A Below-the-Bra guide to the female body

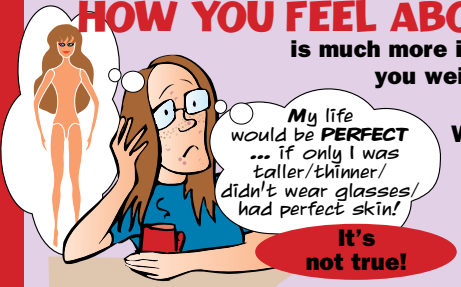
4GIRLS

Sexual development can start anywhere between the ages of eight to 14 with pubic and underarm hair and breasts starting to grow.

Girls develop at different rates. Some girls may have their first period when they're eight years old, others may be 16. All these changes – known as **puberty** – take place over several years.

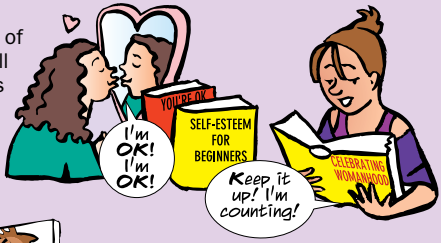
HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT YOURSELF

is much more important than how much you weigh or what you look like.

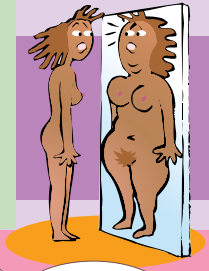


With all the body changes that take place around puberty, it's easy to become obsessed with **HOW YOU LOOK.**

You do a lot of **growing** during your teens so the amount of body fat and muscle you have will increase – your body needs it. As your body changes from a girl's to a woman's you'll get taller, your hips will get broader and your thighs and buttocks fatter.



If you are tall or have a large frame then you will weigh more than if you are short or have a small frame. Remember that you may also weigh more just before and during your period.



Most women who diet aren't overweight – they're just not happy with their bodies.

Most women see their body as bigger than it actually is.

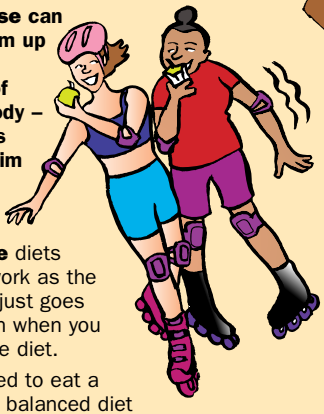
This means that many women have an unhappy and guilty relationship with food – denying themselves things they like, which they then crave, and counting every calorie.

It's okay to eat chips, cakes, chocolate and crisps – if you eat them occasionally and eat other foods as well that balance your diet. If you need to snack between meals go for fruit, nuts or cheese.

Many girls who want to lose weight

just cut down what they eat.
If you are overweight you are taking in more energy than you use up, so you need to exercise.

Exercise can also firm up or slim parts of your body – cyclists have trim thighs.



Leave yourself time to eat breakfast. You need the energy to take you through the day.

Miracle diets don't work as the weight just goes back on when you stop the diet.

You need to eat a healthy balanced diet with lots of fresh fruit and vegetables.

This 'diet' is what you eat every day for the rest of your life.

If you eat healthily and make exercise a part of your life you can forget about dieting.

Worried about what you eat?

Extreme worry about your weight can cause health problems. If you think your concern about what you eat is taking over your life then seek help.

All women have

BODY HAIR

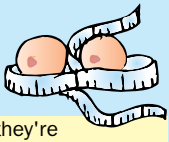
though some remove it.

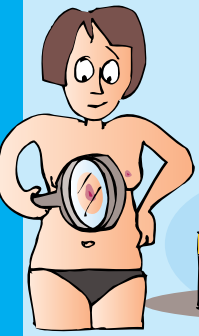
Pubic hair around the genitals appears first, then hair grows in the armpits, on the legs and sometimes on other parts of the body.

Some women choose to shave, wax or use cream or epilators to remove some body hair, and others don't.

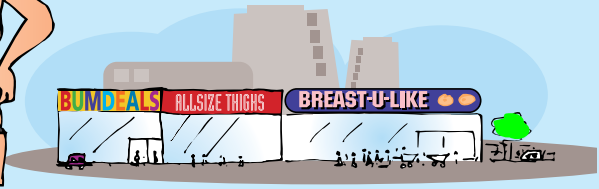
Some people find body hair very sexy – it's a matter of choice.

BREASTS get a lot of attention in our society and many girls worry that theirs don't measure up to the images around them.





Breasts and **nipples** tingle or itch while they're developing, but this will stop once they've grown. Growth can be uneven so one breast may be bigger than the other. This will even out but many women have slightly differently sized breasts all their lives.



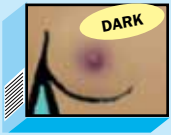
Breasts come in different shapes and sizes and can be **soft** or **firm** –

– small

– or large.

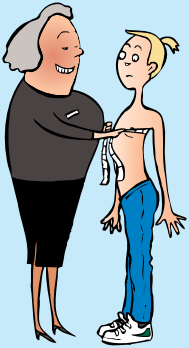
Nipples may point up –

– or droop downwards



– be dark

– or pale.



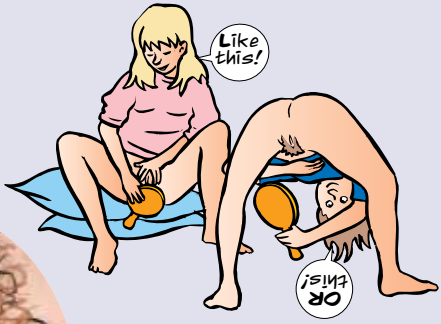
These differences are all normal.

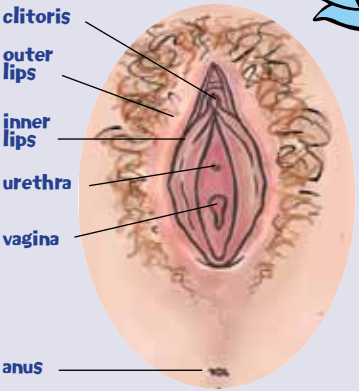
Usually the nipples point outwards, but some girls have nipples that are inverted (point inwards). This is normal and there is no need to worry. In some women, the nipples remain like this throughout their life. It does not mean there is anything wrong with the breasts, and inverted nipples won't stop you breastfeeding if you have a baby.

It's really worth going to a shop that offers a free measuring service so you get a bra that's right for you.

GENITALS are as individual as people's faces – they all look very different.

Take a look with a mirror ...



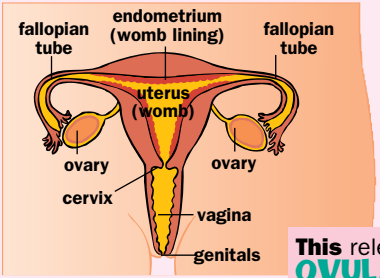


The **outer lips** (labia majora) cover the **clitoris** and extend back to just in front of the **anus.** The outer lips are thicker and often hairy on the outside and are mottled and darker on the inside. When a woman is sexually aroused they open up to reveal the entrance to the **vagina.**

The **inner lips** (labia minora) join at the front in a small fleshy bump called the **clitoris** – its purpose is to give sexual pleasure. The inner lips are thinner. They vary in colour from light pink to dark brown. One outer lip may be bigger than the other or the inner lips may hang below the outer lips.

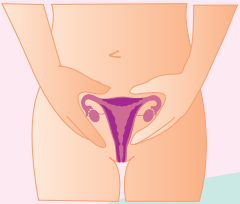
You may have heard about cervical screening tests. This is a test offered to all women aged 20–25 and above, depending on where you live in the UK, every 3–5 years. A cervical screening test spots the warning signs before cervical cancer develops. It can be uncomfortable, but it doesn't hurt and it only takes a couple of minutes.

The MENSTRUAL CYCLE is from the first day of a pe
day before the next period starts. The average length of the menstru
although it can be as short as 21 days or as long as 40 days – both



The menstrual cycle is controlled
The hormone estrogen causes ab
to grow in one of your ovaries ea

Hormones make the eggs grow a
the lining of your uterus. Usually
larger than the others and goes i
tube that connects the ovary to th



This release of the egg is called **OVULATION** and it happens around 10–16 days before the start of the next period. Estrogen also causes the mucus in the cervix to become thinner, wetter and more stretchy, allowing sperm to reach an egg more easily.

If the egg
it is re-ab
body.
Hormone
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LIVING WITH PERIODS

Changes in hormone levels can affect your moods. You may feel:

energetic and sexy around the time you ovulate

or moody, tearful or angry the week before your period is due.

Breasts may become sore or a bit larger and you may get spots on your face just before your period. Eating lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, having a diet low in sugar and salt and taking regular exercise can help.

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and also thicken one egg becomes nto the fallopian he uterus.

g is not fertilised, bsorbed into your

levels drop and s lining breaks up leased through the s a period.

When a woman reaches puberty she will have up to one million eggs in her ovaries.

When you first have periods the time between one period and the next may vary so it can be difficult to know when you will have your next one. When your menstrual cycle becomes more regular you can use a diary to work out when you're due.

Period blood is often thick and reddish brown and may have small lumps in it. It only smells when it comes into contact with the air. It is healthy to change your towel or tampon every few hours.

Sometimes girls and women can have problems with tampons, leading to a serious illness called toxic shock syndrome (TSS). If you have two or more of the following while using tampons: Being sick; a rash; sore throat; sudden fever; diarrhoea, stop using tampons and see your doctor right away.

Your vagina is naturally self-cleansing so you don't need to use perfumed pads or special sprays (and these can cause irritation).

"At first my periods were fine but now the day I get my period is just awful. I have really bad pains, feel sick and sometimes have diarrhoea. My GP said I should go on the pill but my mum's not keen and says I'm neurotic."

Andrea, 15

What you can do

Hold a hot water bottle against your stomach and take a painkiller. The contraceptive combined pill or patch is very good for painful periods, but if you don't want to take this your doctor will be able to prescribe something else. Exercise, such as walking or sport, can help too.

So if you get really bad PERIOD PAINS don't suffer in silence.

Periods may sometimes be painful. Some women are particularly badly affected. The pain is due to large contractions of the uterus muscle. It's a very real pain, so Andrea isn't being neurotic.

For more information on periods, ask for Periods – what you need to know (for 9 year olds and above) from **fpa** (see back page).

It's for you to decide whether you prefer to use towels or tampons. One method isn't better than the other.

Will I still be a virgin if I use a tampon?

Yes. You are a virgin until you have sex.

Does putting in a tampon for the first time hurt? **No, not if you relax.**

It can be difficult to put in a tampon if you're tense and not sure how to put it in. When you have your period try putting a tampon in when you have lots of time and privacy. Read the instructions that come with tampons to find out how to put them in. If the tampon feels uncomfortable it may not be in far enough.

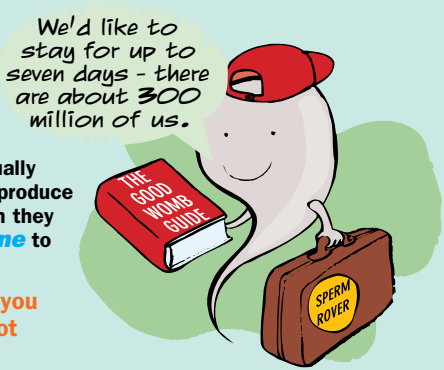
There are lots of silly stories about periods and what you can do when you have one.

It's up to you what you do when you have a period, and you will have a lot of periods in your life. It can take some time to get used to having periods and feeling confident about dealing with them. But periods are a normal, healthy, special part of being female.

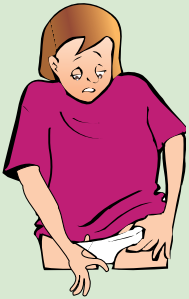
I've heard that if you have sex during a period then you won't get pregnant.

Not true. It's also not true that you won't get pregnant if it's the first time you've had sex/you have sex standing up/don't have an orgasm/bath afterwards.

You are *most* likely to get pregnant around ovulation, but you may not know when this happens. Also, sperm can live in your body for up to seven days so pregnancy is possible at virtually any time in your cycle. Boys produce up to 300 million sperm when they ejaculate and it takes only *one* to make you pregnant.



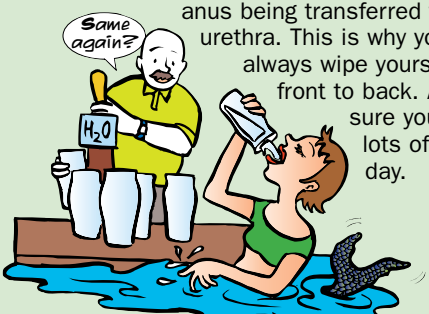
So don't have sex unless you feel ready, and you've got contraception sorted.



It's normal to have some DISCHARGE from your vagina as this natural lubricant keeps your vagina healthy.
This discharge is usually clear or slightly milky and may be faintly yellow when it dries on your pants. When you're sexually excited your vagina produces a natural lubricant to make having sex easier. The amount of discharge increases around ovulation to help sperm swim up your vagina to meet an egg.

If you have an **unusual discharge** that itches and/or smells see a doctor as you may have an infection. This could be a very common infection called **thrush**, which can develop if you wear tight clothes, use perfumed soap or bubble bath or if you are just feeling run down. If you've had sex you may have caught a sexually transmitted infection (see page 14). Whatever the cause it can usually be easily treated.

Many women at some point in their lives have cystitis, which is an inflammation of the bladder or urethra. You feel you want to go the toilet all the time even when your bladder is empty. It can be caused by bruising during sex or heavy petting, or from bacteria from your anus being transferred to your urethra. This is why you should always wipe yourself from front to back. And make sure you drink lots of water a day.



If you think you have cystitis see a doctor.

GOING FURTHER

My boyfriend says I'm frigid because I don't want to have sex. **Frigid is an insulting word used when girls say 'no'. If he's interested in you he'll be prepared to listen to how you feel and wait if necessary. If he isn't, he's just putting pressure on you. Sex should be enjoyable, so:**

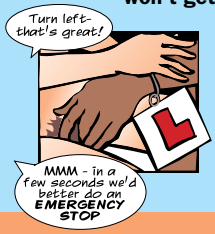
- **Don't have sex until you're absolutely sure it's what you want.**
- **Ditch boys who try to pressure you or insult you.**
- **Realise that all women can enjoy sex with the right partner at the right time.**

I think I'm gay

Having a 'crush' on someone of the same sex is very common and doesn't necessarily mean you're gay. You may be sexually interested in other women – or in women and men. Your body is yours to share with whoever you choose. You may choose to share it with no-one. If you want advice, contact the organisations on the back page.

What is masturbation?

Masturbation (wanking) is something women might not talk about, but most people do it. Most women rub around or on their clitoris and maybe move fingers in and out of the vagina. If you masturbate to orgasm the muscles in your vagina will move in spasms and feelings of pleasure will flow through your whole body. Many women fantasise while they masturbate.



Is it bad for you? **No. Women who have learnt what they like can pass this knowledge on to a partner. You don't need to feel guilty about exploring your own body, and you won't get pregnant, catch a sexually transmitted infection or get a broken heart. But it's your choice to do it or not. You can masturbate alone or with a partner.**

You can get **FREE** information and help about **CONTRACEPTION** from a doctor, nurse, sexual health clinic, some genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics, a young people's service or contraception clinic.

You can be any age to get advice. All services are **CONFIDENTIAL** – this means they won't tell anyone you've been. **However**, they may need to involve other services if they believe you, or another person, to be at significant risk of harm (such as physical or sexual abuse). They will discuss this with you.

Let the staff know if you would prefer to be seen by a woman doctor or nurse.

Where to go for ADVICE on contraception

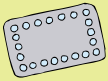
There should be a clinic near you that runs sessions for young people – look in the phone book or ask at a health centre.
fpa (see back cover) has details of all clinics in the UK.

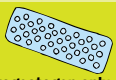
There are many methods to choose from and for most you won't need a vaginal examination. Say if you have a problem, such as unusual vaginal discharge or bleeding after sex.

Emergency ▶▶▶ **Women** can get emergency contraception from their doctor or a contraception or sexual health clinic and pharmacies. There are two types of emergency contraception you can use. The emergency pill must be taken up to 72 hours (three days) after unprotected sex, or it won't work. It is more effective the earlier it is taken after sex. An intrauterine device (IUD) must be fitted into the woman's uterus within five days of sex or ovulation (release of an egg).

It is against the law for anyone to have sex with a young person under the age of 16. This is the same for young men and women and for heterosexual (straight) and homosexual (gay/lesbian) sex. This is known as the age of consent.

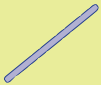
male and female condoms


combined pill


progestogen-only pill

diaphragm or cap with spermicide

contraceptive injection


implant

contraceptive vaginal ring

patch

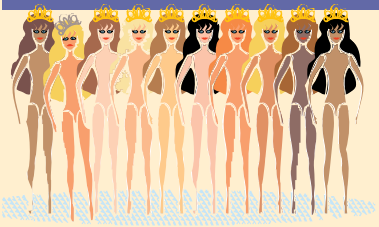
IUS

IUD

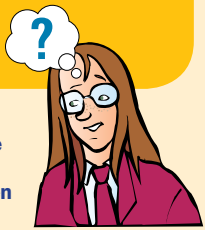
There are many different types of

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTION (STI) including chlamydia, gonorrhoea and HIV.

ANYONE who has sex, even if it was just once, can have a sexually transmitted infection – it isn't true that only people who are dirty or sleep around get infections.



Discomfort or soreness when you urinate (pee), or an unusual discharge from your vagina can be signs of a sexually transmitted infection.



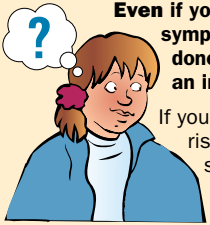
But many infections, including HIV, often have no signs so the infection can stay hidden for many years. This is true for men and women.

Chlamydia

(cla-mi-dee-ah) is one of the most common STIs among young people. Often there are no symptoms, so you don't know you have the infection.

It can make you infertile, which you may only find out when you try to have children later in life.

Yet, like so many infections, if caught early it can be completely cured.



Even if you don't have any symptoms a test can be done to see if you have an infection.

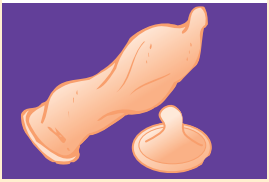
If you think you might be at risk then go to a GUM or sexual health clinic or doctor.

All treatment and advice at GUM clinics is free and confidential. They won't tell anyone you've been, unless they think you are at significant risk (see page 13).

Most large hospitals have a GUM clinic. fpa's helpline (see back page) can tell you where your nearest clinic is.

How can I make sure I don't get a sexually transmitted infection?

Condoms help protect against both pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.



A male **condom** is a thin rubber or polyurethane (plastic) tube made to fit tightly over a man's hard penis. It catches the sperm when they come out and prevents them from entering the woman's vagina. There are also female condoms.

There are lots of different types of condoms to choose from. They're free from contraception clinics, sexual health clinics and most GUM clinics. And they're easily bought without having to see a doctor or nurse.

Many people don't use condoms because they're worried they won't know how to put one on properly and will look stupid. So practise. Get to know condoms so you feel confident using them.

New HPV vaccine

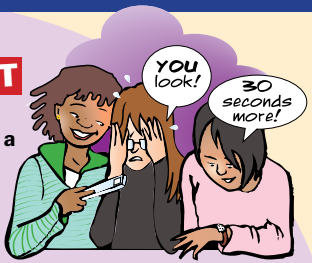
All girls aged 12–13 years are offered an injection which provides protection against HPV, the virus which can cause cancer of the cervix. If you want more information visit **www.fpa.org.uk** or speak to your school nurse. Remember that you still need to use a condom during sex to help protect against STIs and pregnancy.

If you think you might be PREGNANT

If you have had sex and your period is late then it's important to get advice and have a pregnancy test as soon as possible. You can have a free test done at:

- **a young people's service or Brook clinic**
- **most contraception clinics**
- **some general practices (ask your GP or practice nurse)**
- **some GUM services and sexual health clinics**
- **some NHS walk-in centres.**

Many pharmacies offer pregnancy testing and sell home pregnancy tests, although you will have to pay for these.



If you are pregnant then it's very important that you get medical advice as quickly as possible so that you can decide what to do and get the help you need.

Crucial contacts

fpa's helpline provides:

- information and booklets on contraception, sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy choices, abortion and planning a pregnancy
- details of contraception, sexual health and genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics.

fpa helpline

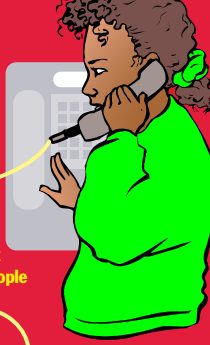
ENGLAND
0845 122 8690
Mon – Fri
9am to 6pm

NORTHERN IRELAND
0845 122 8687
Mon – Thurs
9am to 5pm
Fri 9am to 4.30pm

or visit fpa's website

www.fpa.org.uk

All these helplines are confidential



BROOK
tel 0808 802 1234 www.brook.org.uk
for your nearest Brook clinic for young people

YOUTH ACCESS
tel 020 8772 9900 www.youthaccess.org.uk
for your nearest counselling service

CHILDLINE
tel 0800 1111 www.childline.org.uk
24-hour helpline for young people with any problem

SEXWISE
tel 0800 28 29 30
www.ruthinking.co.uk
talk to an adviser about sex and personal relationships

LONDON LESBIAN AND GAY SWITCHBOARD
tel 020 7837 7324 www.llgs.org.uk
for information and advice on being gay, lesbian or bisexual

RAPE CRISIS
www.rapecrisis.org.uk
for girls and women who have been raped or assaulted recently or in the past

SEXUAL HEALTH LINE
tel 0800 567 123
24-hour free advice about sexual health

FRANK
tel 0800 776 600 www.talktofrank.com
drugs information

BEAT – BEATING EATING DISORDERS
tel 0845 634 1414 www.b-eat.co.uk
for concerns about your weight/eating

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fpa
talking sense about sex

50 Featherstone Street
London
EC1Y 8QU
Tel 020 7608 5240
Fax 0845 123 2349

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www.fpa.org.uk

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