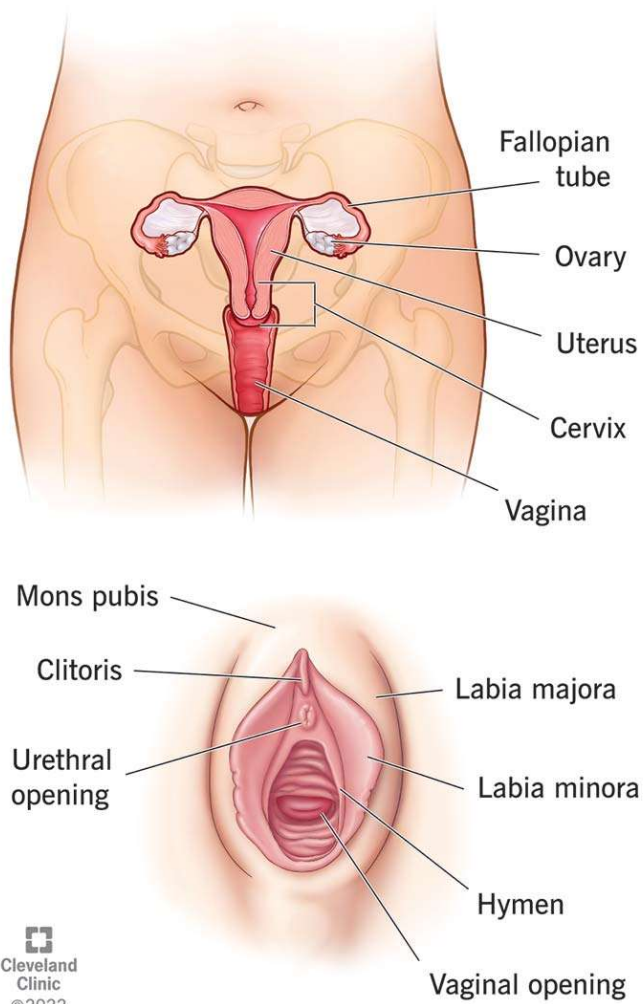


Female Reproductive System

The female reproductive system consists of internal and external organs. It creates hormones and is responsible for fertility, menstruation and sexual activity.

Female reproductive system

Internal and external



Internal and external organs of the female reproductive system.

What is the female reproductive system?

The female reproductive system is the body parts that help:

- Have sexual intercourse.
- Reproduce.
- Menstruate.

What are the parts of the female reproductive system?

The female reproductive anatomy includes both external and internal parts.

External parts

The function of the external genitals are to protect the internal parts from infection and allow sperm to enter the vagina.

The vulva is the collective name for all external genitals. A lot of people mistakenly use the term “vagina” to describe all female reproductive parts. However, the vagina has its own structure located inside the body.

The main parts of the vulva or external genitals are:

- **Labia majora:** The labia majora (“large lips”) enclose and protect the other external reproductive organs. During puberty, hair growth occurs on the skin of the labia majora, which also contain sweat and oil-secreting glands.
- **Labia minora:** The labia minora (“small lips”) can have a variety of sizes and shapes. They lie just inside the labia majora, and surround the opening to the vagina (the canal that joins the lower part of the uterus to the outside of the body) and urethra (the tube that carries pee from the bladder to the outside of the body). This skin is very delicate and can become easily irritated and swollen.
- **Clitoris:** The two labia minora meet at the clitoris, a small, sensitive protrusion that’s comparable to a penis in men. The clitoris is covered by a fold of skin called the prepuce and is very sensitive to stimulation.
- **Vaginal opening:** The vaginal opening allows menstrual blood and babies to exit the body. Tampons, fingers, sex toys or penises can go inside the vagina through the vaginal opening.
- **Hymen:** The hymen is a piece of tissue covering or surrounding part of the vaginal opening. It’s formed during development and present during birth. It’s soft and elastic and doesn’t necessarily block vaginal opening. It can break from everyday activities, inserting a tampon or having sex.
- **Opening to the urethra:** The opening to the urethra is the hole women urinate from.

Internal parts

- **Vagina:** The vagina is a muscular canal that joins the cervix (the lower part of uterus) to the outside of the body. It can widen to accommodate a baby during delivery and then shrink back to hold something narrow like a tampon. It’s lined with mucous membranes that help keep it moist.
- **Cervix:** The cervix is the lowest part of the uterus. A hole in the middle allows sperm to enter and menstrual blood to exit. The cervix opens (dilates) to allow a baby to come out during a vaginal childbirth. The cervix is what prevents things like tampons from getting lost inside the body.
- **Uterus:** The uterus is a hollow, pear-shaped organ that holds a fetus during pregnancy. The uterus is divided into two parts: the cervix and the corpus. The corpus is the larger part of the uterus that expands during pregnancy.
- **Ovaries:** Ovaries are small, oval-shaped glands that are located on either side of the uterus. The ovaries produce eggs and hormones.

- **Fallopian tubes:** These are narrow tubes that are attached to the upper part of the uterus and serve as pathways for the egg (ovum) to travel from the ovaries to the uterus. Fertilization of an egg by sperm normally occurs in the fallopian tubes. The fertilized egg then moves to the uterus, where it implants into the uterine lining.

What are the functions of the female reproductive system?

The female reproductive system provides several functions. In addition to allowing a person to have sexual intercourse, it also helps a person reproduce.

The ovaries produce eggs. These eggs are then transported to the fallopian tube during ovulation where fertilization by a sperm may occur. The fertilized egg then moves to the uterus, where the uterine lining has thickened in response to the normal hormones of the menstrual cycle (also called the reproductive cycle). Once in the uterus, the fertilized egg can implant into the thickened uterine lining and continue to develop. If implantation doesn't take place, the uterine lining is shed as the menstrual period. In addition, the female reproductive system produces sex hormones that maintain the menstrual cycle.

During menopause, the female reproductive system gradually stops making the female hormones necessary for the menstrual cycle to work. At this point, menstrual cycles can become irregular and eventually stop. You're considered to be menopausal when you've gone an entire year without a menstrual period.

What happens during the menstrual cycle?

Women or people AFAB of reproductive age (beginning anywhere from 11 to 16 years of age) experience cycles of hormonal activity that repeat at about one-month intervals. With every cycle, the body prepares for a potential pregnancy, whether or not that's the intention. The term menstruation refers to the periodic shedding of the uterine lining when pregnancy doesn't occur that cycle. Many people call the days that they notice vaginal bleeding their "period."

The average menstrual cycle takes about 28 days and occurs in phases. These phases include:

- The follicular phase (the egg develops).
- The ovulatory phase (release of the egg).
- The luteal phase (hormone levels decrease if the egg doesn't implant).

There are four major hormones (chemicals that stimulate or regulate the activity of cells or organs) involved in the menstrual cycle. These hormones include:

- Follicle-stimulating hormone.
- Luteinizing hormone.
- Estrogen.
- Progesterone.