

PATIENT EDUCATION



The American College of
Obstetricians and Gynecologists
WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE PHYSICIANS

You and Your Sexuality

The teen years are exciting. They also can be confusing. Your body is changing. You are dealing with new feelings. You may find yourself thinking about and exploring your sexuality. Forms of sexual expression can range from holding hands and hugging to touching, kissing, and having **sexual intercourse** or other forms of sex.

This pamphlet explains

- physical and emotional changes
- how to deal with sexual feelings
- forms of sexual expression
- deciding about sex

Your Sexuality

Sex is a normal, healthy part of being human. In your teen years, your body starts changing. You also may begin to think about sex and your sexuality.

Physical Changes

Puberty starts when your brain sends signals to certain parts of the body to start growing and changing. These signals are called **hormones**. Hormones make your body change and start looking more like an adult's.

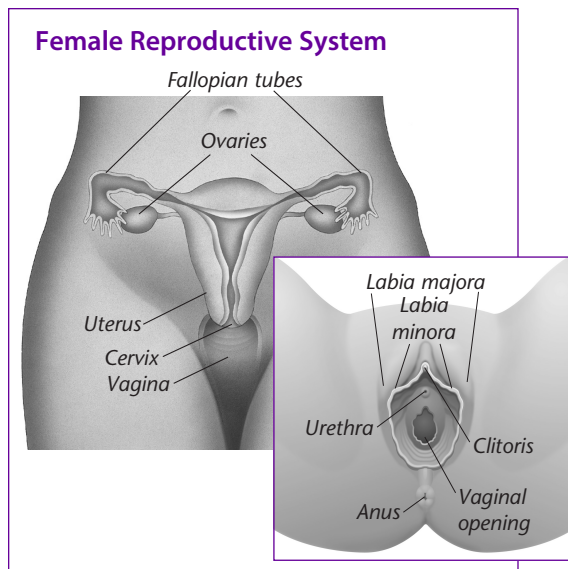
It is normal for changes to start as early as age 8 years or as late as age 13 years. These changes do not happen all at once. Over time, the following changes will occur:

- Your breasts grow.
- Your hips get wider.
- You grow taller and gain weight.

- You grow hair under your arms and around your **vulva**.
- You get your first **menstrual period**.
- You may get acne.

Boys' bodies also change during puberty. These changes happen when their **testes** start working. This usually occurs between the ages of 12 years and 14 years:

- They grow taller and gain weight.
- Their testes and **penis** get bigger.
- They start to grow hair on their faces, under their arms, and around the **genitals**.
- Their voices get deeper.
- Their testes begin to make **sperm**.
- They may get acne.



Emotional Changes

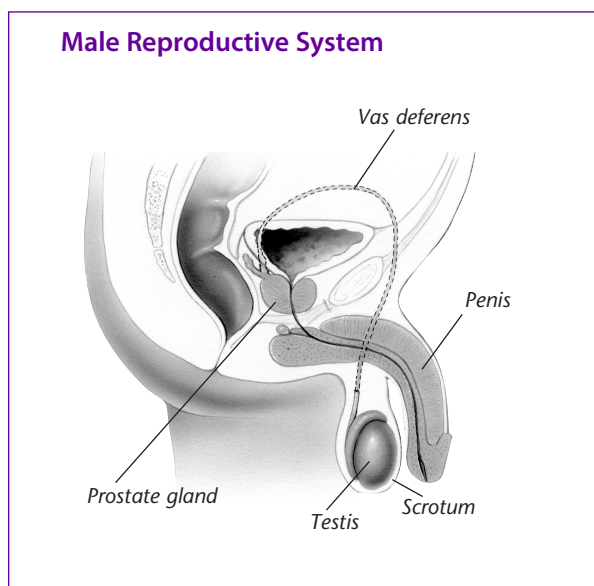
During your teen years, hormones also can cause you to have strong feelings, including sexual feelings. You may have these feelings for someone of the other sex or the same sex. Thinking about sex or just wanting to hear or read about sex is normal. It is normal to want to be held and touched by others. But you must decide how far you are ready to go with these sexual feelings.

Expressing Sexual Feelings

There are many ways to express sexuality. Sexual intercourse is one way. Others include **masturbation**, oral sex, and anal sex.

Masturbation

Touching or rubbing your own genitals (**clitoris** and **vagina** in girls and penis in boys) can give you pleasure. This is known as masturbation. It can help



you learn what kind of touch makes you feel good. Masturbation can let you enjoy your sexuality without having sex with another person before you are ready.

Touching a partner's genitals or other parts of his or her body can provide sexual pleasure. Touching will not cause pregnancy and is less likely to cause a **sexually transmitted infection (STI)** than other sexual activities. STIs are infections that are passed to others through sexual contact (see box "Sexually Transmitted Infections").

Oral Sex

Oral sex is when one partner's mouth comes into contact with the other partner's genitals. Some teens believe oral sex is not really sex because it does not cause pregnancy. But it can spread STIs. If you have oral sex with more than one person, or if your partner

Sexually Transmitted Infections

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are infections that are spread by sexual contact, which includes having vaginal, oral, or anal sex with someone who has an STI. Many STIs have no symptoms or only mild symptoms. You may not even know you have an STI until you get tested.

Some of the types of STIs include the following:

- **Gonorrhea** and **chlamydia**
- **Human papillomavirus (HPV)**
- **Syphilis**
- **Genital herpes**
- **Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)**
- **Trichomoniasis**
- **Hepatitis B virus**

Some STIs can make you unable to have a baby later on. Some are painful. Some can cause serious, long-lasting diseases. Many STIs, including HIV, hepatitis, and herpes, can only be treated, not cured.

Anyone who has sex, even one time, can get pregnant or get an STI. The only way not to get an STI is to not have sexual contact with a person who is infected. If you already are sexually active, be sure to use a condom every time you have sex, including vaginal, oral, or anal sex.

To decrease your risk of getting and spreading STIs, follow these guidelines:

- Get vaccinated against HPV.
- Limit your number of sexual partners.
- Use condoms.
- See your health care provider for counseling and screening.

How to Use a Condom

Using a condom the right way can help prevent pregnancy and protect you and your partner against STIs. A condom should be put on before you have sex, not during. Even if you are taking the birth control pill or use any other form of birth control, you still need to use a condom to protect against STIs.

Use latex or polyurethane condoms (not lamb-skin condoms, which do not protect against STIs). Use only water-based lubricants (nothing with oil). Check the expiration date before using the condom. Using a spermicide with a condom does not make getting an STI less likely. The two most important things about using condoms are 1) to use them the right way and 2) to use them every time you have sex.

To use the male condom, place the rolled-up condom over the tip of the hard (erect) penis. Hold the end of the condom to allow a little extra space at the tip. With the other hand, unroll the condom over the penis.

Right after ejaculation, hold the condom against the base of the still-erect penis while it is withdrawn from the vagina. Throw the condom away.

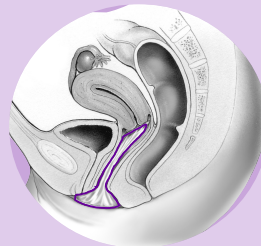
To use the female condom, squeeze the inner ring between your fingers and insert it into the vagina (like a tampon). Push the inner ring into the vagina as far as it can go. Let the outer ring hang about an inch outside your body. Guide the penis through the outer ring.

Right after ejaculation, squeeze and twist the outer ring and pull the pouch out gently. Like the male condom, it should be thrown away—never use it again.

Do not use the male and female condom at the same time. It makes both condoms more likely to break.



Male condom



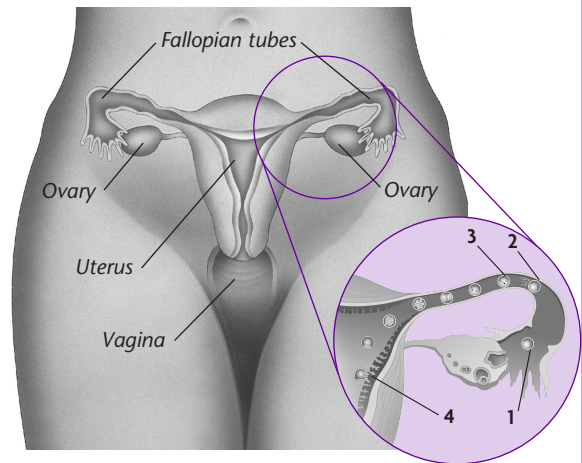
Female condom

has had oral sex with more than one person, it is possible to get an STI. Using condoms during oral sex will help protect you (see box “How to Use a Condom”).

Sexual Intercourse

During sexual intercourse, or vaginal sex, the boy's hard (erect) penis goes into the girl's vagina and moves in and out. This can lead to **orgasm**. Orgasm also can occur during oral sex or masturbation. During vaginal sex, when a boy has an orgasm, he

How Pregnancy Occurs



Each month during ovulation, an egg is released (1) and moves into one of the fallopian tubes. If a woman has sex around this time, and an egg and sperm meet in the fallopian tube (2), the two may join. If they join (3), the fertilized egg then moves through the fallopian tube into the uterus and attaches there to grow during pregnancy (4).

spurts **semen**, which contains millions of sperm, from his penis into the girl's vagina. The sperm can swim up into the **uterus** and then a **fallopian tube**, where one can fertilize an **egg**. This can lead to pregnancy.

If you have vaginal sex and do not want to get pregnant, use a reliable birth control method every time. Birth control can reduce the chance of pregnancy occurring. Learn about the different kinds of birth control. Some are better at preventing pregnancy than others. Your doctor or a clinic can help you choose birth control that is right for you. You also can go to a web site like Planned Parenthood (www.plannedparenthood.org) or Bedsider (www.bedsider.org).

Sexual intercourse also can lead to STIs. Some birth control methods, such as condoms made of latex or polyurethane, help prevent both pregnancy and STIs. Even if you are using another form of birth control, you need to use a condom to help protect against STIs.

Anal Sex

Another form of sex is anal sex, in which the penis is placed into the other partner's **anus**. This form of sex can greatly increase the risk of getting an STI, including HIV. Anal sex can cause tiny tears in the **rectum** and anus. The germs that cause an STI may enter the body through these tears. Using a condom during anal sex can help protect you against STIs.

Being Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual

Being gay is when a boy is emotionally and sexually attracted to other boys. Being a lesbian is when a girl is emotionally and sexually attracted to other girls. Bisexuality is being attracted to both sexes. Many boys and girls are attracted to members of their own

sex during puberty. Things they have done—holding hands with a friend of the same sex, looking at or touching each other’s genitals—may make them wonder if they are gay or lesbian. These activities are normal in teens. Some discover that they are gay, lesbian, or bisexual during these years.

Being attracted to people of the same sex is not a choice a person makes or something that can be changed. Some people may have a hard time talking about being gay or lesbian. Some may not be accepted by their families and friends. This may lead to feeling lonely or depressed. Some people may even consider suicide. If you think you may be gay, lesbian, or bisexual and feel confused or unhappy, talk to an adult you can trust. If you cannot talk to your parents, ask a teacher, doctor, or school counselor for help.

Gender Identity

Gender identity is your sense of being a boy, a girl, or other gendered. Some teens feel that their gender identity—how they really feel about themselves—is different from their physical bodies. A girl may feel that she is really a boy, and vice versa. Others may feel that they belong to neither gender or to both genders. People who feel that their gender identity is different from the sex they are born as are described as transgender. Some transgender people decide to live, dress, and act as someone of the opposite gender or as neither gender. Others do not.

It often is difficult for parents or schoolmates to accept that a person is transgender. Transgender teens may face bullying or discrimination. Some may feel scared and alone. If you are feeling confused about your gender and it is causing you distress, or if you are being bullied or mistreated, talk to a trusted adult.

Deciding About Sex

With all the sex being shown on television, in movies, and in music videos, it is easy to think “everyone is doing it.” But that is not true. Less than one half of high-school teens have had sexual intercourse. That means that more than one half have not. These days, more teens are waiting longer before having sexual intercourse for the first time. Not having sex is the best way to prevent pregnancy and STIs.

Ask yourself what your feelings are about sex. Are you really ready for sex? If you are dating, do you know how the other person feels about sex? Make up your own mind about the right time for you. Do not have sex just because

- you think everyone else is
- you think it will make you more popular
- you are talked into it
- you are afraid the other person will break up with you if you do not
- you feel that it will make you a “real” woman

Safety

In the United States, 1 in 15 girls between the ages of 12 years and 17 years report having been raped. Rape is any genital, oral, or anal penetration without consent. Most victims know the person who raped them. It may be someone whom a girl is dating. It may be a friend of her own age or an adult. The offender might use physical force or threats. Often alcohol or drugs are used before rape. No matter who the offender is, rape is a crime.

Although rape is never the victim’s fault, it makes sense to take precautions to protect yourself. Avoid situations that might put you at risk for unwanted sex. Avoid walking alone. Limit alcohol and drug use. Never leave a drink unattended. Always go to parties with a friend and check in on each other. Never leave without your friend and never leave with a stranger.

Another issue facing teens is intimate partner violence. This type of violence occurs between couples in same-sex or opposite-sex relationships. It can involve physical violence, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse. Even threats of violence are considered intimate partner violence. If you are in an abusive relationship, it is important to seek help. Tell an adult—a parent, teacher, doctor, or counselor.

The Internet is a great place to learn about the world and to keep up with your friends, but it also can be unsafe. You may be exposed to unwanted sexual material or be harassed. You may meet people online who want to talk about sex or meet you.

Never give out personal information (like your name, address, phone number, or school). Use a fake name for a screen name. Keep your profile private so that only people you know can see it. Never agree to meet someone in person that you met on the Internet. Be aware that adults can pose as teenagers in chat rooms. Do not respond to any message or e-mail that makes you feel uncomfortable. Report these messages to parents, guardians, or other authorities.

If you are not ready for sex, say so, and stick to your decision. It is OK to say “no.” If the other person truly cares about you, he or she will respect your decision. If you do decide to have sex or other kind of sexual contact, protect yourself by using birth control and a condom each time.

If you have decided to wait, think about what you will say ahead of time if someone pressures you to have sex. The following examples can work for girls or boys:

- “If you love me, you will have sex with me.”
- Answer: “If you really love me, you will not pressure me.”

- “You are the only one I will ever love.”
- Answer: “Good, then we will have lots of time later.”
- “If you don’t want to have sex with me, I will find someone who will.”
- Answer: “That’s your choice. My choice is to not have sex.”

You should not feel pressure to have sex with someone, especially if the person is a few years older than you or is an adult. It is considered sexual assault for an older person to have sex with someone who is much younger. Tell your parents or other trusted adult if an older person or adult is pressuring you for sex.

Do not be afraid to forcefully say no on a date. Be aware that using alcohol or drugs can affect your judgment and your reaction time (see the box “Safety” on the previous page).

Finally...

Being a teen can be both exciting and confusing. You face many decisions. To make the right ones for you, talk with someone you trust—your parents, your doctor, a teacher, a school counselor, or a coach—if you have questions. You also can visit your local or school library and read books about being a teen. Being well-informed can help you make good choices as you deal with your new feelings about sexuality.

Glossary

Anus: The opening of the digestive tract through which bowel movements leave the body.

Chlamydia: A sexually transmitted infection caused by bacteria that can lead to pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility.

Clitoris: An organ that is located near the opening to the vagina and is a source of female sexual excitement.

Egg: The female reproductive cell produced in and released from the ovaries; also called the ovum.

Fallopian Tube: One of two tubes through which an egg travels from the ovary to the uterus.

Genital Herpes: A sexually transmitted infection caused by a virus that produces painful, highly infectious sores on or around the sex organs.

Genitals: The sexual or reproductive organs.

Gonorrhea: A sexually transmitted infection that may lead to pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, and arthritis.

Hepatitis B Virus (HBV): The virus that causes hepatitis B.

Hormones: Substances made in the body by cells or organs that control the function of cells or organs. An example is estrogen, which controls the function of female reproductive organs.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV): A virus that attacks certain cells of the body’s immune system and causes acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

Human Papillomavirus (HPV): The name for a group of related viruses, some of which cause genital warts and some of which are linked to cervical changes and cancer of the cervix, vulva, vagina, penis, anus, and throat.

Masturbation: Self-stimulation of the genitals, usually resulting in orgasm.

Menstrual Period: The monthly discharge of blood and tissue from the uterus that occurs in the absence of pregnancy.

Orgasm: The climax of sexual excitement.

Penis: An external male sex organ.

Rectum: The last part of the digestive tract.

Semen: The fluid made by male sex glands that contains sperm.

Sexual Intercourse: The act of the penis of the male entering the vagina of the female (also called “having sex” or “making love”).

Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI): An infection that is spread by sexual contact.

Sperm: A cell produced in the male testes that can fertilize a female egg.

Syphilis: A sexually transmitted infection that is caused by an organism called *Treponema pallidum*; it may cause major health problems or death in its later stages.

Testes: Two male organs that produce sperm and the male sex hormone testosterone.

Trichomoniasis: A type of vaginal infection caused by a one-celled organism that is usually transmitted through sex.

Uterus: A muscular organ located in the female pelvis that contains and nourishes the developing fetus during pregnancy.

Vagina: A tube-like structure surrounded by muscles leading from the uterus to the outside of the body.

Vulva: The external female genital area.

This information was designed as an educational aid to patients and sets forth current information and opinions related to women's health. It is not intended as a statement of the standard of care, nor does it comprise all proper treatments or methods of care. It is not a substitute for a treating clinician's independent professional judgment. Please check for updates at www.acog.org to ensure accuracy.

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This is EP042 in ACOG's Patient Education Pamphlet Series.

ISSN 1074-8601

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