

The girls



FIRST NATIONS OF QUEBEC AND LABRADOR
HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMISSION

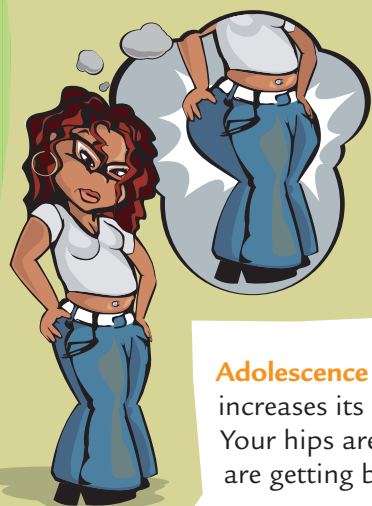
The girls

Girls may begin to develop sexually by the age of eight or nine. The breasts start to grow and hair appears in the pubic and underarm areas. Any changes that occur



during this period are known as **PUBERTY** and take place over a period of several years. Girls do not all develop at the same pace. Some have their first menstrual period at nine, while others may not begin until 18.





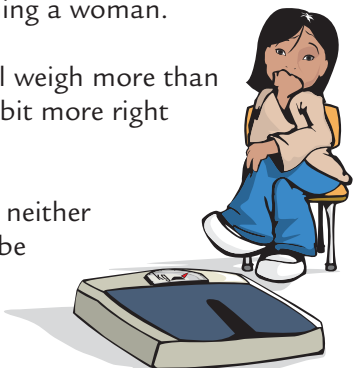
How comfortable are you in your own skin?

Feeling good about yourself as a person is more important than your weight or appearance. With all the changes that occur during adolescence, it's easy to become obsessed with **your physical appearance**.

Adolescence is a period of important growth. The body increases its muscle mass and fat, which the body needs. Your hips are broadening and your thighs and buttocks are getting bigger. You are becoming a woman.

If you're tall and solidly built, you'll weigh more than if you're short and smaller. You may weigh a bit more right before your period.

Most women who follow a balanced diet are neither too fat nor too thin. But it's very difficult to be satisfied with your body. You're often your own harshest, but least objective, judge.



Many girls have a difficult, guilt-ridden relationship with food

They carefully count every calorie and deny themselves things they love. When you constantly deny yourself your favourite things, you're more likely to binge on "forbidden" foods as compensation. Eat chips, cake, candy or chocolate occasionally, and select healthy foods to maintain a balanced diet. If you need a snack, have some fruit or yogurt.



Many girls want to lose weight

If you're a bit overweight, you may be taking in more calories from food that you're using. Make sure you include sports or exercise in your regular routine. Some girls eat a lot and remain slim, while others gain weight easily. This depends on how your body works.



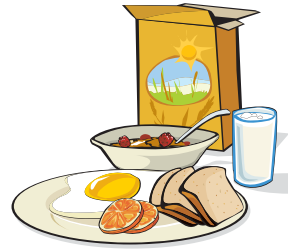
Miracle diets do not work; you regain all the weight you lost and more once you stop dieting. You need to exercise and maintain a healthy, balanced diet. And remember to eat enough fresh fruit and vegetables. Find your own nutritional balance, and you'll be able to forget about weight-loss diets.



Make sure to take time for breakfast. You need energy to jump start your day. Skipping breakfast will not help you lose weight.

Worried about what you eat?

Worrying excessively about your weight could lead to health problems. If you feel you spend too much time thinking about food, you should speak to your doctor.

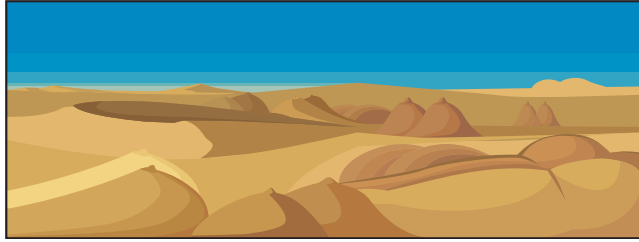


All women have body hair, even though some choose to remove it

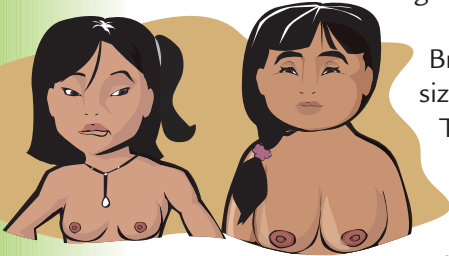
Hair first appears in the genital area, then on the underarms and legs and, at times, other areas of the body. Blonde hair is far less noticeable than brown or black. Some women shave or use products to remove hair from legs and underarms; others choose not to. It's strictly a matter of taste.

Breasts

Breasts have become very important these days and many girls worry that theirs don't resemble the breasts displayed in the images around them (like in magazines).



When breasts begin to develop, they may feel itchy or pickly around the center. This will stop after they have finished growing. One breast may grow faster than the other, but both will end up being almost identical in size. Most women go through their entire lives with breasts that differ slightly in size. This is normal.



Breasts come in various shapes and sizes. They may be very firm or softer. These differences are entirely normal.

Many girls wonder if their breasts are large enough. There are both pluses and minuses to having either larger or smaller breasts. When growing up, having larger breasts can lead to people staring at you more which can feel strange. They can also feel very heavy on your back and shoulders. Many girls with larger breasts tend to slouch forward when they walk or sit. Sometimes girls feel self-conscious and wear baggy t-shirts to cover them up.

Girls who have smaller breasts sometimes wonder if they are seen as feminine as their large-breasted friends. They also sometimes wonder if boys will like them. As with all preferences, some boys like girls with larger breasts and some like girls with smaller breasts.

Breasts do change throughout life and girls who start out with smaller breasts may grow larger through the years. No matter what the size, breasts of all shapes can still receive pleasure, and will be equipped to feed a baby after a pregnancy.

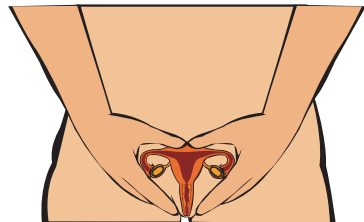
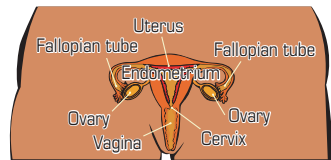
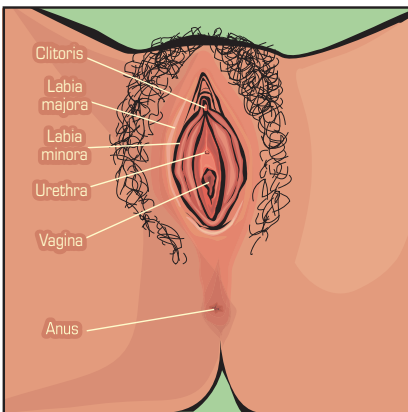
If you have a complex about your breasts, talk to doctor. He or she will be able to put your mind at ease and provide you with helpful solutions.

External genital organs

The whole outer genital area of girls is called the vulva. Like faces, not two vulvas are the same!



The labia majora are the outer lips, generally thicker, and covered in hair after puberty. They serve to protect the insides which are more delicate. When a girl is sexually aroused, the labia majora (large lips) tend to open to expose the labia minora (smaller lips), clitoris and vagina.



The labia minora (smaller lips) are a set of thinner, more sensitive lips on the inside. They can vary in colour from light pink to darker brown, and are hairless. All labia minoras will look different. Some girls have smaller ones, while other girls may have larger, flower like lips. Whatever your shape is, they are unique, and are very sensitive to touch and stimulation. The clitoris is a gland at the top of your vulva where the labia minora meet. This gland is highly sensitive and has about 800 nerve endings! The only function of the clitoris is for pleasure and it generally feels good when it is touched or rubbed. Sometimes the clitoris can be too sensitive and can feel irritated from touching. It is important to listen to your body.

The vagina is the hole or canal that leads directly to your reproductive organs inside your lower abdomen. What you see on the outside is just the opening but this canal is about 10-12 cm in length inside your body when it is resting. When a girl is sexually aroused, this canal gets longer in length and in width, generally to accommodate the size of a penis (which is on average between 12 and 19 cm when erect). The function of the vagina is generally for three things; 1) for sexual intercourse, 2) for menstrual blood (your period) to pass through, 3) to birth a baby. The opening of the vagina can stretch as big as a baby's head if it needs to!

Lots of girls have confusion about how many “holes” they have down there. There are 3. The first, at the top, located right below the clitoris, is the urethral opening. This is a small hole where urine (pee) comes from the bladder (where the pee is stored). The second hole is the vagina. The third hole is the anus, where waste (poo) comes out from the colon.

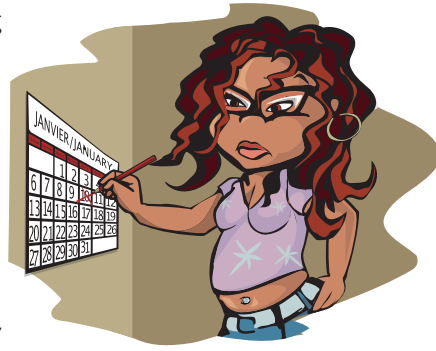
When should you begin having gynaecological exams?

You may already have heard of vaginal smears or the Pap test. This test is recommended for sexually active women or those 18 and over. A smear can provide warning signs before sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or cancer of the cervix have a chance to develop. Vaginal smears may be a bit uncomfortable, but they're not painful and only last a few seconds.



Menstrual cycle

The menstrual cycle is a process of releasing an egg and either fertilizing it or discarding it. This cycle generally happens once on average every 28 days, which is why we say once a month. Your cycle however could be anywhere from 20 to 45 days and this depends on your body. Your cycle will also take a few years to become “normal” because the hormones are learning to get into a rhythm. This means that in your early adolescence, you can experience a period twice in one month or not see it for a few months. It is sometimes helpful to keep a record of the day you get your period so you can see how your cycle develops.



Your menstrual cycle can also be affected by other elements such as stress, diet or a change in weather. It is not a perfect system but generally begins with the release of an egg and then either ends in your menstruation (period) or a possible pregnancy (if unprotected sex happened in this cycle). It is important to note that even if a girl hasn't yet had her first period, there is still a chance she can become pregnant from sex, because it is the egg that is released first.

Hormones control the menstrual cycle. One of these hormones, estrogen, supports the monthly development of 12 to 20 tiny eggs in the ovaries.



Hormones cause the eggs to grow and thicken the wall of the uterus. During each cycle, one egg grows more than the rest and travels to the fallopian tube linking the ovary to the uterus.

The moment the egg leaves the ovary is called ovulation. The tricky part about ovulation is that girls do not feel it happening so they usually do not know that it has happened. Some girls can tell because the fluid in the vagina gets thicker around this time. It is normal to have a little fluid (sometimes sticky) left over in the panties at the end of the day. This is all a part of being a woman! Once released, the egg will take about two days to travel the length of the fallopian tube, where it can be fertilized by a sperm at any point in that time (if sex took place). A girl will generally get her period about 14 days after she ovulates.

Living with menstruation



Menstruation is when the inner wall of the uterus (the part where a baby would grow) sheds itself out of your body.

As a result, you will bleed from usually 3 to 7 days.

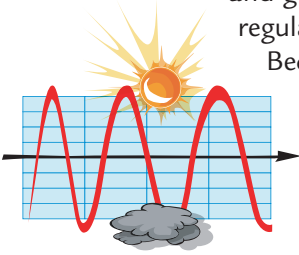
This wall, also known as the endometrium is designed to feed a baby during pregnancy. If no baby implants itself there for the cycle, that wall

is not needed. When you bleed from menstruation, this is the wall coming down so that it can build up

again for the next cycle. Some girls experience cramps during menstruation, which is normal. The uterus is a muscle and to shed this lining, it contracts. If you have cramps, it usually helps to go for a walk or put some heat (heating pad or hot water bottle) on your lower stomach. If your cramps are really painful, see your doctor and he or she may give you medicine to relax muscles. Doctors will also sometimes prescribe birth control pills as a way to help control the pain of menstruation.



While having your period may seem like an inconvenience at times, it is all a part of being a woman. You can still enjoy all your favourite activities and go about your regular routine.



Because menstruation is controlled by your hormones,

sometimes this can affect your mood.

Some girls experience feeling sad before their period and others don't. Some girls may experience soreness in their breasts and others may experience a break out of pimples around this time. Every girl is different.



Menstrual blood is often thick, of a reddish brown color and may contain small clots. It only begins to take on an odour once exposed to air, so change your napkin or tampon regularly, approximately every 4 hours.

When you change your tampon, make sure you remove the old one before inserting a fresh tampon. Once your period is over, use two fingers and examine yourself to make sure you haven't forgotten a tampon. A tampon is worn inside the body, so it's important to change it often, due to a rare but serious condition known as toxic shock syndrome (TSS). TSS is caused by wearing a tampon too long. TSS is a serious condition and if you experience a fever or muscle aches see a doctor right away.

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

Being a virgin generally means that you have not had sexual penetration with a penis. Using a tampon will not affect this. You will still be a virgin.

Does it hurt to insert a tampon for the first time?

No, not if you're fully relaxed. It can be difficult to insert a tampon if you're nervous and not really sure what to do. Try it when you're not in a hurry and won't be disturbed. To learn how to insert a tampon, read the instructions provided in the box. If it still bothers you, or feels uncomfortable, you may not have inserted it far enough inside the vagina.

Napkins or tampons? It's entirely up to you to choose, both methods are equally effective. Some girls have preferences depending on the activity they are doing. If you wish to go swimming for example, it would be suggested to insert a tampon so the blood will be caught inside the vagina and you won't need to wear a napkin in your bathing suit that would get wet from the water. It is also suggested that you remove your tampon before bed and wear a napkin instead because tampons should be changed every four hours. Some girls bleed a lot during their menstruation and may require using both methods

MOM??



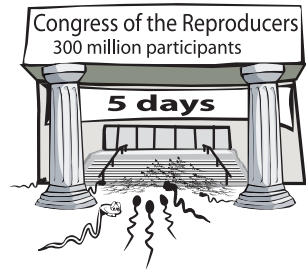
together. Generally, you will bleed the most in the first two days of your menstruation.

Your vagina cleans itself naturally. You don't need deodorized pads, special sprays or vaginal douches which may cause irritation.

I heard that if I have sex during my period, I won't get pregnant

This is not true! It is also false to believe you won't get pregnant if you make love standing up, don't have an orgasm or take a bath after having sex.

You're most likely to get pregnant during ovulation. But the exact time of ovulation may vary from month to month. Sperm may remain active in your body for up to five days. A male releases 300 million sperm with each ejaculation, but a single sperm is all it takes to fertilize an egg. Don't assume you are safe at a specific time during your cycle. If you are sexually active, there is always a chance of getting pregnant. Contraceptives help reduce this chance.



Vaginal fluids

A bit of white discharge is entirely normal. This is a natural lubricant that keeps your vagina healthy. It is generally clear or slightly milky, and becomes pale yellow when it dries on your underwear. When you are sexually aroused, your vagina produces a natural lubricant that helps during sexual relations. The discharge increases with ovulation to help sperm travel up your vagina and come in contact with an egg.



Should the discharge become thick, itchy or odorous, you may have an infection. You may have a fungus infection which is fairly common and easy to treat. If you had sexual relations, you may have contracted a sexually transmitted infection. Regardless of the cause, see your doctor.





At one time or another, many women may develop a bladder infection, an inflammation of the bladder. You will have a constant urge to urinate, even when your bladder is empty.

This may be caused by sexual intercourse or bacteria that passed from your anus to your urethra. To avoid this, make sure to wipe yourself with toilet paper from front to back and drink at least a litre of water a day. If you think you have a bladder infection, see your doctor.

Going all the way

My boyfriend accuses me of being frigid because I don't want to have sex. Frigidity is the inability to derive pleasure from sexual relations. This has nothing to do with saying "no". If your boyfriend really cares about you, he'll listen to you and wait until you're ready. If not, he's pressuring you. Sex should be enjoyable, so:

- ▶ Don't have sex until you're ready to.
- ▶ Ditch anyone who pressures or insults you.
- ▶ All women can climax, with the right partner at the right time.

There is no right age to have sex for the first time. If you believe everything you read or hear, you might think all teens are having sex. That is not true. For both males and females, the average age of first intercourse in Canada is 17 years old. Many people wait longer. Sex can be a big decision and often people want to make sure they are with the right partner. Finding someone you are comfortable with can take some time.

It is also important to think about possible consequences before having sex. Getting pregnant can change your life very quickly. There are also some very damaging and fatal sexually transmitted infections to be aware of.



I think I may be two-spirited (lesbian)

You may be attracted to, or have thoughts of sex with another girl, whether you are two-spirited or not. Most people think about sexual relations with a person of the same sex at some point in life. This is normal. Being two-spirited or lesbian means that you identify as having a sexual preference for other girls. Many people have strange feelings about this but it is common. It is estimated that about 10 percent of our population sees themselves as not heterosexual. There are many support for people who wish to talk about this. If you would like more information or have questions about homosexuality, call HalterHeros, the gay and lesbian hotline (see on page 20).

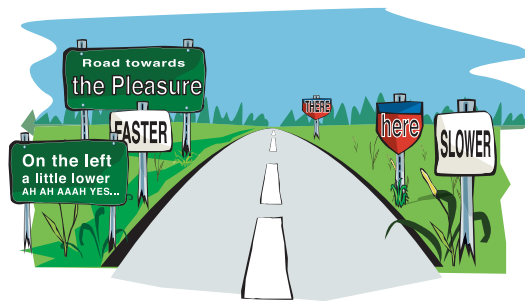


What is masturbation?

Most women stroke their clitoris and vagina. If you masturbate to the point of orgasm, the vaginal muscles contract and your body will fill with pleasant sensations. It's normal to fantasize while masturbating. A very common occurrence!

Is it bad?

No. a woman who knows what pleases her is able to tell her partner. You shouldn't feel guilty about exploring your own body: it won't upset you or give you any sexually transmitted infection. The choice is entirely up to you.



Contraceptives



There is a wide range of contraceptives to help women who are sexually active reduce the likelihood of a pregnancy. You can obtain contraceptive information, counselling or a prescription through your family doctor or medical clinic.

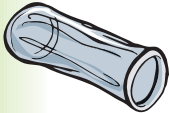
You may obtain counselling at any age. If you're 14 or over, your medical consultation remains confidential. No one, not even your parents, will be told about it.

Inform the duty nurse at the reception desk if you'd prefer a female doctor.

Where can I obtain information?



There is no doubt an organization nearby that provides information to young people. Visit your CLSC, local medical centre or school nurse or check in the phone book.



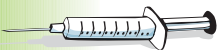
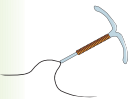
There are many contraceptive methods. If you have any problems, for example, unusual discharge or bleeding after sexual relations, inform you doctor.



If you're not entirely comfortable with your present contraceptive method, check with your doctor, he or she may be able to suggest a more suitable alternative. For more information on all these methods, there are brochures or help lines providing complete information on the plusses and minuses of each.



Canada's legal age of sexual consent is 14, for both girls and boys, regardless of the sex of the partner. According to the Québec Board of Health, 15 is the average age when teenagers have their first sexual encounter. For some, this happens earlier, for others, later on. The age when the first sexual encounter takes place is not important, what matters is that it is fully consensual.

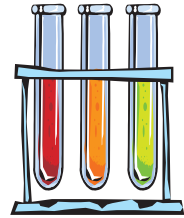


Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

There is a whole range of infections that can be transmitted from one person to another through sexual contact. They include genital warts, gonorrhoea, chlamydia, genital herpes, hepatitis B (for which there is a vaccine) and HIV (the virus that causes AIDS, which is fatal, and for which there is no vaccine or cure).

If you experience any itching, redness, discharge, a strange odour or pain during urination (pee), see a doctor right away. Many of these infections can be cured with one pill! The upsetting news here is that while many STIs can be cured with medicine, if they are not, they continue to do damage inside the body and can sometimes lead to infertility (not being able to have a baby later on).

Chlamydia is a bacteria that can lead to infertility. Chlamydia is very common in girls and boys under the age of 25 and often has no symptoms. Aboriginal communities in Quebec have ten times the rates of chlamydia infections than in other parts of Quebec. Chlamydia is completely curable with one pill! If you are sexually active, and you don't use condoms, you must see your doctor for testing.



Many times people infected with an STI may have no symptoms or pain at all! This makes it hard to know if you have been infected with one. It is silly to believe that these infections only get passed on to people who do not wash well or who have a lot sex. These infections have nothing to do with a person's hygiene, and can be caught in a single sexual encounter.

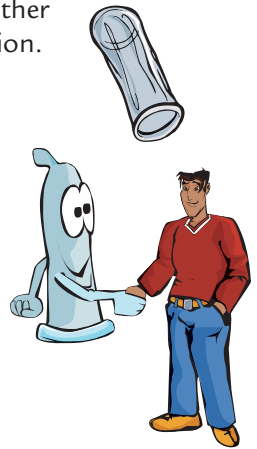
What's the best way to protect yourself?

There are many types of condoms. And in many areas, they can be obtained free of charge, for instance, in youth centres or from your school nurse. You may also buy them over the counter in a pharmacy, superstore or vending machine.

Many people avoid using condoms because they're afraid they won't know how to put them on properly, or that they'll look foolish. Become familiar with condoms, so you'll feel comfortable using them.

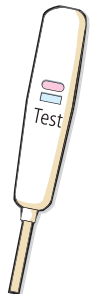
Both male and female condoms provide effective protection against pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Other contraceptive methods provide only pregnancy protection.

Condoms are thin latex protectors worn on the penis that create a barrier from both the skin of the genitals touching and the fluid being exchanged. They are the only protection we have against sexually transmitted infections. And given how serious STIs can be, it is always a smart idea to use a condom for sex! Despite what you may hear, condoms do not reduce pleasure during sex. They just reduce your worry about pregnancy and infections!



If you think you might be pregnant

If you had unprotected sex, aren't on the pill, forgot to take it, or failed to use a condom, see a pharmacist, doctor or school nurse as quickly as possible (within 72 hours). They can provide you with a morning-after pill sold commercially under the name Plan B without your parent's approval. If your period is late, have a pregnancy test as soon as possible. You can get tested in a medical clinic or obtain a do-it-yourself kit at the pharmacy. Just a few drops of urine are needed. If you fear there is a risk of HIV transmission, contact an emergency service or a doctor and obtain preventive treatment as quickly as possible (within 48 hours).

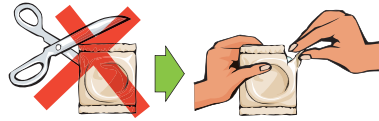


If you are pregnant, it's very important to see a doctor and get the help you need in order to decide on your next move as quickly as possible.

A condom may only be used once

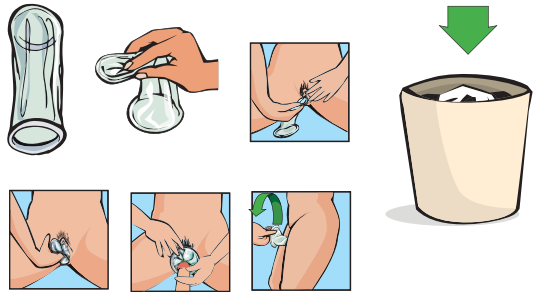
Advice

- ▶ Practice putting it on alone before using it.
- ▶ Put on some music, a condom can make a bit of noise.



Advantages

You may insert a female condom several hours before a sexual encounter for increased comfort. The condom is made of polyurethane. It's stronger than latex, hypoallergenic and is well lubricated.



Useful numbers:

Kinds Help Phone: www.kidshelp.sympatico.ca/en/
1-800-668-6868

AlterHeros: www.alterheros.com/english/youth/
Demystifying our differences

Sexualityandu.ca: www.sexualityandu.ca/eng

**First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social services
commission (FNQLHSSC):** www.cssspnql.com

In these organizations, your call will remain confidential.

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