



Fact Sheet:

15 Things Everyone Should Know About Their Vagina

May 2015



Introduction

This fact sheet includes 15 facts that every young person with a vagina should know! Don't be shy! Your vagina is part of your body! So it's good to know at least some basic information about it!

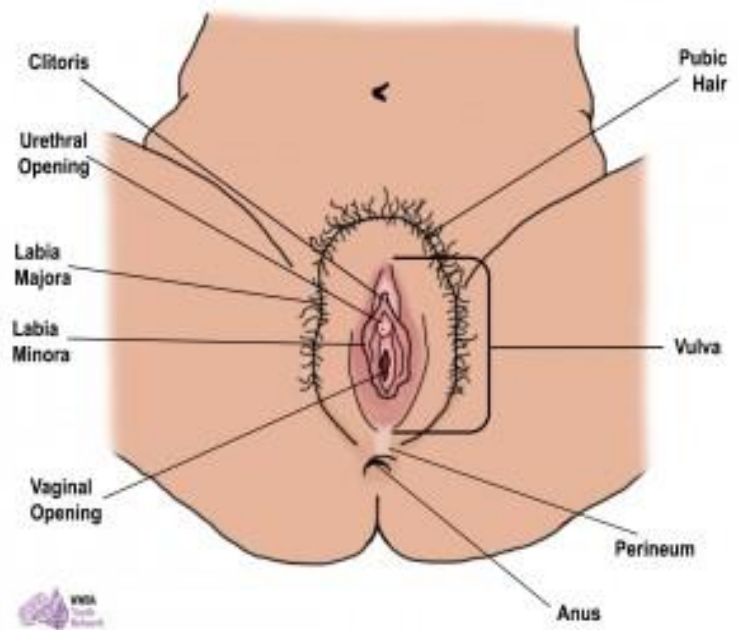
Fact #1 - What is the Vagina?

It is the path from the uterus (womb) to the outside of the body. During menstruation (period) you bleed through your vagina. The vaginal passage is where a baby comes through and then out the vagina opening. The vagina passage tilts back 30-degrees from the opening. This is why you have to insert tampons by aiming them toward your back.

Fact #2 - A lot of people say 'Vagina' when they actually mean 'Vulva'

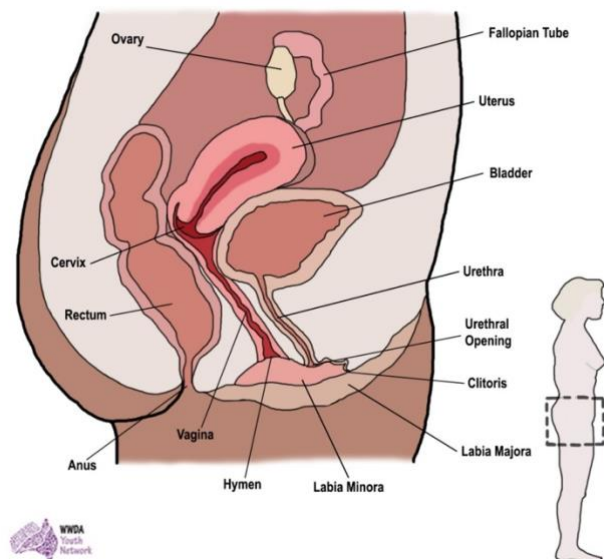
The vulva is the name for the genitals on the outside of the female body. It includes the clitoris, labia majora, labia minora, vestibule, and hymen. Your clitoris is the small, long, sensitive knob at the front of the vulva.

Your labia majora is the larger, outer 'lips' to the vagina. Your labia minora is the smaller, inner 'lips' to the vagina. Your vestibule is the area around and between your urethra and vagina. Your hymen is the thin piece of tissue at the entrance to the vagina. The vulva also has a number of glands that make fluids. These keep your vagina clean and moist.



Fact #3 - Every vagina is unique

Vaginas and Vulvas come in different shapes, sizes and colours and how it looks varies from woman to woman. Try and get to know your own vulva. Easiest way to do this is by using a mirror to have a look when you are in a private and safe place. That way if you notice any changes in appearance that worry you, you can discuss them with your doctor.



Fact #4 - Does urine and bodily waste come out my vagina?

No, you actually have 3 holes. The Vagina, the Urethra, and the Anus. The *urethra* is a very small hole where urine (a.k.a. pee) comes out. It leads up to the bladder. It is located above the vagina, under the labia majora 'lips'. The *anus* is the hole through which solid waste (a.k.a. poop) comes through from your bowel. It is located on it's own, below the vagina, and it is not located beneath the labia majora 'lips'.

Fact #5- The Cervix

The cervix connects the vagina to the uterus, and can be seen up the vaginal passage from the opening. It is about 2.5cm across and is shaped like a small donut. It is made of cartilage and is covered by smooth, moist tissue.

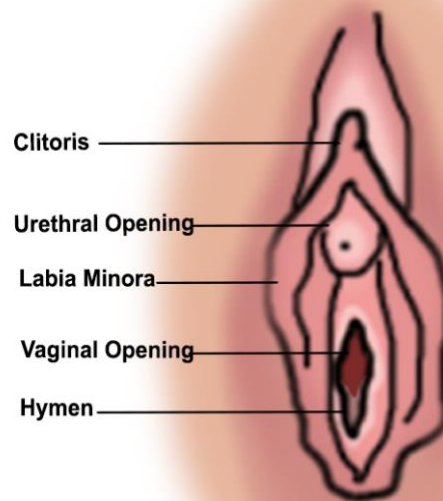
The cervix produces cervical mucus that becomes clear and stretchy during a woman's menstrual cycle to either prevent or promote pregnancy. It opens up a small amount during your menstruation

(period) to allow for menstrual flow.

Fact #6 - Vaginal Discharge

Discharge or fluid from your vagina is normal. Your vagina creates these fluids to keep itself clean and moist. Vaginal discharge is usually white, cream-coloured or clear and does not have much of a smell.

It is normal during your period or during pregnancy for the discharge to change in texture, amount and/or colour. An unusual change in your discharge, for example, a strong smell, could mean you have an infection and you should see your doctor.



Fact #7 - Pubic Hair

Pubic hair starts growing around your vulva about the same time your breasts start growing. At the start it is just a few fine hairs and then later they become thicker and curlier. The vagina and vulva are moist areas. Pubic hair is there to absorb that moisture and drain it away.”

Removal of pubic hair can cause skin abrasions, skin irritation, and bacterial infections. Some women decide to remove pubic hair, not for health reasons, but for personal preference. This is entirely your choice. If you do want to remove your pubic hair, be smart about it. Before you do it talk to an adult you feel comfortable talking to (like your mum, or GP) and do some research to educate yourself on the risks.

Fact #8 - The Hymen

It is a thin tissue barrier that is located close to the entry of the vagina.

All hymens are different in shape, thickness and stretchiness. Some are really thin and elastic. Others are thicker and less stretchy. The most common shape of a hymen is like a half moon. It allows the period blood to flow out of the vagina.

Virginity is not judged by whether or not you have a hymen. Some women are not born with a hymen. For those who are born with a hymen lots of things can cause tearing. These include, medical examinations, disease, some physical exercises, masturbation, and sexual intercourse. Normally things as thin as a tampon or a finger are too narrow to affect the hymen tissue, but they may cause some tearing.

Fact #9 - The Vagina Can Expand

In everyday life, the average adult woman's vagina is 5-7cm wide and 7-10 cm long. It is extremely elastic and able to expand. It is made for babies to come through! It can expand up to 200% during sexual intercourse and giving birth.

Fact #10 - The Clitoris is very Sensitive

The clitoris has 8000 nerve endings and is there specifically for sexual pleasure. In some cultures, the clitoris is cut off with the belief of decreasing a woman's sexual desire. This is a human rights violation and a widely condemned practice known as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). All types of FGM are illegal in Australia.

Fact #11 - Vaginal Flatulence

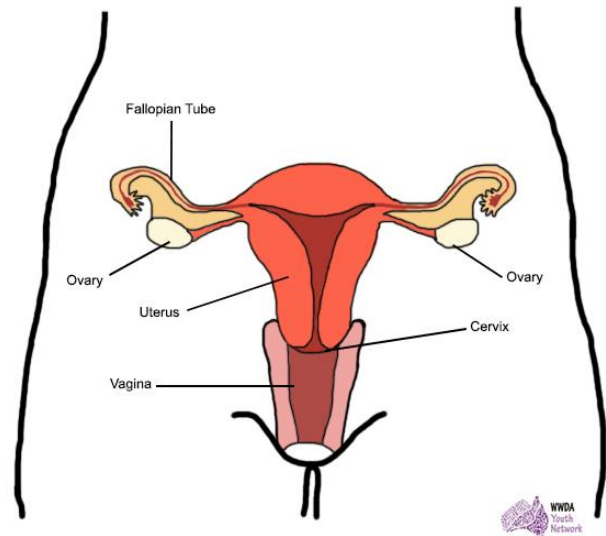
Most commonly known as a "Queef" or "Queefing", and unlike intestinal gas (or farting), a queef is odourless. Small pockets of air easily get trapped in the vaginal passage. A queef occurs as the result of this air coming out of the vagina. It can happen in any position, is usually quick, and may or may not make noise. They are healthy, normal, and you should not be ashamed of them.

Fact #12 - Vaginal Muscles

Pelvic muscles are a group of muscles and ligaments that support the bladder, vagina, uterus (womb) and bowel.

The muscle walls of the vagina are thick and elastic and are covered by bumpy soft tissue. The elasticity of these muscles allow for movement in the vaginal passage, including during childbirth and sex.

Vaginal contractions occur when the pelvic muscles around the vagina contract without your control. This is your body responding to sexual excitement. They are most intense during good sex.



Fact #13 - You Can't Lose Anything In Your Vagina!

Ignore any myths about things getting “lost” in your vagina. The vagina is closed. Think of it like a sock, there is the opening, the cylindrical passage, and the closed toe (or *the cervix*).

Sometimes things, like tampons, can get stuck inside. If this happens, you can try to remove it using your index or middle finger. But always be safe and wash your hands. If you cannot get the item out safely and gently by yourself, you need go to the doctor. They should be able to remove it easily.

Fact #14 - Keep your Vagina Healthy!

Your vagina has lots of natural good bacteria. They are there to keep it healthy and happy. Different things like drinking alcohol and having unsafe sex can make your vagina unhealthy. But there are some things you can do to help keep it healthy. You can eat *probiotic* yoghurt. You

should wash your vulva and vagina with just water and not with harsh soaps. You should practice safe sex, like using condoms. And you should change your pad or tampon regularly during your period.

Fact #15 - Common Vaginal Infections

The most common vaginal infections are yeast infections, bacterial vaginosis, and trichomoniasis. Leaving these untreated can cause serious reproductive health issues, however all three can be treated with medication. So if you experience any symptoms see your doctor for the right diagnosis and treatment.

- *Yeast infections*: This happens when a type of fungus called candida starts overgrowing in the vagina. Symptoms include an itchy vagina/vulva, redness and swelling of the vulva, and a thick and odourless discharge from the vagina.
- *Bacterial vaginosis*: This happens when there are too many bad bacteria in the vagina. The most common symptom is a greyish-white or yellow discharge from the vagina with a “fishy” smell.
- *Trichomoniasis*: This is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) common in young, sexually active women. It is the most common curable STI. Symptoms include, an itchy and irritated vagina, a frothy green-yellow vaginal discharge with strong odour, and painful urination.

Every woman should have her first gynaecological exam by the age of 18, or within two years of having sex. These visits provide you with accurate and private information. The doctor can answer any questions you might have about your body, menstruation (period), sex or sexuality. At the exam you will also be able to learn about your options to prevent STI's, prevent pregnancy, and much more.