

Reproductive and sexual anatomy: Females

Background Note

Overview

The female reproductive and sexual anatomy includes the external and internal sex organs, such as the vulva and vagina, and the internal reproductive organs, such as the ovaries and uterus. The female reproductive system produces hormones, which help a girl develop into a sexually mature woman during puberty. Females also use these organs to produce and release eggs which, when fertilised by a male's sperm, grow into a baby in the uterus.

Female reproductive organs

Organ	Description	Function
Vulva	External genitalia	Protects vaginal and urinary openings
Labia majora (outer lips)	Part of the vulva Two folds of skin, covered with hair and forming a pad of fatty tissues on the pubic bone	The outer folded skin enclosing the labia minora (inner lips) and vaginal and urinary openings
Labia minora (inner lips)	Part of the vulva Two folds of skin, within the labia majora	The hairless folds of skin between the outer lips that enclose the clitoris and vaginal opening
Clitoris	Part of the vulva Located above the opening of the urethra, a highly sensitive gland packed with nerve endings Becomes enlarged when aroused	Sexual pleasure
Hymen	Membrane that covers the entrance to the vagina	Helps to protect the vaginal opening
Vagina	Muscular tube from the uterus to the vulva and external body Elastic in nature (potential space rather than a 'black hole')	Allows passage of menstrual blood flow from the uterus and the conduct of sexual intercourse Birth passage
Ovaries	Two oval-shaped glands located on both sides of the uterus within the pelvic cavity	Contain ova/ovum (eggs) to be released monthly as part of the menstrual cycle

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Organ	Description	Function
		Produce the female hormones progesterone and oestrogen
Fallopian tubes	Narrow tubes joining the ovary and the uterus The ovary end of the tube has finger-like projections floating and reaching over the ovaries to help sweep up the egg	An egg (ova) or eggs (ovum) moves down the fallopian tube(s) after being released from the ovary Fertilisation can take place within the fallopian tube or uterus
Uterus	Hollow muscular organ shaped like an upside down pear which lies in the centre of the pelvis Stretches and expands with growth of the foetus during pregnancy	Organ in which the initial embryo, and later the foetus, grows and provides a total nurturing environment

Relevant resources

Illustrations

[Female reproductive system](#)

[Fact sheets/booklets/videos](#)

[Girls and puberty](#)

Postscript

This Background Note relates to the following Learning Activities:

- [Reproductive systems](#)
- [Reproductive systems revision](#)

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