Female Anatomy

and How Contraceptives Work in Women

Internal Anatomy

Womb (uterus)

Where a fertilized egg grows and develops into a fetus. *IUDs* are placed in the uterus, but they prevent fertilization in the fallopian tubes. *Copper-bearing IUDs* also kill sperm as they move into the uterus.

Ovary

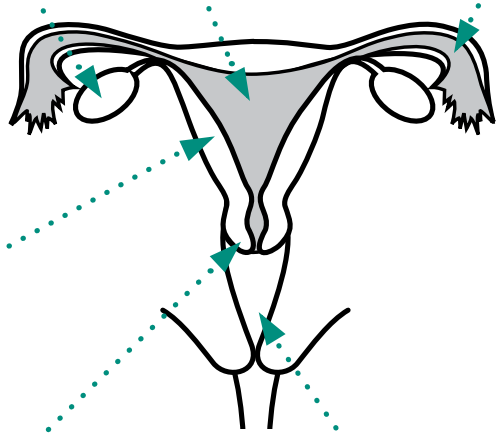
Where eggs develop and one is released each month. The *lactational amenorrhea method (LAM)* and *hormonal methods*, especially those with estrogen, prevent the release of eggs. *Fertility awareness methods* require avoiding unprotected sex around the time when an ovary releases an egg.

Uterine lining (endometrium)

Lining of the uterus, which gradually thickens and then is shed during monthly bleeding.

Fallopian tube

An egg travels along one of these tubes once a month, starting from the ovary. Fertilization of the egg (when sperm meets the egg) occurs in these tubes. *Female sterilization* involves cutting or clipping the fallopian tubes. This prevents sperm and egg from meeting. *IUDs* cause a chemical change that damages sperm before they can meet the egg in the fallopian tube.



Cervix

The lower portion of the uterus, which extends into the upper vagina. It produces mucus. *Hormonal methods* thicken this mucus, which helps prevent sperm from passing through the cervix. Some *fertility awareness methods* require monitoring cervical mucus. The *diaphragm*, *cervical cap*, and *sponge* cover the cervix so that sperm cannot enter.

Vagina

Joins the outer sexual organs with the uterus. The *combined ring* is placed in the vagina, where it releases hormones that pass through the vaginal walls. The *female condom* is placed in the vagina, creating a barrier to sperm. *Spermicides* inserted into the vagina kill sperm.

External Anatomy

Pubic hair

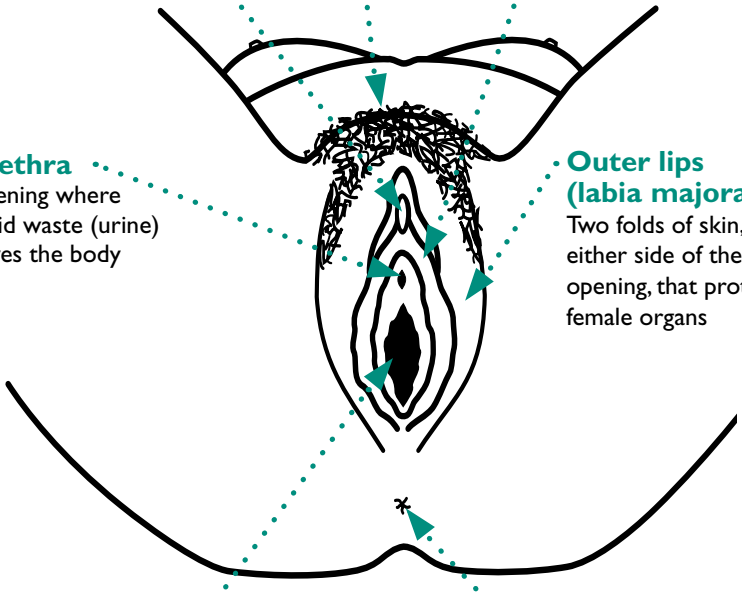
Hair that grows during puberty and surrounds the female organs

Clitoris

Sensitive ball of tissue creating sexual pleasure

Inner lips (labia minora)

Two folds of skin, inside the outer lips, that extend from the clitoris



Urethra

Opening where liquid waste (urine) leaves the body

Outer lips (labia majora)

Two folds of skin, one on either side of the vaginal opening, that protect the female organs

Vaginal opening

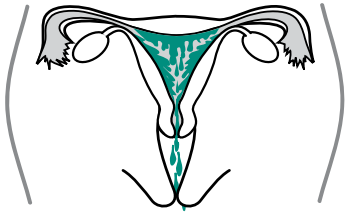
The man's penis is inserted here during sexual intercourse. Blood flows from here during monthly bleeding.

Anus

Opening where solid waste (feces) leaves the body

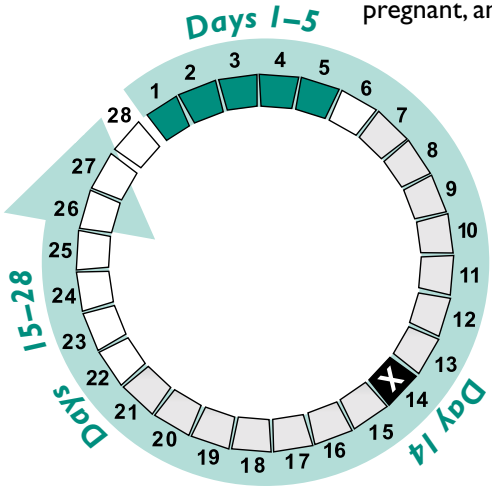
The Menstrual Cycle

1 *Days 1–5:* Monthly bleeding

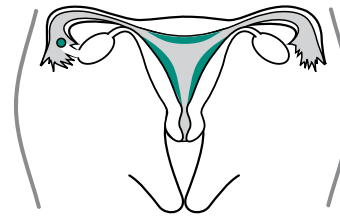


Usually lasts from 2–7 days, often about 5 days

If there is no pregnancy, the thickened lining of the womb is shed. It leaves the body through the vagina. This monthly bleeding is also called menstruation. Contractions of the womb at this time can cause cramps. Some women bleed for a short time (for example, 2 days), while others bleed for up to 8 days. Bleeding can be heavy or light. If the egg is fertilized by a man's sperm, the woman may become pregnant, and monthly bleeding stops.



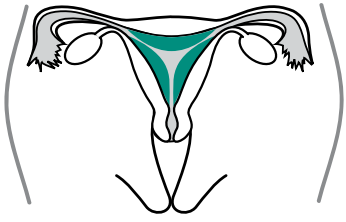
2 *Day 14:* Release of egg



Usually occurs between days 7 and 21 of the cycle, often around day 14

Usually, one of the ovaries releases one egg in each cycle (usually once a month). The egg travels through a fallopian tube towards the womb. It may be fertilized in the tube at this time by a sperm cell that has travelled from the vagina.

3 *Days 15–28:* Thickening of the womb lining



Usually about 14 days long, after ovulation

The lining of the uterus (endometrium) becomes thicker during this time to prepare for a fertilized egg. Usually there is no pregnancy, and the unfertilized egg cell dissolves in the reproductive tract.