



U N C E N S O R E D

The Gender Diverse
Sexuality Handbook
for Every Body

Uncut Version

by South Shore Sexual Health





UNCENSORED

The Gender Diverse

Sexuality Handbook

For Every Body

(Uncut Version)

Created by Julie Veinot of South Shore Sexual Health with funds from the Queens Community Health Board and Lunenburg County Community Health Board.

This resource is not meant to replace advice from your personal health care providers. (But use it to start conversations with them.)

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A Note to Readers

When we started writing about sex, we discovered there was a great deal to say. As you can tell, there are many pages in this book. Maybe too many. We know not everyone likes to read, or can read fast—especially when we talk about medical stuff.

Some people may read this book cover-to-cover because that's how they roll. Some people may pick out certain topics. For example, you may have a handle on the reproductive system, but would like to learn more about transitioning or porn. (Spoiler alert: not *all* porn is bad.)

Read this book in a way that works for you. If you need some support, read it with a friend or family member.

Our target audience is junior high students, but if you're older or younger, that's okay too. In fact, we are willing to bet *everyone* will learn something new from this resource, whether they are 10, 20, or 90!

We hope to come out with an upper elementary version when funding permits. Until then, take what you can from this edition and run.

Language

We're going to try and use language that includes as many people as possible. We won't get it 100% right because everyone uses words in a way that works for them. If this is your book, cross out the words and write in your own! For example, we often use the word vagina, but some folks might prefer to call it the front hole. We've left some white space on the pages. Make your notes there, if you'd like.

USE
"front hole"

Finally, we have chosen to use the letters 2SLGBTQIA+ because it includes many identities as well as those that are Two-Spirit. We put the 2S first because it recognizes identities created long before Europeans settled what is now known as Canada. The + means there are other letters and identities that are possible in the rainbow community. You're included too.

Footnotes

If you haven't seen many footnotes, they are the print blurbs at the bottoms of pages which are linked to a small number. For example, this is a footnote.¹ Once you see one, go to the bottom of the page to read more.

You will also see lots of words in bold. There is a glossary, or mini-dictionary, at the back of the book. This allows you to read more about new words. You can also Google them if you'd like to learn more beyond the glossary. If you're really brave, you can hit up Urban Dictionary.

¹ It singles out some information, a bit like a secret note from the author.

The Colours

We wanted to create a youth book for as many folks as possible. We longed for a resource that helps more than those called “girl” at birth and those called “boy” at birth. That’s why we often use the colour purple in this resource as well as teal, pink, and yellow.

We also believe that *all* genders should know about other genders. Just because you were called a boy at birth doesn’t mean you shouldn’t learn about menstruation. Or just because you have a vulva doesn’t mean that you aren’t interested in learning all about morning wood. And just because you are cisgender doesn’t mean you aren’t interested in learning about transitioning. (Like what is a gaff? Don’t worry. We’ll soon tell you.)

You may notice that this resource is somewhat organized around the **gender binary**.² We look at estrogen and testosterone as a means of organizing puberty experiences while knowing it is a bit more complicated than that.

Okay. So it’s *a lot* more complicated.

Some folks may find things in each section that apply to them, and some that don’t. This is perfectly normal. We hope you find some comfort in learning more about bodies and how they go through puberty.

Q & A

Whenever we do presentations with youth, we often do an anonymous question box. We like to give folks an opportunity to ask about topics *they’re* interested in.

² We will explain in a bit.

You'll find a lot of these questions at the end of each chapter. They are from real youth who have similar questions as you do. A few are my own that I just *had* to answer. You see, you never stop learning about your health.

From the Author

Growing up, I had access to lots of information about sexual and reproductive health. I had my faithful puberty book with quaint cartoons, a parent who worked in the health care field, and the latest issue of *Cosmopolitan*. *Cosmo* was okay, but clearly geared to straight cisgender women who liked cocktails and six inch heels. I was straightish, but loved coffee and being closer to the ground.

In the 1990s, sex ed in Nova Scotia was pretty similar to what was portrayed in the movie *Mean Girls* with Coach Carr. It was a nicer version of “Don’t have sex, because you will get pregnant and die.” HIV was still a huge worry, teen pregnancy was almost as bad, and everything focused on vaginas and penises (with some fallopian tubes thrown in there for good measure). As you can guess, knowing about fallopian tubes doesn’t exactly prepare you for the real world.

It wasn’t until I was working in the field of sexual health that my knowledge *really* expanded. Turns out, there was so much more I needed to know—and new information was coming out every day. In fact, I’m still learning. I probably learned something while you started reading this book.

This is the book I wished I had when I was a teen. I can only imagine what it would've been like to learn about gender diversity, consent, lubrication, and what the heck was normal back when I needed it the most.

This is a book I could write *only* after being a sex educator for many years. It took some unlearning of old myths. It took a lot of reading. It even took a few tours of Urban Dictionary.

It's worth noting that I'm a white cisgender woman who is university educated, which means my experiences in the world flavour this resource a certain way (and maybe lead to me using some big words). I've tried my best to unlearn what I could, and I am committed to learning more to ensure my view of the world is not the only view.

Hopefully, more resources from diverse people will come out, improving our knowledge of puberty and sexuality beyond the gender binary. We need to make space for these authentic voices, and listen to them. For too long, the world has focused too much on cis straight white folks, and my apologies for being more of the same.

Because my main background is in the Liberal Arts and Education, I had to research new info to ensure this resource is up to date with the best facts we have as of right now. Medical information and science stuff changes regularly as new research comes out. If there is one thing I've learned, it's important to adjust to new information.

Besides, sometimes you just have a burning desire to know:

- Do identical twins have the same penis size?
- Why do we fart more during our periods?
- How do they really make a penis for someone who is transgender and getting bottom surgery?
- Can you snort birth control?

Obviously, I was curious. So I looked it all up. The answers to these questions are all in here.

I hope you learn lots about the human body. And I hope I answer the question I get from everyone under the sun: Am I normal?

I think we all could've used this answer when we were growing up.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "julie". The letter "i" is written in a cursive style with a small heart shape above it. The rest of the name "julie" is also written in a cursive, flowing script.

P.S. If you're a parent or caregiver who is hoping to share this with your child, please do. The danger is in sharing information *too late*, not too early. If you're lucky enough to have your youth ask you questions about sex, be honoured they want *you* to help them learn more about growing up. While it may be unsettling to have your child learn about anal beads and gaffs, remember that youth often satisfy their curiosity on the internet.

Let's talk about sexual health with as much evidence-filled information as we can. We all deserve a world where we are educated about this incredibly important aspect of our health. It's the only way we become empowered to fight for our own wellbeing.

Being Sex Positive

For the longest time, Canadian society wasn't sex positive. In fact, until 1969, birth control was illegal in our country. Condoms were bought with hushed whispers at the counters of pharmacists willing to break the law. Women received early versions of the birth control pill to help "regulate" their cycles—certainly not because they wanted to have sex (but totally because they wanted to have sex).

Prior to European nations colonizing North America in the 1500s, sexuality among the Indigenous peoples was considered a natural part of being human. Many communities recognized that while there were men and women, there were also other genders that combined being a man or woman in wonderful ways.

This, then, was the true start of being sex positive in our nation, and we're finally coming back to these truths. People think these are new and modern ideas, but they are actually very old.

What does it mean to be sex positive? It means seeing sexual health as a natural part of life. Whether you choose to be sexually active, or just enjoy your body knowing it is yours and capable of amazing things, you can be sex positive too.

Here are some features of being sex positive that we believe in:

All people are sexual beings.

There are no exceptions. Whether we have special abilities or physical challenges that make us unique, we are still capable of being sexual.

Sex is not dirty or sinful—in fact, it is healthy and positive.

Sexual activity between consenting humans is not dirty. It is not sinful. Sex can be enjoyable and pleasurable among consenting people, and contributes to health and wellbeing.

Enjoying your sexuality is a human right.

When we prevent people from having safe, pleasurable experiences, we are not allowing them to exercise one of their fundamental human rights.

It's okay to say no to sex, and it's okay to say yes.

If someone is interested in a pleasurable experience with themselves or another consenting human or two, then it is okay to enjoy sexual activity.

Everyone has the right to evidence-based information about sexual and reproductive health.

It doesn't matter if you're 14. You have the right to access

the best information about your sexual health so you can make decisions that work for you.

Intimate media and videos may have some educational value, and pleasure value.

When people consent to watch videos of erotic activities, including porn, they may actually enjoy and learn from them.

You have the right to enjoy your sexuality free from violence and coercion.

Humans never have the right to force sexual activity or reproductive choices onto another human. We all have the right to our own bodies and the right to decide what happens to those bodies, including consenting to medical care, sex, and pregnancy.

We know not everyone will agree with every single statement above. We just want you to know where *we* come from. We come from a place where we see a healthy life for everyone, regardless of gender, orientation, ability, race, economic status, and more.

The information in this guide is based on these guiding principles. It is meant to help you in your journey of growing into an adult (even if you're over the age of 18!) By the time you finish this book, we hope you will see that being sex positive isn't about having lots of sex, forcing sex on people, or even having no boundaries.

Let's get started.

Some of the Basics

There are more than just two genders. So why do puberty and sex books insist on putting people into one of two boxes—one pink, one blue? Why do youth have to pick between the two? Why aren't we given the language to understand how we are feeling?

Humans experience life as more than boys and girls! There are people who are transgender. There are people who feel like both a boy and a girl. There are people who don't feel like either gender. Some change day to day.

There are many ways of being human. And they are all perfectly fine. Almost always, people want to be reassured they are normal. There is a 99.99% chance you are normal. Breathe.

Years ago, folks thought **gender** and **biological sex** were the same thing. In fact, they didn't even think the two were separate!

Some people still think this way even though they haven't cracked open a textbook printed since 2010.

Experts now separate gender from biological sex because

humans are complicated and diverse. And that's science!³

We rarely use the term biological sex anymore; instead, we talk about sex assigned at birth—usually assigned by a doctor.

Generally, sex as assigned at birth is determined by looking at the genitals. People think this is the only thing that matters, but our sex also includes our hormones, chromosomes, internal reproductive organs—and possibly gender identity.

Usually the whole penis=boy and vulva=girl situation works out. The person with the vulva is often a girl and the person with the penis is often a boy.

But our genitals don't offer a lot of insight into who we are. After all, doctors can't see into our brains when we pop into the delivery room. Our brains are where you find gender (as far as we know). We usually assume genitals will tell us about gender, but it is really our sense of self, buried somewhere in the mind. It may be located next to your love of pizza and *Star Wars*. (We're not really sure yet, but we *do* know it's not whether you have a penis or a lack thereof.)

Plus, gender is influenced by our culture, and how we understand fashion, dance, speech, body language, and more—basically the whole performance of gender. The world is a stage, said Shakespeare, and we are all actors. Especially with our gender.⁴

Gender also changes according to our culture. For example, things we used to consider masculine are now feminine, and vice versa. At one point pink was considered a manly

³ If people are trying to use science as a way to discriminate against people who are 2SLGBTQIA+, their science is outdated. Science changes every day, as it adjusts to new knowledge.

⁴ Want to learn more about gender and performance? Read Judith Butler.

colour because it was strong and more decided.

Basically, our genitals do not always line up with our gender, or our culture's ideas of gender. The medical system tries its best to gender people at birth, but the system doesn't always get it right.

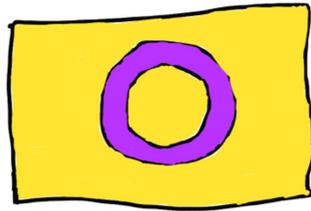
Furthermore, genitals can get complicated, so relying on them to clearly reveal gender won't get us anywhere.

Let's look a bit more at some of the unique ways humans can be born. We'll untangle some terms.

Intersex

Some people are **intersex**. Intersex folks do not always fit into the boy box or girl box physically. They may have a variety of features. Surprisingly, being intersex is common—as common as being a natural redhead! You probably know someone who is intersex, but we don't often talk about our genitals in regular conversation. (Usually.)

When an animal has features of both sexes, we often call them hermaphrodites. This isn't a term we use with humans anymore (especially since humans are not capable of reproducing by themselves, although this option would be pretty rad).



These days, intersex is the preferred term for people who have various biological combinations of traditional “boy” parts and “girl” parts. Sometimes people say *variations in sex development* or *disorders of sex development*.

But because being intersex is normal, we are not going to use the word *disorder*. That’s a word for doctors, not teens. We want to emphasize how normal you are if you *do* know you’re intersex. Out of 100 births, one baby will be intersex—so don’t worry. You’re in good company.

All bodies start out the same in the womb or **uterus**. At first, we do not look like boys or girls. We are neither, at that point. In the early weeks of pregnancy, we don’t have penises or vulvas. Instead, we have special features that will turn into testicles and penises if they are exposed to “male” hormones in the womb—or vulvas and ovaries if there is a lack of these “male” hormones.

Embryos with a Y chromosome generally produce (and respond to) “male” hormones. If there is no Y chromosome, there is no “male” hormone, which means the embryo develops a body with a vulva. Think of vulvas as the default genitals. If nothing changes, a vulva will form, along with ovaries and a uterus.

If anything happens during this process—for example, if the “male” hormones don’t come in the right amount—the resulting genitals may not fit our usual ideas about boys’ and girls’ bodies. Some people who are intersex may have:

- A small penis
- A large clitoris
- A penis with a pee hole in a different spot
- Genitals that aren’t completely formed but don’t look stereotypically female or male
- A scrotum with no testicles
- A “male” that has a small uterus or other structures inside that are typically associated with “females”
- A “female” that has testes inside even though they are typically associated with “males”

For a long time, parents or doctors would choose the gender of an intersex baby. They would then perform surgery on that little babe to fit the chosen gender. Unfortunately, this led to horrible problems when people

discovered they weren't who they thought they were.
Changing someone's genitals through surgery does not affect their gender.

Ideally, surgeries shouldn't be performed on babies that are intersex. It is best to let children grow into their gender. If they want surgery down the road, they can always decide that for themselves. However, there is nothing wrong with having intersex characteristics—same as it is normal to be a ginger.

Plus, surgeries may lead to troubles with sexual feeling and arousal. That's why such a big decision can only be made by yourself after chatting about the pros and cons of surgery (often called **informed consent**).⁵

Some folks may not recognize they are intersex until puberty. And some folks may never know the finer details of their biological make up. There are professors that won't let university students study their chromosomes in class in case they might be shocked by the sudden news that they aren't XX or XY, as they were expecting.⁶

Another time intersex people may discover their unique features is while trying to conceive or make a child. Functioning ovaries and testicles are needed to produce eggs and sperm respectively. When some people fail to get pregnant and go to specialists to learn why, they may discover that they have intersex traits that make conceiving challenging.

So there you have it: being intersex is normal and common.

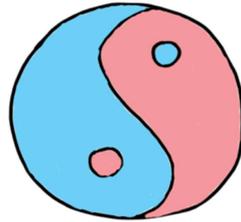
⁵ Informed consent means you're educated on the pros and cons of any medical procedure or test so that you can make the best decision for your body. This clearly can't happen when you're two months old and still haven't discovered your toes.

⁶ Quick note: Usually, egg cells have an X chromosome, and sperm cells have either an X or Y. Often, if a child has XX chromosomes, they're a girl. XY often makes a boy. However, some folks are actually XXY. So even looking to see if folks have XX or XY as their genetic makeup isn't a guarantee of gender.

Don't start with the “there are only boys and girls in this world” garbage. It's not true from a biological standpoint and we haven't even started discussing the gender binary and gender identity.

Gender Binary

The **gender binary** is the idea *only* men and women exist, and they follow certain ways of being male and female. This definition sounds pretty boring, but you can see examples of it everywhere. If you are a girl, you are expected to be a certain way—same as if you are a boy. You know—men are from Mars, women are from Uranus (or one of those strange planets).



The gender binary concept is part of some cultures, but not all. Western Europe (like England and France), which colonized North America from the 1500s onwards, was all about the gender binary. But there are other cultures that see gender differently. And it's not always boy or girl, man or woman.

Various Indigenous nations in North America believe there are more than two genders. Some of them believe in a third or fourth gender. The modern term for this concept is **Two-Spirit**. Someone who is Two-Spirit is a blend of genders, roles, and expressions. (Specific definitions will depend on each Indigenous culture.)⁷ Only people who are Indigenous (First Nations, Metis, or Inuit) should consider using the term Two-Spirit to describe themselves.

⁷ It's important to remember that there is not one Indigenous culture, but many, even in Canada. Ideas about gender vary among Indigenous peoples.

Gender Identity

Our gender identity is our sense of who we are, especially in relation to how our society views gender. (Clear as mud, right? Bear with me.)

Some of our gender seems to be born with us. And some of it is learned along the way, by how our family and friends act with us according to our culture.

When children are about two to four, they begin understanding gender and may even identify their own gender, regardless of what they were called at birth.

People whose gender identity matches what they were called at birth are known as cis or **cisgender**. This means they were called something at birth that fits their gender identity. Most folks are cisgender.

Other folks may be trans or **transgender**. This means they were called something at birth that does not fit their actual gender identity. Many people fit under the term trans or transgender. It includes different gender identities.

Terms that are no longer used include tranny, heshe, shehe, and other offensive phrases. FTM (female to male) and MTF (male to female) are not used so much anymore either. Transsexual is also an outdated term, although some people may still identify as transsexual. (It's always up to people to call themselves whatever they want! We aren't the label police.)

Some people may be trans men. These folks were assigned girl at birth, but are actually boys or men. They may call themselves trans boys or trans men. They may also just call themselves boys or men. They don't need to out themselves as trans unless they want to.

Other terms that may be used include AFAB (assigned female at birth). They may also consider themselves transmasculine or masculine of centre.

Some people may be trans women. They were assigned boy at birth, but are actually girls or women. They may use terms like trans girl or trans woman. They may also prefer to be called girls or women. Again, no one has to use the word trans in front of their gender unless they want to.

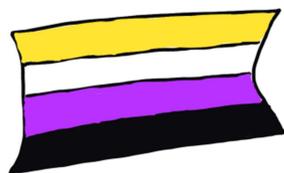
You may have also heard words like AMAB (assigned male at birth). Transfeminine or feminine of centre can also describe some folks.

As you have noticed, these terms still focus on the gender binary. Obviously, there is more to life than this concept.

Other folks don't necessarily identify as men or women. They may see themselves as both or neither. They may want to smash the gender binary.

There are many different terms to describe gender. We've tried to offer a simple definition for each term, but remember that people will use words that work best for them. They may have particular reasons for using a term and that's okay!

Someone who is **non-binary** has a gender beyond just that of a man or woman. Or they may see themselves as both.



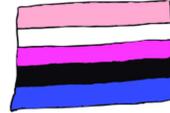
Other terms that some folks may use include differently gendered, gender expansive, gender creative, gender variant, genderqueer, agender, genderfluid, gender neutral, bigender, androgynous, or gender diverse. You'll notice we use gender diverse a lot.

There are slight differences in how some of these terms

work for folks. We all find the language that fits our experiences and sense of self best.

Some folks may also use the term “enby” which stands for non-binary. Enby is preferred to NB because NB has historically meant “non-black”.

People who are **genderfluid** may be different genders on different days. Their gender is fluid and not fixed in one place.



Different people will use different terms. And five years down the road, we may have better ways of describing ourselves.

Remember, if someone uses a word to describe their identity, that is the perfect word for *them*. Generally, it is not recommended to call other people by these terms unless you know for sure they identify with them—and unless you’re sure they’re out to everyone. Give folks space to be themselves, authentic, and safe.

If you’d like to learn some great definitions of new words, check out pflag.org/glossary. It’s an excellent resource on language currently being used by folks who are 2SLGBTQIA+.

Gender Expression

We’ve discussed what gender identity is: now let’s look at how you show or express your gender to the world. Sometimes we call this **gender expression**. Sometimes it’s also called gender presentation. It’s you, showing a particular gender on the outside in a variety of ways. For example, we may be cisgender and still play with our gender expression.

Our society usually decides the ways gender is shown or

expressed. Centuries ago, it was considered very manly to wear heels, ribbons, and curls. Today, the opposite is true: these things are usually linked to women and femininity.

Not that long ago, girls always wore skirts, boys wore pants. It was considered unfeminine for a girl to wear pants to school. Things have changed somewhat. Of course, boys may still be criticized if they wear skirts! Some celebrities like Jaden Smith and Billy Porter have shown up on red carpets wearing skirts in recent years, though. Things will likely change.

You get to determine your gender expression, but chances are, you'll think of how society views certain things. It's like a dance, or performance. Some of us are better or worse at it than others.

How do you show your gender?

Often it is through things such as your:

- name
- hairstyle
- glasses
- voice and way of speaking
- clothes
- movements
- pronouns (he/she/they)⁸

We also need to mention **secondary sex characteristics**. It sounds like a complicated term, but it's really basic—and essential to puberty.

Our secondary sex characteristics are those that turn us into mature humans. When we hit puberty, we begin developing external features that look either typically male or female, often based on the hormones that are dominant

⁸ Pronouns stand in for nouns. With people, the most common pronouns are she or he. Some folks use gender neutral pronouns, like “they”. It is okay to use “they” for one person. We checked with your English teacher. They're cool with it.

in our bodies.

For the most part, these characteristics are not necessary for reproduction itself. The theory is that they may attract partners *for* reproduction.

On a more practical level, these features are sometimes used by other humans to gender us, whether or not they actually reflect our gender identity.

Humans do not look exceptionally different until puberty—at least with their pants on. A girl can easily pass for a boy and vice versa. However, once people start developing their secondary sex characteristics, others may use these as clues to guess gender, even if it's not an accurate way to tell someone's gender.

Secondary sex characteristics for some folks include soft skin, wide hips, breasts, and other features typically associated with girls. For others, these might include a large Adam's apple, a beard, and wide shoulders.

Transgender

Being transgender is different from being intersex, though you can be *both* transgender and intersex.

Most people who fall under the transgender umbrella do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

When your gender is based on something as simple (and complicated!) as your genitals, things can go wrong. We don't know people's genders until they start growing and



feeling more like a boy, girl, neither, or both. Our gender tends to come out around age two or three. However, it may not be obvious that someone is transgender at that time. Developmentally, though, it is an appropriate time to be exploring your gender and how it fits into your culture.

The average age for children to become aware of being transgender or non-binary is about eight years old, although they do not always disclose this until they are about 15 and a half. Everyone's timeline will look different—these are just some averages from one study. And average is, well, average.

Not everyone knows they are trans at a young age, but some folks do. It's also okay to come out as trans when you're 12, 22, or 62. It can take a while to figure out who you really are. After all, our society doesn't encourage people to be authentic and gender diverse. (But we should.)

Being transgender is common, just like being intersex. At one point we thought one in 10,000 people were transgender. We were wrong. In a town of 10,000, you'll find lots of gender diverse people. Even in your school, there will be numerous folks who are trans or gender diverse (even if *you* don't know it). Current numbers say one per cent of the population is gender diverse. That's one in 100 people. Even that number seems rather low. Hopefully newer research will come up with much more realistic numbers. It's beginning to look like it's at least one or two folks per classroom. (Maybe 1 in 15 or 30?)

We hope that this resource will help you explore the diversity of the humans around us. Including you.

Transitioning

We've mentioned the term before, but we're going to talk

more about what it means to **transition**.

If someone is transgender or non-binary (or another term they use), they may feel the need to transition or change so their outside (or their gender expression) reflects their gender identity. This usually involves clothing and sometimes includes secondary sex characteristics.

When someone transitions, they may begin to change some of the things listed above. This could include their name, their clothes, and their hair. They may take lessons on how to speak more like their gender. They may take hormones so they get secondary sex characteristics that suit their identity. And they may consider surgeries to change their genitals or chest.

There is no right way to transition. The journey looks different for every person. Some people will transition quite quickly. Some people will transition slowly. Some people will feel surgery is necessary. Some people will avoid surgery like the plague. Regardless of what folks do, it doesn't change the truth of their gender identity. There is no checklist you have to complete to be trans (although some professionals may suggest timelines in order to get certain medical services funded, like hormone therapy or surgery).

If someone is young enough, they may start to transition before puberty—perhaps by changing their name and pronouns. When puberty arrives, they may take puberty blockers to keep their hormones from creating the secondary sex characteristics they don't identify with. (Once someone goes through puberty, it is harder to transition although growing a full size penis can help in having enough flesh to create a neovagina.)⁹

Deciding to transition can be difficult. Sometimes, the

⁹ Literally meaning a new vagina.

decision is not so hard—it is convincing parents and doctors to make it happen before you're 80. When you're young, you often need support from adults in your life. Sadly, they are not always supportive, and sometimes downright harmful.

Pausing puberty can be a scary thing. It does require prescription drugs and all drugs have side effects. You can talk to your doctor or specialist about what kind of side effects that you might feel, and whether the drugs are safe for you.

Although most people don't change their mind about being trans, they may decide to go through puberty naturally for any number of reasons. This will happen once the puberty blockers are stopped.

If youth are certain about changing their external body to match their gender identity, they can start taking hormones to help them go through the puberty that fits their identity best.

It's important to consider your future plans if you take hormone therapy. Hormone therapy will likely change your ability to make someone else pregnant or to get pregnant. If you have testicles, you may not make sperm. And if you have ovaries, they may not mature and release eggs.

It can be hard to decide whether you want a baby at 14. This is a decision you may need some support to make. Find your people. They may be a guidance counsellor, parent, or mental health staff. Go through your options. Think of the pros and cons—and what you feel in your gut.

People can make families in many ways. If you choose hormone therapy, you may decide to create a family differently. Adopting a baby or having someone donate eggs or sperm might lead to your perfect life!

Q & A

Here are some common questions about transitioning as well as gender identity. We are still learning a lot, and new research is always coming out about our diversity.

If a girl starts playing with trucks as a child, does that mean she is transgender?

If someone plays with toys typically associated with another gender, it does not mean they will be transgender. They might be and should be given every opportunity to explore their gender. But it is more common for kids to be cisgender and to just enjoy playing with different toys. Let's question why toys even need to be gendered!

Will I change my mind about being trans?

Probably not. It is rare for people who are trans to change into cisgender people. While some children who explore gender may not necessarily grow up to be trans, people who *do* come out as trans are trans. Generally, it is safe for trans people to transition because they do not change their minds. This doesn't mean folks need to rush to label themselves. It just means that we shouldn't deny youth health care because someone is worried it's just a phase.

Do people confuse being gay and trans?

Sometimes it can be challenging to discover who you really are in a world that expects us to be straight and cisgender. Sometimes young folks will think they are gay only to discover they are really trans. The most important thing is for people to have the space to discover themselves, safe from homophobia and transphobia. It may take time to figure out your true identity, and that's okay. Find a safe adult or ally to chat with.

If I'm trans, does that mean I'm gay?

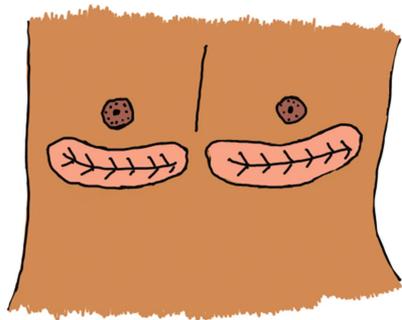
Humans like labels. Unfortunately, we are not soup. It can be challenging to discover which labels fit our experiences. To be gay means being attracted to the same sex or gender. To be trans means not identifying with the gender you were assigned at birth. Do these terms fit you? Maybe you would prefer a general term like queer to describe your identity. Remember, you get to be you. You decide your own labels.

Why do people who are 2SLGBTQIA+ or trans have more mental health issues?

Sometimes, growing up different can be challenging. There is nothing wrong with being 2SLGBTQIA+. But some people can be bullies. They use differences as an excuse to harass others. The stress of being different in a world that doesn't always accept difference can be hard on a person's mental health. We often call this **minority stress**—stress that can impact a person's health because they are not treated equally by society. It leads to mental health issues and even suicide. It's not caused by being 2SLGBTQIA+ so much as the world's reaction to you being 2SLGBTQIA+. When we honour the diversity of humans, we improve everyone's wellbeing.

Do all trans people want surgeries?

No. Some people want surgeries to change their chests or genitals. Some people don't. Some people cannot have medical procedures for various reasons. There are pros and cons to any surgery, and each person must decide for themselves whether surgery is for them. *You don't have to have surgery to be a true*



transgender person.

What is top surgery? And bottom surgery?

These terms are used if someone is changing their chest (top surgery) or genitals (bottom surgery). Sometimes we call this gender affirming surgery. People do not have to have both surgeries (or any surgery) to be transgender.

What's a dead name?

It is the birth name of someone who is trans, often a name that doesn't fit their gender. It is proper etiquette to use the name someone asks you to use.

Why are some parents so upset when their kid comes out as trans?

Not every parent gets upset, but some do. Gender diversity was not taught much before 2010. Plus, some parents get caught up in having the first girl to be born in two generations, or a boy to carry on the family name. Some parents may have some adjusting to do if they have just found out their child is trans. But no parent has the right to harm their child in any way. Seek support if your parents are making it hard to be trans, regardless of the why. They have to deal with their own issues as adults, and not put their feelings on you.

My school makes me use the wrong locker room and washroom. What can I do?

In some provinces, including Nova Scotia, schools have a duty and policy to support trans and non-binary students. Unfortunately, some schools may be slow to offer supports. If your school is lagging behind and not giving you the support you need, seek out allies. It might be your guidance counsellor. Or parent. Students have the right to be who they are in school.

Kids are bullying me for being non-binary. What can I do?

Report it to any teacher, administrator, or guidance counsellor who will listen. Also keep track of every incident—time, date, witnesses, and so on. Evidence is important. Store your list of incidents on your phone or in a journal. You deserve a safe school environment. If you cannot fix it at the school level, contact your local school board or centre for education. If you feel comfortable with your school police officer, bring it up with them. It's worth noting that 2SLGBTQIA+ folks have not always been safe in the justice system, so keep that in mind when contacting police.

What is gender dysphoria?

This term is often used to describe how some people feel about their gender, and is usually tied to mental distress which needs to be relieved by transitioning and other supports. It generally means distress related to being another gender than the one you were called at birth. Sometimes you need to be “diagnosed” with **gender dysphoria** in order to receive therapies or surgeries that are paid by the public health care system. Many gender diverse people do not experience gender dysphoria. In fact, some folks like to focus on **gender euphoria**, a positive feeling that leads to joy in your gender identity and expressing yourself authentically. How you feel about yourself is the most important, but do recognize that some professionals may need to “diagnose” you with something in order to have hormones and surgeries covered financially. This is just how the system is set up currently.

People keep forgetting to use the right pronouns.

This happens a lot to people! And it's no fun. You can remind people about your pronouns either on the spot, or

in a private conversation later. Hopefully someone will stick up for you too, so you don't always have to be the pronoun police. Someday, sharing pronouns or using gender neutral pronouns will be common etiquette. Until then, it may require some reminding of people. That stinks.

What if I call someone the wrong pronoun?

Humans make mistakes, so unless you're an alien or robot, you're bound to flub a pronoun or two. If you make a mistake, keep it simple. Apologize and try to avoid making that same mistake again. We all like to be recognized for who we truly are.

What does Mx. mean?

You know how some people like a Mr. in front of their name, and some like Ms.? Well, what do you do if you want a gender neutral version? You can always use Mx. It's pronounced "mix".

Do trans people always feel as though they were born in the wrong body?

Not always. There is no one way to be trans. Some trans folks love their bodies. Others don't. Sometimes the only thing that's wrong is how society tries to put people into small boxes.

It seems like everyone is becoming trans these days. Is it new?

Gender diversity has always been around. Not only has it been seen in some Indigenous societies of North America, India has long recognized hijra as a third gender. However, unlike some Indigenous groups, which consider gender diverse people extraordinary, the hijra have traditionally been excluded from society. Today, it seems more people are becoming trans or non-binary for a number of reasons.

One is that it used to be very unsafe in many cultures to come out as gender diverse. People would hide their true genders, often suffering in silence. Two, as we give people more education about gender, more folks are able to find a name for their unique experiences. If we give people the space and language to describe gender beyond the gender binary, then we are going to see true identities emerge much more often.

Is it ever okay to ask someone if they have had genital surgery?

Maybe if you're a doctor. Maybe. Otherwise, no, no, and no.¹⁰ Asking about anyone's genitals isn't appropriate.

When should I let someone I'm dating or seeing know I'm trans?

It's up to you! If you aren't sure how they will take it, try mentioning it indirectly. For example, say, "I would be okay dating someone who is trans or genderqueer." See what the other person says. That might give you a hint as to what their feelings are. It might also give you a warning if they display any hatred. If you aren't sure how your partner will react, disclose in a relatively public spot in case they get violent. People who are trans (especially trans women of colour) face dangers in our current world.

Won't boys put on dresses or sneak into girls' washrooms if we allow people to choose their own gender?

It hasn't been a problem even though many conservative people think girls and women will be assaulted if trans women are allowed into their spaces. The reality is that girls, women, and trans women are at risk from sexual

¹⁰ Really. Don't do it.

violence anywhere and everywhere. Sadly, trans women are at the highest risk of experiencing violence—sometimes even by cisgender women! Let's support everyone in having a safe place to pee by understanding that some people who don't fit your gender ideas may use the stall next to you and *it's okay*. Gender neutral washrooms are common. In fact, your own home probably has one!

What exactly is a cross dresser? Is that the same as being trans?

No. Someone can cross dress *and* be trans. But cross dressing generally means wearing the clothing of another gender—and that's it. (It happens a lot in Shakespeare!) Years ago, a cross dresser was called a transvestite, but you don't hear that term much anymore. There is usually more stigma when a man wears clothes associated with women than vice versa. Clothing does not always indicate someone's gender, so you can't assume anything from one's gender presentation or expression.

Is cross dressing the same as being a drag queen?

A drag queen is a person who dresses as a woman for entertainment purposes, like going on stage. Often they are part of shows. A drag queen typically exaggerates feminine clothes, hair, and make up. The reverse, a drag king, is a person who dresses as a man as entertainment. You don't have to be trans or gay to be a drag queen or king. However, some drag queens or kings are part of the rainbow community.

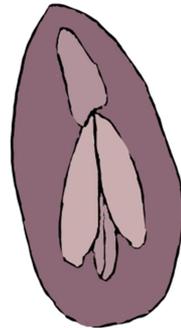
Do genitals work after bottom surgery?

Sometimes, depending on the surgery and how you define "work". One positive benefit to genital surgery is that some people enjoy sexual activity more when they have the genitals that match their gender identity! However, there

are risks to surgery, such as sexual sensations changing. As more surgeries are done, though, techniques will continue to improve. Each person should discuss with their surgeons the pros and cons of any procedure so they can be educated about what results they can expect.

How fast will I change if I begin taking hormone therapy?

It depends. Most changes usually happen in about two years. Some folks may see small changes in a few weeks, but this does not hold true for everybody. Chat with your doctor or specialist about how your journey may look.



How will I know I'm trans?

If you think about transitioning constantly, you may be trans! But seriously, if you have doubts that you are living as the correct gender, you may fit under the trans umbrella. Find allies to help you learn more about gender. Often, 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations can help support you in finding peers and learning more.

Is it dangerous to take hormone therapy?

While hormone therapy is fine for some folks, not all bodies will be able to handle the medications. For example, if someone is interested in taking estrogen (the hormone often linked to women and femininity), they may be at increased risk of blood clots, especially if they smoke and are over the age of 40. Your doctor or specialist will look at your medical history to decide if you are okay to take these drugs. Please beware of getting drugs online or from a friend (unless that friend is a pharmacist) for this reason.¹¹

¹¹ It's worth noting that birth control is often made of hormones, so it could technically be a kind of hormone therapy.

If I take estrogen, how big will my breasts grow?

Most people who were assigned male at birth can expect to grow breasts that will fit an A or B cup after being on hormones for about two years. If this size is not adequate, there is the option of having surgery to put implants in breasts (also known as breast augmentation surgery, AKA “a boob job”). Unfortunately, there are some challenges getting boob jobs covered by public healthcare. If you have a cool rich aunt who is willing to pay for the surgery, you’re ahead of the game.

Are the effects of hormones permanent?

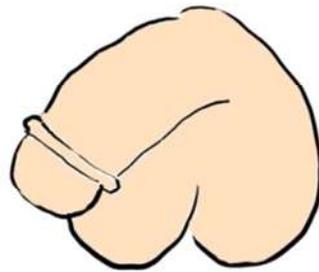
They may be. Breast growth and sterility (or being unable to make babies) may be permanent. If someone takes estrogen, changes to the nipples may be permanent as well. However, there are exceptions to every general rule, so use birth control if you don’t want a pregnancy, and chat with your health care provider about what the side effects may be with any treatment.

Will I gain weight on hormone therapy?

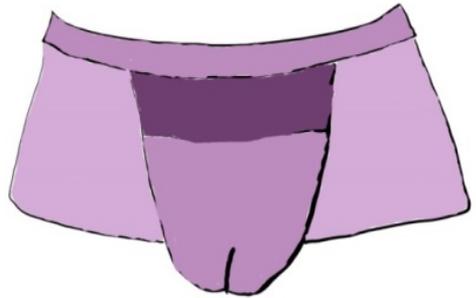
Maybe. Hormones may encourage fat to live in different places in your body. For example, someone taking estrogen can expect fat in places like their hips, breasts, and around the face.

What are gaffs and packers?

If you were born without a penis, but want one, there are several ways to appear as though you have a penis in your pants (or a rocket in your pocket). A **packer** is a prosthetic or fake penis and testicles that is put inside underwear to give



it a penis-like bulge. Some packers look more realistic than others, depending on the person's budget or wants. (There are luxury ones that are super expensive.) You can also use homemade versions, which we will cover later. Some packers help a person pee standing up. We call these stand-to-pees. (These come in handy at outdoor concerts too!) If someone is looking for a harder penis to penetrate a partner, they can use a strap on with a harness. Each person will find the right packers for the job as they explore different kinds of packing gear. A **gaff** does the opposite of a packer. It helps tuck in a penis and testicles for a flat appearance. Gaffs come in various styles and sizes.



Can I make my own packer?

Sure! Take a few socks and make your own. Stuff a sock with one or two other socks until you have your desired shape and size. Place in your underwear. Voila!

I can't afford to buy a binder or gaff! What can I do?

Many youth serving organizations that support 2SLGBTQIA+ folks can help you get free or low cost items like binders, gaffs, and packers. Contact your local agency or sexual health centre for more information.

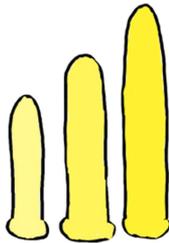
How long do I have to wait for surgery?

Often, surgeons will not perform gender affirming surgery on anyone under 18, except for mastectomies to remove breasts. Each surgeon may be slightly different, but they

will often follow guidelines issued by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (even though not all trans and non-binary folks support WPATH standards).

What's a dilator?

It's a long object used in vaginas. Dilators can be used to help with pain during intercourse or penetration, or to help stretch the vagina after genital surgery. It's important to keep a surgically created vagina in good shape. Think of it as physio for your vagina! If you have surgery, ask your surgeon or health care team what they recommend and how often you should use your dilators.

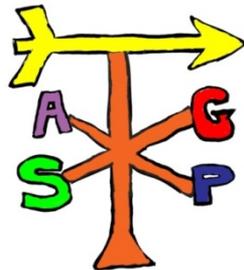


Orientations

Your orientation is different from your gender identity or expression. When we talk about orientation, we are talking about **sexual orientation**. Simply put, your orientation is who you are attracted to. You may be attracted to them sexually, emotionally, physically, or all of the above.

If you have no attractions to other folks, don't stress. You may be too young. Or you may be **asexual**. Someone who is asexual does not experience a lot of sexual desire even once they've finished puberty. This is a perfectly normal sexual orientation. Sometimes these folks are called aces (short for asexual).

Many people consider themselves **heterosexual**. It is the most common orientation, but not the only normal one. If you are heterosexual, you likely feel attraction to the opposite sex or gender.¹² Thus, if you are a woman, you are attracted to men. If you are a man, you are attracted to women. This is also called being straight.



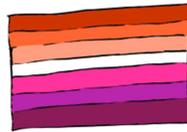
¹² It's worth thinking about whether you are attracted to someone because of their sex or gender. There is no right answer to this question, and hopefully, it gets you thinking about how complicated humans are.

Gay

If you are attracted to folks *other* than the opposite sex or gender, you may consider yourself **gay**. Gay has more than one meaning, but it generally means that a man is attracted to other men. Years ago, gay people were called homosexuals as a medical diagnosis, but that term fell out of fashion. Now we know being gay is perfectly natural and normal. It is not a mental illness. That's why we avoid "homosexual" out of respect. If you want to use it to describe yourself, though, rock it.

Lesbian

A **lesbian** is a woman who is attracted to other women. You may also use the term gay when talking about same sex/gender attraction to other women. You may also use the term **queer**.



Queer

Queer is a word that can mean lots of things. The word queer has a history of being used as an insult. Some people may hate the expression because they were bullied with it. Other people, though, may be comfortable using it because they have reclaimed¹³ the word to show they are a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community. You may like to identify as queer, and you may not. It's a term that can cover a lot of people! It often means "not straight/hetero" and however that looks for a person.

Some folks even use queer to describe their gender, such as genderqueer.

¹³ To reclaim a word means using it to self-identify in an empowering way, by embracing the term instead of letting it exist as an insult.

Bisexual

Someone who is **bisexual** is attracted to more than one sex or gender. It likely means you are attracted to same sex or same gender partners as well as opposite sex/opposite gender partners. It can also mean you like more than one sex or gender. “Bi” means two. Think of a bicycle—it has two tires. Traditionally, being bisexual was defined as liking women and men. But it technically means liking more than one gender. These genders do not have to be women and men.



Pansexual

If you are **pansexual**, you may be attracted to more than one sex or gender too. Some people prefer the term pansexual instead of bisexual because “pan” means “all”. This means you are attracted to numerous genders or sexes—not cookware. You may not be attracted to all genders or sexes per se, but more than two.



Asexual

As we mentioned earlier, if you are **asexual**, it means you aren’t really interested in sexual activity. Ever. People can define asexuality in different ways. Some asexuals are romantic and want to date, but not have a lot (or any) sex. Some aromantic asexuals don’t want to have romantic relationships or sex.



Some people who are asexual may have sex, but not really be interested in it. There is a range of desire that asexual folks feel. Again, this range is normal.

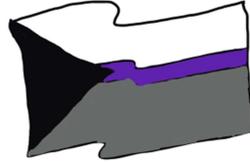
Grey A

Some people identify as **grey-As**, in a zone between asexual and sexual. You may have a bit of interest in sex, but not a lot.

Demisexual

Are you a **demisexual**? A demisexual is sexually attracted to a person *only* if there is some sort of emotional connection. Although many people have not heard of this term, it sounds like the stereotypical Hollywood romance.

Often, someone who is a demisexual only wishes to have sex with a person once they've bonded in some way.



Questioning

If someone is not sure what orientation they are, they may be **questioning**. It is okay to be questioning! Humans are complicated, and sometimes our attractions are too! If you aren't sure what kind of orientation fits you best, take your time to explore your feelings. You don't have to decide your orientation this very moment. Some people take decades to come out, for various reasons. Don't feel you have to hurry or you're on some kind of deadline. (Plus, you are allowed to change your label if you feel old terms don't fit your life anymore!)

As you can see, there is a wide range of orientations people can have. All orientations are perfectly normal and natural.

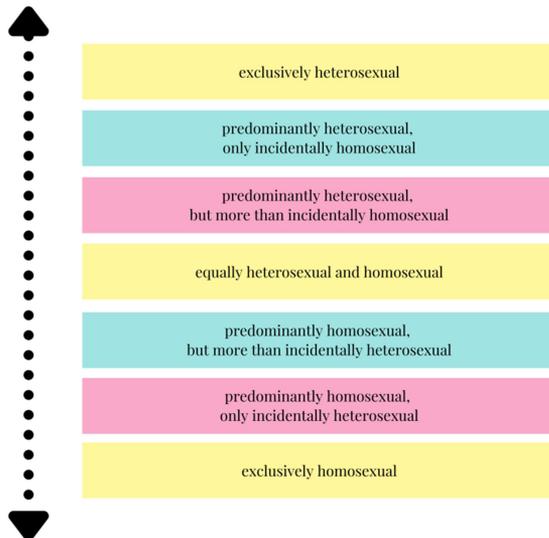
Don't let anyone tell you otherwise.

Many people will know their orientation early on, when they start having crushes. If you haven't decided your orientation by puberty, attractions during puberty will provide hints as to your orientation. Only you know who you truly are.

Orientation does not depend on your partner at any given time. It does not depend on your behaviour. It is about your own sense of self.

Years ago, a sex researcher named Alfred Kinsey came up with the idea that our orientation exists on a scale.

The Kinsey Scale



Obviously, not everyone agrees with Kinsey. And we're not really sure what he means by "incidentally"? Like every night? Every weekend? Once a year?

The Kinsey Scale is included here as an example of how we've tried classifying orientations. It is not the only one.

You can reach out to adult supporters if you need help talking about your orientation. Teachers and guidance counsellors are available at school. And many communities have organizations that support people who are 2SLGBTQIA+, including sexual health centres.

Remember that you are not alone.

Coming Out Tips

What does it mean to come out?

Well, coming out means announcing to friends, family, and/or the world that you don't fit the same old mold. It may mean telling folks you're gay or transgender. It's based on the idea that people are hidden until they announce to the world that they are not straight or cisgender.

Perhaps someday we will live in a world where it is not necessary to come out. People will just understand that humans are diverse and don't fit some straight mold, or some cisgender mold.

Until that time, you may have situations in your life where you want to tell someone you are unique.

Unfortunately, coming out isn't a onetime process. Even if you are comfortably out in all aspects of your life, there will come times when you want to tell people that you aren't straight, thank you very much. For example, you may tell

your parents you're out when you're 13. But if you don't see Aunt Marge until you're 16, you may feel the need to come out to her then.

Coming out is a very personal process. First, you have to come out to yourself. Then you have to decide how and when to tell others.

Some people have experienced so much homophobia and transphobia that it can be difficult to accept they are gay or transgender. If this is the case, you may need some extra support to love yourself.

There is no right time to come out. Some people don't come out until they're seniors! And some people come out when they're young. You can do it any time it feels right for you. Also keep in mind your safety, and what that looks like.

Find someone to support you in this process. Hopefully it's someone who has been through this themselves.

Here are a few tips to get you started.

- Consider coming out to one person at a time.
- Ensure you are safe if you live at home with parents and caregivers who may not welcome your orientation or gender. It may mean waiting until you move out before telling them.
- The good news is that even though many people will express emotions about their child or youth coming out, most parents accept it and love their child unconditionally.
- Coming out can be a huge relief for many people, who are finally free to live as their true selves.
- Start with people you know will be kind, which will give you the confidence to come out to people who may be less than thrilled.
- Test the waters by asking how someone feels about a celebrity who you think is like you.
- Remember that other people's reactions are about *them*, not you.

Q & A

Here are some common questions and thoughts about orientations.

My religion tells me that being gay is a sin.

Some religions are not supportive of people who are 2SLGBTQIA+. Some are. The reality is that many people are part of the rainbow community and it is a natural human experience. Some people choose a new religion and some people choose no religion. If you need spiritual support, there *are* religious groups out there who are more than happy to welcome people who are 2SLGBTQIA+.

Is it normal to fantasize about the same sex even if you are straight?

Totally! It is natural to have all sorts of crushes and fantasies. Your orientation is a part of you. No fantasy can change that. Sometimes people fear being gay and worry that they aren't normal if they are attracted to the same sex or gender. It is okay to be gay and it is okay to have same sex or same gender fantasies. Enjoy them and know that they don't necessarily change your orientation.

What makes people gay?

We really don't know. Most people seem to be born with their orientation. Some animals choose same sex partners, including penguins, so it is definitely not out of the ordinary for different animal species. In short, being gay is a normal variation of being an animal. It also runs in some families, making it likely genetic.

Is being gay a choice?

People cannot choose to be gay or straight. They can choose to act certain ways, but they cannot change who they are. Ideally, people get to live their best life! It can cause mental

health problems if your identity is seen as shameful and you must bury it deep. In a safe world, everyone gets to be who they are.

What is conversion therapy?

It basically means that someone sees being 2SLGBTQIA+ as a problem and needs to “convert” someone to being straight or cisgender. This is harmful and unhelpful, and can lead to disastrous consequences for the person who is led to believe they are defective or not normal. This may include suffering, mental health issues, and even suicide. Conversion therapy may be done by a “professional” in some kind of “therapy” sessions, but may also include pressure from folks in authority who think being gay or trans is just a phase you’ll grow out of. Run from anyone suggesting being 2SLGBTQIA+ needs to be cured, or is “just a phase”.

Are men who are gay feminine?

Some are. Some aren’t. Being or acting feminine does not tell you anything about who a person is attracted to.

What is a fag?

Sometimes it means a cigarette, but it is usually an insult for someone who is gay. Some people who are gay may reclaim the word and reduce its power as an insult. But if you aren’t gay, it’s usually best not to use it.

What is a dyke?

It is usually an insult for someone who is a lesbian. Some lesbians may reclaim the word dyke for themselves, but if you aren’t a lesbian, you should probably avoid using it.

If you are bisexual, are you equally attracted to both genders or sexes?

Not necessarily. It’s different for all people who are

bisexual. You may be mostly attracted to women or feminine folks, with an occasional liking for a specific type of masculine person.

If I am a bisexual woman, but marry a man, does that make me straight?

Not unless you feel you are. Otherwise, you are still bisexual—just married to a man.

Why do people use the word “gay” to put something or someone down?

For a long time, Western society celebrated straight men (straight white cisgender men, to be exact). If you were a woman, a gay man, a transgender person, or different in some way, you were not seen as valuable to society. To this day, even though being a woman or being gay is okay, some folks use these terms as insults. It's okay to be a man, woman, straight, gay, trans, non-binary, and so on. We should never use sexuality to insult someone.

Aren't women who are lesbian very masculine?

Some are. Some aren't. Being or acting masculine is not code for who a person might be attracted to.

Is it true bisexual people are promiscuous?

No. (P.S. Being **promiscuous** means having a lot of sexual activity, but it also involves judgement that you're having what someone considers “too much” sex.) Your gender or orientation has no relationship to your desire for sexual activity (unless you're asexual!)

If I'm bisexual, does that mean I can't make up my mind?

No. Sometimes, even people in the rainbow community will tell people who are bisexual that they can't make up their

minds. Being bisexual is a valid orientation and very common. It just means you like more than one sex or gender.

If I'm a man and have sex with a man, does that mean I'm gay?

Not necessarily. You may choose to identify as gay. Sometimes, though, our behaviour and our orientation may be different. You may have heard the phrase “men who have sex with men”. It allows for the possibility that not all men who have sex with men may identify as gay. It's okay. You get to pick how you identify based on who you are inside—not your behaviour. If you are a gay man and have sex with women, it doesn't make you straight. That is why having sex with someone doesn't “fix” your orientation.

What is a lipstick lesbian?

It is a term to describe a lesbian who acts very feminine. It also refers to the stereotype that lesbians act masculine and don't wear makeup. Wearing makeup cannot tell you anything about who a person would like as their partner. Sometimes a little lipstick is just what an outfit needs!



What does being butch mean?

Butch is the assumption that lesbians have to dress or act like men in some way (hey look, it's the gender binary again). Some folks consider themselves proudly butch. However, not all masculine appearing folks consider themselves butch. It's more of an identity, not a description.

How do gay people have sex?

Most people assume “having sex” means putting a penis in a

vagina. If two people don't have these particular parts, obviously this is not in the cards! Sex, though, is more than just a penis and vagina show. Sexual activity is about sharing intimate fun with your partner. Fingers, mouths, and sex toys can all make intimacy sexy—and they don't rely on what genitals a person has. Gay people can have sex any way they want to.

Will I always be my orientation?

Maybe. Orientations can be fluid and flexible. Some studies suggest cisgender women are more likely to be flexible in their orientations. Ultimately, remember your behaviour and your orientation may not line up 100%, and that's okay.

Why does the rainbow flag mean someone is gay?

The rainbow flag is associated with the 2SLGBTQIA+ community as a symbol of the identities of all humans. The colours represent the many orientations and genders we can be, but also have some specific meanings, like:

- Red – life
- Orange – healing
- Yellow – sunlight
- Green – nature
- Blue – harmony and peace
- Purple – spirit

What is the progress flag?

For a long time, the rainbow flag has been the gold standard for representing the Pride community. However, in 2021, more folks are using the progress flag which includes the colours black and brown to recognize the BIPOC¹⁴ community, as well as



¹⁴ BIPOC stands for folks who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour.

the transgender colours of pink, blue, and white. Some flags also have the intersex symbol of a purple circle on a yellow triangle. It just goes to show that we are always evolving our inclusive practices to reflect people better.

If someone transitions, will their attractions stay the same?

Not necessarily. Some trans folks may experience sexual fluidity, or a change in who they are attracted to. They may have only been attracted to women, but now are attracted to both, or just men. There is no right way to feel as one transitions.

Can you tell if someone is gay by looking at them?

Maybe if they have a shirt that says “Hello, I am gay!” Otherwise, everything is just a guess. Some people have better “gaydar” than others, but you cannot always tell someone’s orientation just by looking at them—the same goes for their gender, too.

The Beast Awakens

Now that we've covered identities and orientations, we are going to get down to the nuts and bolts of puberty, whether you're a newbie or have been going through puberty for some time. We traditionally don't do a great job of explaining puberty beyond the gender binary, so we will go in-depth from a more gender diverse perspective.

Puberty is the time when hormones take over your body to make you into an adult. You grow up... at least in body! (The last part of the brain doesn't mature until about age 25, so you have an excuse until then.)

Everyone goes through puberty. It is a natural thing. Even youth who are trans and take puberty blockers will eventually need to go through puberty with support from their medical professionals.

We've already mentioned hormones, but what are they? **Hormones** are special chemicals in our body that travel from glands to organs and tissues so they can tell them what to do. Hormones help us fall asleep, digest food, and more. There are many hormones in our body doing many different things. We wouldn't be here without hormones even though they get blamed for many mood swings!

When we are around eight to 12 years old, hormones start

taking us down the road to puberty. It does not happen overnight, but small changes appear.

Everything starts with the **pituitary gland** in your brain. The pituitary gland sends out a hormone that wakes up the **ovaries** or **testicles**. Then the ovaries or testicles begin producing **testosterone** or **estrogen**¹⁵. Ovaries make mostly estrogen while testicles make mostly testosterone. Everyone has a bit of estrogen or testosterone in their body. It comes down to whether you have *more* estrogen than testosterone, or vice versa.

Estrogen is often linked to the **secondary sex characteristics** of many girls and women: breasts, soft skin, wide hips, and extra body fat. If we have ovaries and make estrogen, we are more likely to grow into someone with features typically associated with being a woman. If we take estrogen as part of hormone therapy, we will experience similar effects.

Testosterone causes the secondary sex characteristics of many boys and men: facial hair, wide shoulders, slim hips, and low voice. Our voice box, or **Adam's apple**, will get more noticeable on our throats like a little lump. If we have testicles and make mostly testosterone, we are more likely to grow into someone with features typically associated with men.

During puberty, all bodies regardless of gender may see:

- more acne or pimples
- more oil on their skin and hair
- more body hair, especially under the arms and in the pubic area
- more adult odor, especially in the armpits, groin, and feet
- changing moods
- increased sexual desire or attraction to other bodies (unless they're aces)
- getting taller

¹⁵There are actually several kinds of estrogens in human bodies, but to make things simple, we're going to talk about it as one kind. Because we can.

Puberty starts around age eight or nine for some people while others may not notice changes until they are 14 or 15. Both are normal. People go through puberty on their own time, but it can feel frustrating when you don't go through puberty when your peers do. Sometimes we get shamed for going through puberty too early or too late, which isn't fair. We are all unique.

Before puberty, our bodies look like children's bodies. We appear gender neutral. There really isn't much difference between us even if we were assigned girl or boy at birth. Sometimes we use our clothes, hairstyles, and names to show people our gender. Even then, people might make mistakes gendering us. (We call this **misgendering** someone.)

Early Signs

What are the signs we might soon go through puberty?

People with **testicles** will notice their testicles getting bigger. The first hairs will appear at the base of the **penis** and **scrotum** (the bag of skin holding the testicles).

About a year after the testicles start growing, the penis will start to get bigger and longer.

People assigned girl at birth will often notice one or both of their breasts getting tender and popping out a bit more. Sometimes little breast buds are the first sign their chest is changing. These folks will see hair sprouting on their crotch. The very first hair will appear on the **labia** or lips of their **vulva**.

There are many changes to come for all genders and bodies, including those who are transgender and intersex.

Puberty can be a scary time, but it is also a time to honour that you are becoming an adult.

Ovaries, Periods & Estrogen

We are going to start with estrogen, the hormone typically linked to femininity, girls, and women. This is a very simple explanation. After all, many boys have estrogen in their bodies too—just not as much.

For now, all you need to know is some folks make estrogen during puberty. They typically have parts linked to being a girl, like a **uterus** or womb, as well as ovaries.

Menstruation can be a big moment for someone who has a uterus. You need a uterus to be able to menstruate—after all, the lining is what comes out during your period, which we will cover in more detail in this section.

Your first period will likely come about two years after your breasts change, and after the start of some vaginal discharge. Let's cover discharge first.

Discharge

Before someone gets their first period, they may notice **discharge**, or wetness, coming from their vagina. It may be smeared across the crotch of their underwear.

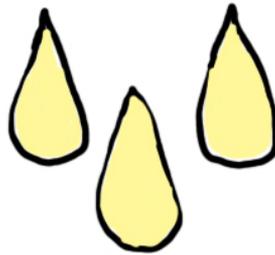
Discharge comes out of most vaginas naturally. It may be light white or yellowish as it dries. Because it is quite acidic,

it may even bleach the fabric of your underwear. This doesn't mean anything is wrong—in fact, it is completely natural. When your vagina is more acidic, it is actually keeping harmful germs at bay!

Discharge comes mostly from the cervix, so you need one of those to have any large amount of discharge. If you have extra cells on your cervix, you may make even more!

Some discharge comes from the walls of the vagina. However, if someone has a surgically created vagina, they will not notice as much coming from their vaginal walls.

A teaspoon of discharge each day is typical in most folks. However, some people will notice less while some people may need to change their underwear frequently. As time goes on, you will learn *what is normal for you*. Then, if anything seems different, you'll know to chat with your health care provider.



If you are not taking any hormones like birth control, you will notice your discharge changes throughout the month.

It becomes slippery and stretchy like egg whites when you are **fertile**, or the time you are most likely to release an egg for **fertilization**. You may notice this slippery discharge on toilet paper when you wipe your vulva. Other times during the month, you may not notice much at all. There may be little of it and it may be sticky.

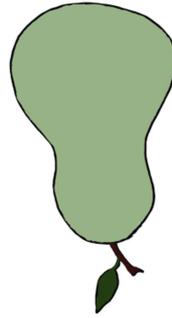
You may feel more fluids when you think about someone you like. Your body *also* makes something called **lubrication** for sexual activity. When people with vaginas

get excited by someone (also called being “turned on”) they may notice more wetness. If you feel extra fluids and you’re not sure why, this could be the cause. Again, it is natural and nothing to be ashamed of. It is perfectly natural for vaginas to be wet. If your vagina is usually drier, that is okay too.¹⁶

Lay of the Land

The **uterus** or womb is the shape of an upside down pear when it is not being used for pregnancy. It sits behind the bladder in your pelvic area.

Attached to each side of the uterus are **fallopian tubes**. These tubes pick up eggs from the ovaries and allow them to travel to the **uterus**. In a diagram, the tubes and ovaries make it look as though the uterus has horns!



Sex hormones cause eggs to mature in the ovaries each month. Halfway through your monthly menstrual cycle, one egg will emerge from an ovary. Sometimes one will come out of each ovary.

If the person has had sex with someone who makes sperm, the sperm will swim through the uterus and head for the fallopian tubes in search of The Egg or Eggs. We will cover pregnancy in a bit. Right now we’re going in the opposite direction of pregnancy—periods.

¹⁶ We’ll discuss artificial lube soon. Artificial lube is a dry vagina’s best friend. Ditto for your anus.

Periods

Many people consider getting their period the first sign of puberty. Your first period often comes after discharge starts showing in your underwear.

A period is the shedding of the uterus lining. It is a natural event that usually happens every month. Sometimes we call it **menstruation**. Because it can be an awkward topic to discuss, we may give it silly names like shark week, being on the rag, getting a visit from Aunt Flo, and so on.

If you don't have a uterus, you won't get a period. If you're on some kinds of birth control, you may not get a period, or it may come on a different timeline. Taking testosterone can also change the number of periods you get. They may become less frequent, or even stop completely.

Why do we have periods? Our uteruses create a lining each month in case we get pregnant. The uterus lining is like a bed for an embryo.¹⁷ If someone does not get pregnant, the lining of the uterus must be changed—just like changing your bed!

Thanks to a drop in certain hormones, the lining comes out through the vagina as blood, mucus, and tissue. Sometimes there are even blood clots, which look like dark red or black boogers.

Since this mixture can

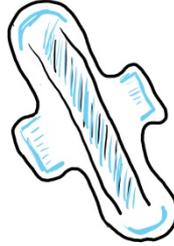


¹⁷ Humans start out as zygotes, then become embryos before finally becoming fetuses. Then they are born and become babies. The names differ based on how far along the pregnancy is.

stain your clothes, it is important to wear something to catch the fluids.

Pads

You may choose to wear a **pad**, which sticks to the crotch of your underwear to absorb fluids after they leave the vagina. The pad is changed every few hours. There are all sizes, from wee panty liners to larger night time pads with wings. Wings don't help you fly, but they help cover the sides of your underwear. Most pads are disposable, but you can buy or make reusable ones that require washing between uses.



Tampons

Other folks may prefer to use a **tampon**, which is a cotton stick or plug that goes inside the vagina to absorb fluids. It can be made from rayon too. Tampons are changed throughout the day, just like pads. They come in different sizes, from slim to extra absorbent. Some have applicators and these come in plastic or cardboard.



Menstrual Cups

There are also **menstrual cups**, which sit in the vagina to collect fluids as soon as they leave the uterus! These small cups can be left inside your vagina for up to 12 hours, depending on how heavy your period is.



There is no right way to collect your period fluids. Pads, tampons, and menstrual cups are

all safe if you follow the instructions.

Your first period will be a surprise. For most bodies, it is not a gushing river that starts suddenly and spreads over the floor like you are in a horror movie. Instead, you may notice a spot of brown or a streak of red on your underwear. Or maybe you will see something on the toilet paper after you wipe your vulva. This is a sign that you need to put on a pad, wear a tampon, or insert a menstrual cup.



Prepare ahead. Put a few pads in your locker or book bag. That way, when you see the spots, you can put on a pad ASAP.

If you get your period at school and have no pad or tampon, search for a teacher or guidance counsellor. Staff at school usually have spare supplies for students.

Some bodies feel cramps as the uterus works to remove its lining. Others may feel nothing. A few conditions can cause lots of pain during periods, so visit a health care professional if your period is unbearable.

There are many ways to ease period cramps. If you are home, a hot water bottle or heating pad can be comforting. Exercise also helps.

If nothing works and you are still uncomfortable, ask your parents or caregivers for a simple pain reliever like ibuprofen or naproxen. Since these pills have side effects, try to use other things first. But don't suffer.

Blood flow changes throughout your period. Sometimes it is heavy. Sometimes you cannot notice it. Different sizes of pads and tampons are designed for light or heavy days.

Eventually, the blood will ease for a day or two and you will be confident enough to stop wearing tampons or pads. Then you will not bleed for another month or so. (You will still have discharge, though.)

As you get more periods, you will learn what to expect from your body. Each body is different. Some people track their periods with a calendar or app on their phone. It can help predict when you are likely to get your next period.¹⁸

Menstrual Cycle

Approximately every 28 days, people with ovaries and uteruses go through a menstrual cycle that prepares their bodies to become pregnant. It is run by hormones that do various things to release an egg and prepare for a possible pregnancy.

Keep in mind some hormones alter this cycle so an egg isn't released. This includes birth control as well as testosterone.

Follicle-stimulating hormone

As you start your period flow, there are few to no hormones running the show. However, in a few days, a follicle-stimulating hormone from the pituitary gland wakes up eggs in your ovaries—about 15 to 20 of them. Each egg gets bigger in little follicles¹⁹ in the ovaries. Usually only one egg becomes dominant.

Estrogen

The growing follicles start releasing more and more

¹⁸ Remember that some apps sell your personal information. Take the time to learn what information your period app sells, and to whom.

¹⁹ A small sac in the ovary that contains an egg cell.

estrogen. The eggs are competing to become *the* egg that is released when you ovulate (not all eggs will be released, thankfully!) The process takes about two weeks. Estrogen causes the lining of the uterus to start thickening. It also helps make mucus that is friendly to sperm. Sperm-friendly mucus allows the sperm to travel to the egg.

Luteinizing hormone

As estrogen increases and the eggs grow, a surge of luteinizing hormone (thanks to the amazing pituitary gland) will allow the winning egg to break free of the ovary. Around this time, cervical mucus will appear like egg whites. This is a prime time to get pregnant. You are about to ovulate.

Ovulation

Generally, only one egg wins the contest, although sometimes two eggs are released. Some bodies feel a bit of pain when releasing an egg (and they can feel it on the side that released it!) After being picked up by the fallopian tube, the egg or eggs last less than 24 hours before dissolving into your body. Sperm must find the egg in this short window of time, although sperm have a longer life than eggs—some live up to five days. Most die noble deaths sooner than that, either draining out of the vagina or being absorbed into the body.

Progesterone

The follicles that were holding the maturing eggs collapse, which causes the hormone progesterone to be released. This hormone means you will not release any more eggs and will continue to grow the

lining in your uterus so it can accept a fertilized egg. Progesterone's goal is to protect fertilized eggs and allow them a chance at pregnancy. Progesterone is not a friend to sperm. That's why you can't get pregnant again while you're pregnant.

Period

If you are not pregnant, estrogen and progesterone levels fall. The uterus lining is released through the vagina. You now have a period.

Follicle-stimulating hormone

Rinse. Repeat.



Body Changes

Estrogen released by the ovaries will make changes in your body over time, until you look more like an adult. You will grow features that will be associated with women and/or femininity.

If you are on hormone therapy and taking estrogen, you will notice similar things. You will also be taking another medicine that keeps testosterone under wraps.

Whether you take estrogen or make it in your body, you can expect most or many of the following changes. Keep in mind that all bodies are different and everyone will look unique. These are just some common things that happen to folks who make or take estrogen.

Softer Skin

Typically, estrogen helps make skin soft including the lips.

Acne

A lot of people will experience acne or pimples. Gentle cleansing can help with most cases, along with over-the-counter pimple cream. Serious cases of acne can be seen by a doctor or nurse practitioner for advanced care. Interestingly, estrogen promotes clearer skin. During the last part of your cycle, when progesterone is running high, you may notice more acne.

Fat Deposits

While not everyone will be stereotypically curvy, estrogen helps the body store fat in places like the hips. Fat will also change facial features.

Higher Voice

People are more likely to have a higher pitch to their voice.

Hair Growth

Not only will hair begin growing in the pubic area, it will grow in the armpits, legs, and sometimes above the upper lip. If facial hair becomes thick and a concern, chat with your doctor or nurse practitioner.

Breast Growth

Estrogen will stimulate the growth of breasts.

Muscle Mass

Testosterone is often associated with bigger muscles. Although people who make or take estrogen can be strong and build muscle, they will not have the same muscle mass as those who make or take testosterone. Obviously, this only counts if

all other things are the same, like activity levels. An Olympic athlete will trump a couch potato every time.

Height

Most cis girls typically get growth spurts before most cis boys. However, eventually, most cis boys will likely become taller than most cis girls. If someone takes estrogen, they will not become as tall as they might have had they gone through a more “male” puberty.

Pelvic Exams

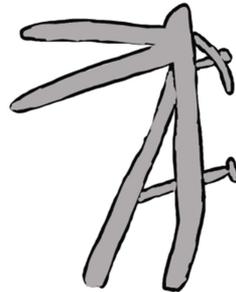
This is your public cervix announcement! Anyone with a vagina and/or cervix needs to have pelvic exams on a regular basis to check for cervical cancer, sexually transmitted infections, and vaginal infections. They also need to be done if a person is pregnant.

You’ll be encouraged to get a pelvic exam in the following situations:

- Once you are sexually active and turn 25.
- If you need STI testing and they need a swab from your vagina or cervix.
- You have had a positive pregnancy test.
- You have been forced to have intercourse and you choose to have a forensic exam to gather evidence.
- You had a vagina made through surgery and need to keep it checked regularly.
- Something else is off and your health care provider recommends it.

Your health care provider will let you know when you should have your first exam. They should also make it as comfortable as possible for you, even if you’re nervous.

Most exams require the use of a duck-billed tool called the **speculum**. It is inserted into the vagina, then opened so the health care provider can see the vagina and/or cervix (door to the uterus). Some speculums even have lights to make this easier since most vaginas do not come with lightbulbs!



You may feel some discomfort from the speculum. If you are feeling pain, ask for a smaller speculum or for your health care provider to stop. Your consent is required for any exam, and you are allowed to stop anything that causes you pain or makes you feel uncomfortable.

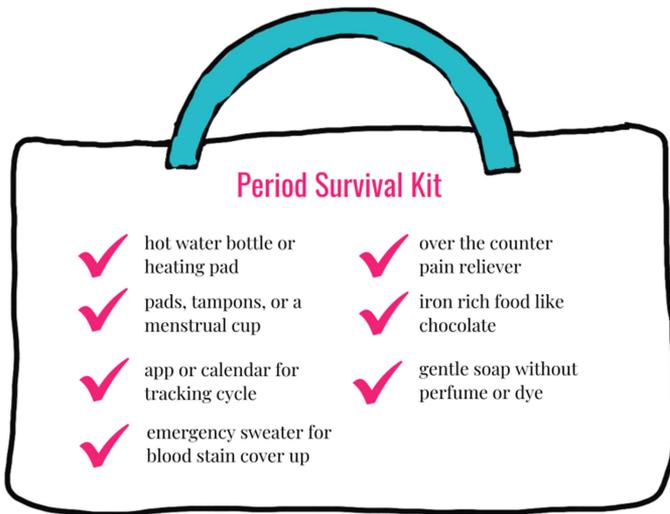
Some tips to surviving your first pelvic exam:

- Wear socks. It is likely the only thing you will have on except the johnny shirt.
- Remember to take off your underwear and bra, or underwear and binder. Many times, breast exams are part of pelvic exams. You can decline this if you wish, but it can be helpful to allow a professional to feel for lumps. Not all practitioners do lump checks.
- Wear a liner in your underwear. After the exam, you may leak some of the schloopy goop that is put on the speculum to make insertion easier. Some blood spots afterwards are also normal if your cervix is temperamental.
- It's hard to have an exam if you're on your period. You also want to consider avoiding ejaculation or cum, spermicide, or artificial lubricant in your vagina for at least the 24 hours before any planned exam.
- Pap tests do not check for sexually transmitted infections, only cervical cancer or strange cells on the cervix. While the speculum is in your vagina, ask for a swab for STIs. They just use a long cotton swab similar to the kind you use in your ears. Some STI tests are done by testing your blood or urine.
- It's okay to want a doctor of the same gender. It's okay to want a doctor of a different gender.

- Few people will ever be close enough to the bottom of the exam table. You can expect your provider to guide you to the edge like you're going to fall off a cliff (but you won't).
- Try your best to relax. Wiggle your toes to release the tension.

For trans boys and trans men, it is extra important to get tested for cervical cancer if you take testosterone, are sexually active, and still have a vagina. The testosterone causes changes that put you at a higher risk of cervical cancer.

Barrier use, the HPV vaccine, and regular Pap screening are essential for you. While pelvic exams are awkward at the best of times (let alone if you're trans or non-binary), it's important to get them when needed. There are trans-friendly practitioners out there, but they may be hard to discover.



"I have super heavy periods. Here are my hacks:

- you can put two pads together to make a super long pad if you're out of overnight pads/toss and turn a lot in your sleep
- if you sleep with a tampon in, set an alarm to make sure you wake up in time to take it out
- you can wear a pad or panty liner with a tampon or menstrual cup
- you can keep period gear in a makeup bag, or purse (o.b. tampons are small enough that you can keep them in a coin purse)
- if you keep tampons in your backpack, wear a shirt with long sleeves during your period. Tuck a tampon in your sleeve to hide it from the class when you go to the bathroom (just pretend you're getting a pencil from your backpack)
- if pads give you a rash don't use ultra-thin pads or scented ones, try cotton pads
- remember: period blood won't stain black underwear, pants, or bed sheets
- to get blood out of fabric soak it in water, apply hydrogen peroxide and dab it until it's clean

P.S. You can wear panty liners outside of your period if you secrete a lot of vaginal mucus."

- Anonymous, 18

Q & A

People have lots of questions about their periods and their reproductive systems. Here are some common ones!

Will blood get on my clothes when I'm on my period?

It depends whether you bleed a lot or not. Some people may notice spots on their underwear if their pad or tampon isn't up to the job. Night times can be a challenge because you don't change your pad as often. Blood spots on your sheets aren't unheard of if your flow is super heavy and you move around a lot. If blood accidents happen at school or in public, a well-placed sweater or jacket can help hide stains unless you want to rock them like the menstruator that you are.

What do I do if I get blood on my clothes?

Run any blood spots under cold water. Or try pouring hydrogen peroxide on them. Your parents or caregivers may have stain removing sprays in the house.

What is free bleeding?

Free bleeding means someone does not use any menstrual products to collect their period fluids. There are some special types of underwear that can be purchased for this purpose.

Do I release an egg one month from one ovary, and next month, from the other ovary?

Ovulation seems to be random—sometimes from the left, sometimes from the right. If both ovulate at the same time and both eggs get fertilized, the person could get pregnant with twins.

I'm often wet. Should I use a panty liner?

There are mixed opinions on the underwear liner question. If you have a good reason for wearing one, such as pee spotting (incontinence), heavy discharge, blood spotting, and so on, you may find a liner helpful. Change every recess and lunch. And remember that you can buy reusable ones! The downsides to using liners every day? They are bad for the environment, may cause chafing, and have plastic materials that keep heat and sweat against your body.

Aren't tampons dangerous?

A rare condition called toxic shock syndrome can be caused by bacteria growing on things left in the vagina. Years ago, some big absorbency tampons were linked to toxic shock syndrome. Today, we know that tampons are pretty safe to use. To be extra safe, use the smallest size you can and change the tampon frequently.

All those pads and tampons seem bad for the environment.

They can be. If you want to be eco-friendly, consider a reusable menstrual cup or washable pads. You can even make your own pads! Go online for directions and patterns.

Can trans women have children if they don't have a uterus?

Someday science may be able to offer uterus transplants to trans women. Currently, they are only offered to people assigned girl at birth. And even then, they are pretty rare.

How do I use a menstrual cup?

Generally, menstrual cups are made from silicone and are used to collect fluids right in the vagina. They often have to be folded a certain way so they can be inserted into the vaginal canal. (See your cup instructions or YouTube for

help.) You turn the cup once to ensure a good seal. When you remove it, remember to break the seal first—especially if you have an IUD. Grasp gently and remove upright so you can get rid of the contents. If you're in a public washroom, just dump it into the toilet and clean with some toilet paper. If you're at home, rinse with gentle soap. Keep it clean and empty regularly.

Once I have my period, can I have a baby?

Once people with uteruses start releasing eggs and people with penises make and ejaculate sperm, they indeed can start a pregnancy. If you have vaginal intercourse with someone who makes sperm, you should use birth control. Technically, you can get pregnant *before* your first period because you may release an egg before you bleed.

How much will my period hurt?

Different bodies feel things differently. Some people will barely know they are having their period. In rare cases, certain conditions can make periods very painful. However, most people can ease pain and cramps by applying heat, exercising, or as a last resort taking a light painkiller from a parent or caregiver. If these things don't work, get an appointment with a doctor or nurse practitioner.

Can I go swimming?

If you wear a menstrual cup or tampon, yes. Pads do not work well for this.

How long will my period last?

It could last three days. It could last seven. If your period lasts longer than eight days or you go months without having it, talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner.

Will people know I have my period?

If you change your pad or tampon every few hours, and

regularly clean your genitals, no one will know you have your period. Menstrual cups are probably the most discreet because many folks can leave them for 12 hours, depending on how heavy their flow is. This might be a great option for non-binary folks or trans men.

Why can't I insert my tampon?

Sometimes we think our vagina goes straight up, so that's the way we try to insert our tampon. Our vagina actually slants back at an angle. If you shove your tampon more towards your tail bone, you'll find it much easier to insert.

Will I always have my period every 28 days?

When you first start menstruating, you may not have regular periods. This is very normal! Download a period app to see if you follow a pattern. It can be fun to track your period.

What if I bleed too much?

Most bodies don't bleed a lot. However, if you are soaking big pads or tampons every hour or two, and passing big blood clots (bigger than a quarter coin), you should make an appointment with your doctor or nurse practitioner. Losing a lot of menstrual blood may make you low in iron and tired. No, you won't bleed to death! Some forms of birth control can help people who bleed a lot during their periods. Some forms of birth control can stop periods altogether. You may want to avoid the copper IUD, which can make bleeding worse.

There are so many kinds of pads and tampons!

What do I buy?

Most folks need a range of products. Flow changes from day to day. You may want a few sizes of pads or tampons. If you are new to tampons, try a slim fit so you can get used to putting them in your vagina. Some tampons have

applicators that are plastic or cardboard. There are brand name products as well as store brands. If you don't mind the kind you buy, watch for sales and stick to store brands for savings

Can I use something natural like a sea sponge in my vagina instead of a tampon?

While it's great to be ecological, toxic bacteria can grow on things left inside the vagina, and cause toxic shock syndrome (which can be fatal). Whatever you put in your vagina needs to be clean and changed frequently. You cannot guarantee something like a sea sponge is bacteria free. Consider a menstrual cup or reusable pads to be economical, ecological, and safe after you clean them! (Also avoid crocheted, reusable tampons that can grow bacteria in the little holes. Beware of Pinterest pins!)



I'm a trans boy and don't want my period. What do I do?

Your doctor or nurse practitioner should be able to help. Get your parents or caregivers to make you an appointment. Some forms of birth control can give you fewer periods or maybe even no periods. You may also want to talk about puberty blockers.

"I remember when I got my first period... Mom was away for the first time ever and my sister had to convince me that I wasn't going to die. She was lighthearted and really helped to calm me with answering my questions and using humour. She was great!!"

- D, 33

Can I flush tampons down the toilet?

You shouldn't, whether you are on a private septic system or town sewer. Fold all used tampons and pads in toilet paper, then toss into the nearest waste can. Unfortunately, not all washrooms have small cans for menstrual products. Just carry your wrapped pad to the nearest trash before washing your hands. Hopefully someday all washrooms will have little cans for privacy.

I notice some spots halfway through my cycle. Is this my period?

No. Some folks have "spotting" during the month due to changes in hormones, among other reasons. It is not an actual period. Just use a liner if you are worried about staining your underwear. Call your doctor or nurse practitioner if it becomes a bother, or doesn't get better over time

Will I have my period my whole life?

No. If you ever lose a significant amount of weight, you may stop having periods. If you get pregnant, you will not have your period as long as you are pregnant. If you nurse a

"When I got my period at age 11 I had no idea what was happening to me. Just a little blood on the toilet paper freaked me right out. I was at home when it happened so I hollered for my mom. She shoved a box of Kotex in my hands and said "You're grown up now, don't let the boys touch you." That was the extent of my parental support and sex education. Fortunately my best friend who had brothers had already explained sex to me so I knew the boy stuck his thing into the girl's bum. It sounded totally yucky and not something I ever wanted to happen to me."

- Goddess, 72

baby, you may notice a delay in getting your period. If you ever have a hysterectomy, or surgery to remove your uterus, you will stop having periods. Finally, if you keep your uterus, you can expect to go through **menopause** later in life. After you go through menopause, you will no longer be able to get pregnant or have periods. Most people go through menopause in their late 40s or 50s.

It seems like a lot of blood. How much do I lose?

Most bodies lose between a few tablespoons to half a cup of blood and fluids. A quarter of a cup is typical. If you have heavy periods, chat with your health care provider about checking your iron. They may also investigate other health concerns if you bleed a lot during your period.

Can people get pregnant during their period?

Sperm can live in the uterus and fallopian tubes for up to five days. In that time, you may **ovulate** or release an egg and not know it. If pregnancy is a concern, it is important to use protection whenever you have vaginal intercourse with a penis. Keep in mind that it is unlikely to happen during your period, but better safe than sorry.

What happens if I can't get my tampon out?

Thankfully, a tampon cannot get lost inside you. The uterus has a **cervix**, which is like a door. It opens to let out a baby during childbirth. It is open just enough to let the lining out during your period and sperm inside during intercourse. But it is not open wide enough to lose anything inside, like a tampon. If you cannot find the strings on your tampon, stick your finger inside your vagina and search for the tampon. Bear down, kind of like taking a poop. However, you do need to get it out. It can grow toxic bacteria after a while. If you cannot get it out, get a doctor or nurse practitioner to find it for you.

I have my period, I have a fever, and I feel sick.

Is that normal?

During your period, you should take a fever seriously *especially if you use high absorbency tampons or have anything in your vagina like a menstrual cup*. Other signs of toxic shock syndrome include low blood pressure, confusion, and a rash that looks like a sunburn (and you haven't been anywhere near the sun!) Get your parents or caregivers to take you to the hospital. Tell the staff there you have something in your vagina. Toxic shock syndrome is rare, but can be serious if not treated. Remember to change tampons often and use the smallest one you need. Keep menstrual cups clean and never use anything for your period that isn't hygienic or can't be cleaned thoroughly.

I'm too scared to tell my mom/dad/caregiver that I have my period.

It's natural to find it difficult to talk to your parents about having your period. However, they may be super excited for you! Some Indigenous folks celebrate a girl's first menstrual period as a sacred time in her development. Remember, too, your folks will also need to get you menstrual products like pads or tampons. If you cannot say the words aloud, write a note and ask them to read it before bed.

"Having your period is hard when you are in school. My friends don't always have pads or tampons so I keep extra supplies in my locker. They know they can come to me. Our guidance counsellor makes a big deal out of it if you ask for supplies. My mom helps make sure there's lots and a variety to choose from. My one friend can't afford it so she comes and gets all she needs from me. It makes me happy to help."

- Anonymous, 13

What is PMS?

Premenstrual syndrome or PMS may occur up to two weeks prior to an actual period. There is no known cause for PMS, but several sex hormones change during the menstrual cycle, so they are probably the culprits. Symptoms may include mood swings, food cravings, bloating, or a feeling of fullness in your stomach. Eating well and exercising may help. If they don't and the symptoms really bother you, chat with your doctor or nurse practitioner. Some folks get PMDD, which is PMS times 1000. It's actually called premenstrual dysphoric disorder.

Can people have sex during their period?

Yes, if they wish. Sexual activity may even ease cramping! Putting down dark towels may help sheets or car seats from getting stained. The extra fluids may also help with penetration and lubrication.

Can I get pregnant as soon as I start having my period?

Maybe. Some bodies do not ovulate or release an egg for up to two years after the first period, while others may ovulate right away. You won't know, so assume you could always get pregnant whenever you have penis/vagina intercourse, even if you haven't had your first period yet.

Can people start getting their periods at the same time as other people in their family or house?

There was a small study that found some folks' periods did sync with the people they lived with after three months. But for the most part, there is little evidence to support the idea that people menstruate together. It's probably just a coincidence. If you feel it's awesome, then great!

Can I catch an infection if I have sex during my period?

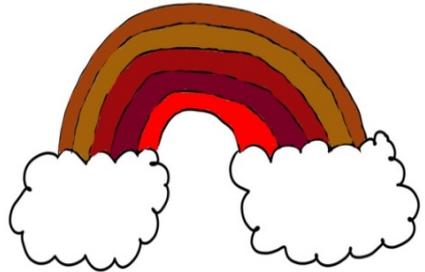
Yes. Body fluids may carry viruses or bacteria. You can also catch a **sexually transmitted infection** from genital-to-genital skin contact with another person. Use a condom or dam for any genital contact whether you are on your period or not.

I haven't had my period yet and I'm 15. Is something wrong?

Some people may not get their first period until they are 16 or 17. If you still haven't had a period by the time you are 17, you may wish to chat with a doctor or nurse practitioner. Over a century ago, *most* people did not get periods until they were 16. The age has dropped a lot since then, although no one knows exactly why. However, it's okay to get your period a bit later during puberty.

Is it okay for my period to be brown?

It is perfectly normal for your period to be brown or red shades. It usually reflects how long the fluids have been exposed to air (oxygen). Brown is often seen at the end of a period while bright red is common on your heaviest days. If you see pink or orange colours, check in with your health care provider.



Why do some people call it being on the rag?

Years ago, people literally used rags for their periods. Disposable pads only became a thing around the 1920s after World War I. Modern tampons didn't come onto the market until the 1930s, although ancient Egyptian and Roman folks

used papyrus and wool in their vaginas. People in the Pacific used plants and moss. If people don't have money for pads and tampons, they may still use rags to keep their clothes from staining. But steer clear of the moss.

What are period panties?

Some folks prefer to wear certain underwear when they are having their period. They might be loose and comfortable. They may be old or dark, so staining doesn't matter. If your flow is heavy, you may not wish to wear your best underwear. Ditto for expensive ones! Sometimes period panties are absorbable underwear that will take in fluids like blood and keep them from seeping through to the rest of your clothes.



Can stress make your period different?

Stress, including illnesses like the flu and even vaccines to prevent the flu, may delay ovulation—and your period. Remember that people who have *just* started having their period may go a month or two without menstruating. It takes a while to get into a groove. If anything seems unusual, go to your doctor or nurse practitioner to chat more about your situation.

Can I get cancer from toxins in tampons?

There is no proof that pads or tampons cause cancer. While there are trace amounts of various chemicals in menstrual products, there is nothing to panic about. One such chemical, dioxin, is also found in food—and in much higher quantities. At this point, the best menstrual products for you are the ones that do not cause irritation and that you can afford. Organic products may still contain dioxins due

to the amount that are in our environment—plus, they cost a lot. If you're still worried about dioxins, consider the menstrual cup or reusable pads.

I get headaches every month. Is that normal?

Hormonal changes throughout the month may cause health effects in certain individuals. For example, headaches may come at certain times of the month. Some individuals with epilepsy may notice seizures in relation to their cycles. Big issues should be brought up with your health care provider.

I notice I get diarrhea when I have my period. Is that weird?

It's normal. Chemicals called **prostaglandins** are released to help your period clear out of your body. They may also move your intestines as well. These chemicals may also be behind period farts, a special breed of fart that visits only during menstruation.

Is it safe to stop my period with birth control?

As far as we know, yes. There are no known effects of delaying or avoiding your period through contraception. In fact, if you have severe pain, heavy bleeding, or seizures, the benefits may be helpful. Talk to your health care provider. One issue is that without regular periods, you may not notice an unplanned pregnancy as quickly.

If my period stops with testosterone therapy, can I still get pregnant?

Always consider it a possibility. Talk to your health care provider about a form of birth control that can work in harmony with your hormone therapy. Some of your options include condoms, IUDs, and barrier methods.

What do I do if I'm bleeding way too much during my period?

In the long term, visit your health care provider. They should check your iron levels and decide if birth control may help reduce your flow. They may also check for conditions that make periods worse (like endometriosis). In the short term, you can take naproxen or ibuprofen to cut down on your flow. These drugs are anti-inflammatory and reduce the prostaglandins that lead to cramping, menstrual bleeding, and likely even diarrhea in some folks. There are side effects to these drugs, so talk to your health care provider if you're taking many. However, in healthy young people, they are usually well tolerated and can help cut down your flow.

Wet Dreams & Testosterone

We've checked out what puberty may be like for folks who make or take estrogen—now it's time to talk about those who make or take testosterone. Typically, folks who make testosterone have a penis and testicles.

Testosterone is viewed as the masculine hormone. There are many stereotypes that come along with testosterone, not all of them true. For example, if you make or take testosterone, you won't necessarily like lifted trucks and hockey.

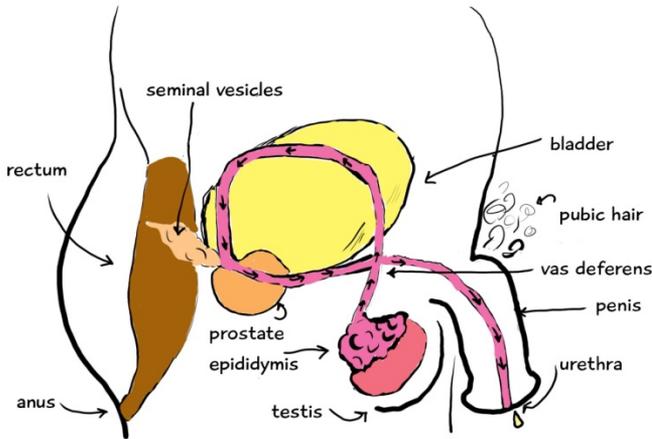
To produce large amounts of testosterone naturally, you need testicles (testicles... testosterone...) **Testicles** are small organs shaped like eggs that sit in a sac (the **scrotum**) behind the penis. When your testicles start getting bigger, you can assume that you are beginning puberty! Some other names for testicles include balls, package, junk, and so on. Are there different ones you have heard?

Once puberty begins, testicles make testosterone, along with sperm. The testicles will get a bit darker and begin to grow hair. The penis will also change and grow thicker and longer.

The plumbing, or reproductive system, of someone with testicles is as impressive as that of someone with ovaries. It

is basically a sperm-making factory that can produce millions of sperm cells daily—all while we're going to school, doing chores, or gaming.

How it's Made



The sperm-making process starts in the testicles. It's important for testicles to be at the right temperature so the sperm they make stay healthy and active. When it's cold, the testicles move closer to the body. When it's hot, the testicles move away to keep cool. This happens as a result of muscles called the cremaster muscles (one for each testicle).

Once sperm are made in the testicles, they go to the **epididymis**, a series of tubes inside each testicle. The sperm start out immature, then age as they go through the epididymis. Dead sperm are absorbed back into the body while healthy sperm get ready to go to the vas deferens.

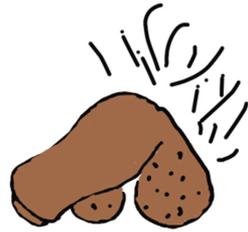
The **vas deferens** is the next stop on the production line. There is a vas deferens for each testicle. Each of these little

roads goes up into the body and around the bladder where pee is stored. The bladder is not (yet) part of the system, but is a close neighbour.

More tubes join the action. The **seminal vesicles** make a sticky fluid that is added to sperm to make semen. A seminal vesicle meets up with each vas deferens just before the prostate.

The **prostate gland** adds more fluid to the semen. The production line runs right through the prostate gland. At this point, the two paths from each testicle have become one. They emerge as one from the prostate.

Prostates are pretty interesting. Not only do they help make sperm, they can feel good when touched. Sometimes people with prostates can access them through the bum with a penis, toy, or finger.



When people get older and need their prostate checked for cancer, a doctor may insert their finger into the bum to feel for lumps in the prostate. Prostate cancer is very common in older people with prostates. (Thankfully, there are treatments available.) Since prostates are important to sperm production, once someone has their prostate removed, they can no longer start a pregnancy.

The next stop is at the bulbourethral glands or Cowper's glands. These glands make Cowper's Fluid AKA pre-cum. Pre-cum lubricates the urethra (the rest of the line) for easy traveling out of the penis.

Now that the semen has sperm, fluid from the seminal vesicles and prostate (as well as fluid from Cowper's glands), it's about ready to leave the penis. It's just waiting for an **orgasm**. An orgasm will launch everything out of the

factory.

An orgasm is a buildup of excitement that erupts into all sorts of feelings and body reactions. It is kind of like the build up to a sneeze... only the sneeze feels good. It's like an itch that needs to be scratched and the scratch is so satisfying.

There are many ways to describe an orgasm. It may feel different for different bodies. Only you will know how it feels when you experience an orgasm in a sexual relationship or while you **masturbate** (see our later section).

When a person gets turned on and nears ejaculation or orgasm, the system starts pumping until the semen bursts out of the end of the penis. Even though semen exits through the same tube as pee, you cannot pee and ejaculate at the same time.²⁰

Semen sometimes dribbles out—but it sometimes shoots up to 25 centimetres if nothing stops it!

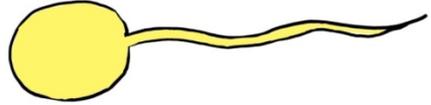
About one teaspoon of fluid comes out of the penis. It is milky white and sticky, although it becomes more like water when it hits the air. In fact, if the penis is not covered by a condom and ejaculates directly into someone's body, some of it will leak out.²¹

If the penis is inside someone with a vagina, the sperm in their special fluid travel up through the uterus and towards the fallopian tubes looking for an egg. Millions of sperm make this journey—that's why it can be hard to avoid pregnancy if you don't use protection. There is a high chance that one of those sperm cells will find the egg.

²⁰ Muscles at the base of the bladder are supposed to keep pee in the bladder during orgasm.

²¹ Liners can be handy for this very reason.

One of the few ways people with penises can protect partners from an unplanned pregnancy is by using a condom or getting sterilized. Sterilization means having a vasectomy, which is permanent. A



person needs to be 100% sure they don't want children if they have a vasectomy because each vas deferens is cut and clamped. No sperm can travel outside the testicles if the vas deferens²² is shut down to traffic.

While vasectomies can be reversed, the procedure can be costly and is not a guarantee future sperm will start a pregnancy. A vasectomy should be considered a final decision.

Fascinating Facts

- Scrotums are made of the same tissue as the outer lips of a vulva. The only difference is that in some people, they fuse together to make a sac for testicles. Scrotums have the same glands, nerves, and hair as outer labia. When a vagina is made through surgery, surgeons actually use scrotums to make the outer labia.
- One testicle will often be bigger than the other. One will also hang lower so they don't bump together.
- Damage to the testicles can lead to problems down the road. Wear cups and other protective equipment during sports.
- Most people who get testicular cancer are young, even as young as 15. Remember to do testicle checks to ensure you have no lumps or bumps. Get anything strange checked out because testicular cancer is almost always curable if found early.
- If you get sudden pain in the testicles that lasts more than a few

²² FYI the plural of vas deferens is vasa deferentia or vasa deferentes.

minutes, head to the emergency room. Sometimes the cord providing blood to the testicle twists—a very serious emergency that needs treatment. It's called testicular torsion.

- Prostate troubles, whether infections or cancer, can monkey with urine or ejaculation. If anything seems off, get to a health care provider. Keep in mind prostate cancer is typically seen in middle age, not youth.

Body Changes

Whether you make or take testosterone, you can expect most or many of the following changes. Keep in mind that all bodies are different and everyone will look unique. These are just some common things in folks who make or take testosterone.

Chests

Sometimes, those assigned male at birth will grow “breasts” temporarily. After a year or two, things should even out so that the person has more of a chest than breasts.

Lower Voice

Testosterone will make the voice lower and deeper. During puberty, many people will hear cracks in their voice as the voice box grows larger. Sometimes the voice box is called an “Adam’s apple” because the bump can be seen on the throat, round like an apple. If you take testosterone, your voice will go lower.

Hair Growth

Hair will begin growing in the groin at the base of the scrotum, as well as in the armpits. Fine hairs will appear on the upper lip. From there, hair growth will vary. Some people grow a full beard by the end of their teens. Some people will sprout hair on their

backs and bum. Some people may also notice balding on their head, especially if they have a family history of baldness. This includes those assigned girl at birth who take testosterone.

Muscle Mass

Testosterone is often associated with bigger muscles. People who make or take testosterone will notice they are becoming stronger.

Acne

Most people will experience acne or pimples. Gentle cleansing can help, along with over-the-counter pimple cream. Serious cases of acne can be seen by a doctor or nurse practitioner. If someone starts taking testosterone, oil production will likely increase—along with the number of pimples.

Height

If people are going through the puberty of the gender they were assigned at birth, people with testicles will be shorter temporarily while people with ovaries hit a growth spurt. Eventually, though, people with testicles get taller on average. If someone takes testosterone during puberty, they will be a bit taller than if they went through a more “female” puberty naturally.

Underwear

There are many kinds of underwear for folks with penises and testicles. It’s important to consider what keeps your body working the way you want, while offering the look you desire.

Boxers

Boxers are more likely to give your equipment breathing room. If you're trying to get someone pregnant, you may produce more sperm if your testicles are not too hot. Many boxers come in cool patterns. They also have a slot for poking out your penis when you need to pee. In the winter, this might be very welcome! Be careful of sitting at the wrong angle. A seam might choke off your equipment. If you plan to wear shorts, be forewarned you could have a wardrobe malfunction if the shorts ride up when you sit down. Folks who have larger bodies may prefer the fit of boxers because they are looser but also squarer.

Briefs

If you need more support, consider briefs. This is probably the better option if you're playing sports. You don't want any testicular torsion due to lack of support! One great thing about briefs: if you're wearing form-fitting clothes, briefs will likely be less visible under your pants. The downside is that if your equipment stays at a sauna-like temperature, you might be more prone to fungus, such as jock itch. It is similar to athlete's foot, but hangs out in your groin, bum, and inner thighs. Prevent jock itch by treating athlete's foot and wearing sandals in public showers and locker rooms.

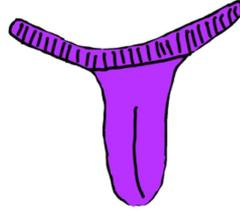


Boxer-Briefs

Why choose? Get the looser fit of boxers—with the support of briefs. They may also help you avoid chafing during exercise. Some folks dislike how they can ride up on the leg, though.

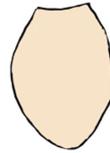
Gaff

A gaff is a pair of underwear that helps reduce the bumps made by the penis and testicles. It gives the wearer the appearance of being gender neutral or having a vulva. Please note that keeping your equipment tucked back can lead to irritation, fungal infections, and lowered fertility. Remember to take breaks, especially during sleep. Gaffs come in all sorts of styles, from plain to frilly. Some just have coverage for the penis and testicles; some are full underwear. Find something that fits your gender expression and genital health.



Packing Underwear

If you weren't born with a penis, you can use your underwear and a prosthetic penis to make it appear as though you are packing, so to speak. Packing underwear comes with a special pouch for your packer. It may also come with a foam insert that you can think of as a modern day codpiece. Packing underwear comes in lots of shapes and styles. You can also get pouches that pin to your everyday underwear, too. Unfortunately, packing underwear can cost upwards of \$30 a pair.



Commando

Some people prefer to go without underwear. Be cautious if you're using pants with zippers—you don't want your penis or testicles to get caught! The upside is that going without underwear is great for cutting down on jock itch. But like

boxers, it may increase your risk of testicular torsion.

In the end, pick the kind of underwear you find comfortable. Some people may buy a variety of styles. For example, you may prefer to sleep in boxers, but wear briefs during the day.

Most importantly, toss them when they start to look like a dog's chew toy and you can afford to buy a new package or two.

Tucking Tips

There are numerous ways to minimize the penis and testicles, including taking hormone therapy, wearing a gaff, and/or tucking. Tucking is a way to make the external genitals less visible.

Above the testicles are two spaces called **inguinal canals**. The testicles can be tucked up in these spaces naturally. Any remaining skin as well as the penis is often tucked back towards the bum.

Some people can just tuck and leave their parts where they are. Others use items like gauze and tape to keep the penis and testicles hidden. Some use gaffs.

It's important to present yourself in a way that makes you comfortable and safe.

- Try tucking after a cold bath or shower, when shrinkage is present.
- Avoid tucking longer than eight hours—or at least take a break while you sleep.
- Don't use just *any* kind of tape—use medical tape or trans tape so it can be removed easily and safely. You'll find it in the first aid section of most stores, or in stores selling trans supplies. Don't forget some kind of safe oil for removing the tape without pain.

- Duct tape—just don't do it.
- Be careful if you use tape to minimize your genitals in any way. Shave or remove any hair so the tape doesn't stick, and remove tape in the bath or shower while it's hot and steamy. As mentioned earlier, oil can help remove the adhesive.
- You shouldn't hurt your testicles if you do it correctly, so become educated on how to tuck safely.
- Tuck only when the penis is soft.
- Tucking may be a bit uncomfortable, but should not hurt.
- Consider ways that don't use tape—otherwise you may be tempted to avoid going to the washroom. This can lead to infections in your urinary system.
- Keeping your testicles tucked may reduce your fertility or ability to make someone pregnant (however, use protection if you aren't ready to become a parent!).
- If you feel significant pain at any time that doesn't go away, head to your doctor to see if anything has twisted in the testicle.

There are videos on the internet to show you various ways of tucking. With practice, you'll become a pro at getting the look and feel you need.

Q & A

Since we don't talk a lot about sex, we often hear great questions about testicles and semen. Here are a few:

What if I feel a lump in my testicle?

Any new lumps should be checked out by a health care provider. It may not be cancer, but it is important to have someone rule it out. The bathtub or shower is a great place to feel your testicles to see if there is anything different about them. Do it at least once a month.

What is a wet dream?

It is slang for a **nocturnal emission**—basically a night-time ejaculation, typically from a penis. Wet dreams are 100% normal. In fact, when you have wet dreams and wake up with morning erections, your penis is functioning just as it should! Some people learn to do the laundry so no one knows about their stained or wet pyjamas and bedsheets. Learning about laundry is a good life skill, but there is no shame in having wet dreams. P.S. If you have a vulva, you can have erections and wet dreams too, although you may not always ejaculate or notice the extra fluids.

What if I lose a testicle?

Some people may lose testicles, especially if they get testicular cancer. As long as one testicle is working normally, there is more than enough testicular action to create testosterone or sperm. You may be able to get a prosthetic testicle, too, that will offer the look and feel of an original testicle.

What is an undescended testicle?

Before birth, testicles rest inside the body, then move down through the inguinal canals into the scrotum. In rare cases, this does not happen. If it doesn't happen by puberty, the person may need surgery to fix the problem. Most testicles, though, come down on their own.

"My first wet dream was awful. I hid the evidence. I was sure everyone could tell just by looking at me. Mom never let on about the sheets or my wanting to learn about doing laundry."

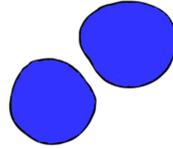
- Anonymous, 25

Why does semen sometimes leave a yellow stain?

As semen dries, it may leave a yellowish stain due to the amount of protein or sperm in it.

What are blue balls?

It's slang for someone with testicles or balls who was stimulated and turned on, but did not ejaculate. Blue balls may ache, but they do not hurt so bad their owner has to have sex without consent. Also, people with vulvas get something similar when extra blood flows to their genitals and there is no orgasm. Blue balls and blue vulvas are not life threatening conditions.



Why does semen get clumpy in the shower?

Semen does not like water when it first comes out of the penis, which means it will form clumps when exposed to water. Be considerate and remember to clean the shower if you do masturbate there.

Why do drips come out of my penis before I ejaculate?

This is called pre-cum. It can help your penis become lubricated before it goes inside anyone, and it helps create a slippery “road” down the urethra for sperm. Pre-cum may spread infections. And while there is little chance of getting your partner pregnant if they have eggs, *it is still a theoretical risk*. All it takes is one sperm—especially if there happen to be any hanging out in the urethra from a recent ejaculation. When in doubt, wrap it up.

What happens to the testicles of someone who takes estrogen hormone therapy?

The testicles will get a bit smaller between three months and three years after starting hormone therapy. For many folks, the penis and prostate may also get smaller. Hormone therapy will also change sperm production, so the person may not be able to fertilize an egg if they wish to start a family that way. If the person's testicles do not go through a "male" puberty they will not be able to produce sperm at all.

If I have testicles but am taking estrogen, do I have to worry about birth control?

Yes. Hormone therapy may not affect your ability to get someone pregnant right away. Use a condom or other birth control just in case you are still fertile.

I want to buy hormones online. Is this safe?

No. You don't know what you're going to get. If you get your drugs from a drug store, you know you are getting the real deal. Anyone can sell anything online. If cost is an issue, find out if your parents have a health plan that covers hormone therapy. Talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner about ways to access drugs—some drug companies will do compassionate programs for people who don't have enough money to pay for their treatment.

Why are boys hornier than girls?

To be horny means to be interested in sex. We also call it our sex drive or **libido**. The sex drive for all genders is complicated. It can be related to hormones, neurotransmitters (chemical messengers in your body), and lifestyle. It's a myth that boys are hornier than girls. While there seems to be some evidence that testosterone levels can play a role in libido, we cannot assume that cisgender boys and trans men taking testosterone are hornier than girls. Plus, taking testosterone does not magically cure a low sex drive, so it's obviously more complicated than that! Otherwise, we could fix low sex drives with testosterone.

Does testosterone really make boys more aggressive?

While there are some links between testosterone and aggression, it is not a 100% clear link. Sometimes, negative behaviours in boys are just passed off as “boys being boys” even though there are plenty of people assigned male at birth who are not aggressive. While testosterone may activate some aggression in people, it’s not an excuse for poor behaviour that harms others. Behaviour is complex and caused by more than just a hormone in our body. People who start taking testosterone as part of hormone therapy do not suddenly become aggressive individuals. However, they may notice more angry feelings, which they should talk about with their medical professionals. One study found that although people with testosterone had more aggressive feelings, they did not show any aggressive behaviour.

Will taking testosterone make me manlier?

Feeling manly is complicated and includes whether you fit your culture’s ideal of “manly” or “masculine”. If you are experiencing issues with your penis or erections, you can chat with your health care provider about possible solutions. If you are interested in transitioning and taking hormone therapy to masculinize your body, you can chat with a specialist about what you can expect.

Vulvos & Vaginas

What's a vulva? Some people think it's something grandmothers drive.

It's actually the name for the genitals we usually link with girls and women.

Often, we call it the vagina, but that's not quite right. The **vulva** *includes* the **vagina**. It also includes the opening to your urinary system (your pee hole) as well as the **clitoris** and **labia**. Let's just say the vulva is the whole kit and caboodle!

Other names include hoo-ha, vajayjay, cooch, pussy, twat, snatch, box, beaver, bird, etc. Needless to say, people will come up with a lot of other names to avoid saying vulva!



The Clitoris

The clitoris is one of the most mysterious structures of the vulva, so let's clear up some things.

First, the clitoris of someone called a girl at birth is made from the same tissues that make up a penis. There are more similarities than differences between penises and clitorises. That's why some clitorises look more like penises, and vice versa.

One of the biggest differences is that the pee hole (urethra) does not come out through the tip of the clitoris. Instead the pee hole is down a bit from the clitoris **glans**, or head.

Only the top of the clitoris typically sticks out of the body. Think of the clitoris as an iceberg—most of it is underneath the surface!

The glans of the clitoris is the size of a pea in many folks. It sits at the top of the vulva and is protected by a small hood. Some people may notice their clitoris is a bit bigger or longer depending on if they are on hormone therapy or are intersex.

The legs of the clitoris cannot be seen. They reach around the urethra towards the vagina on the inside of the body. The clitoris looks like a large wishbone, only much thicker.

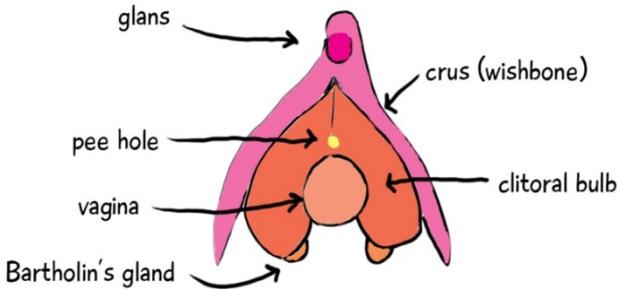
Because it is full of nerve endings, the clitoris can be a huge source of pleasure. Often, if the clitoris is touched enough, it may lead to an **orgasm**. Sometimes the clitoris glans is so sensitive, people can't touch it directly! Sometimes they have to touch it indirectly, through the hood that covers the glans. Quick fact: a clitoris often has more nerve endings than a penis.

If someone is old enough to take testosterone hormone therapy, their clitoris will stretch and become slightly more like a penis. The average size of the clitoris after hormone therapy is about two inches or five centimetres. Some may only grow one inch or 2.54 centimetres. Others may reach about three inches or 7.62 centimetres.

While erections are usually associated with penises, clitorises are made of similar tissue and become erect when aroused. Sometimes, it is not so noticeable because of the swelling lips and extra lubrication. This even results in wet dreams although there is less evidence left behind than if the person had an ejaculation from a penis. The person with the wet dream may or may not orgasm.

In folks who get gender affirmation surgery, and have their penis made into a neovagina, the penis glans is used to make the clitoris glans. As we said before, they are both made from similar tissue and are full of nerve endings that bring sexual pleasure.

Inside Mechanics of Clitoris



Lips

Most of your vulva is protected by the labia or lips. There are outer lips. These are the **labia majora**. There are also inner lips. These are the **labia minora**.

If you'd like to see your labia, use a mirror in your bedroom

or bathroom to see what is between your legs. Find your pee hole and your vagina/front hole.

Vulvas come in all sorts of shapes, sizes, and colours. Some vulvas have inner lips that are frilly and stick out. Some vulvas have hidden lips that are more tucked away. Some people have vulvas that are darker purple.

All of these vulvas are normal! They are like snowflakes. Each one is different. Let your mirror help you see what kind of vulva you have. How would you describe it?

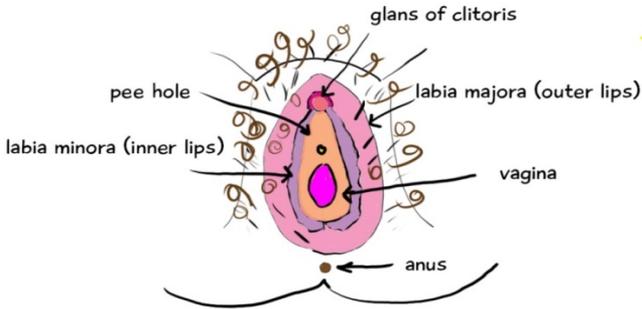


If someone has undergone surgery to make a vagina, the outer labia may look far apart while the labia minora are not so big. This is perfectly normal, and some people may go on to get those parts adjusted by their surgeon if they wish.

Some people think their vulvas are ugly. There can be a lot of pressure on people with vulvas to have them look a certain way. This includes people with penises too, and is based on a standard that does not include diverse, intersex, or transitioning genitals.

The adult entertainment industry, or porn industry, has made a lot of videos of people with certain shaped lips. These particular sizes often make it easier for video cameras to record them doing sexual activities. But they do not always reflect reality, or allow you to see bodies that are like yours.

In fact, there can be so much pressure on people with vulvas that they have surgeries to change their shape! But all vulvas are unique and 99.99% are normal. They are like penises in that there are no standard sizes and shapes. They



are supposed to be different.

Vaginas

You may have noticed that the vagina is usually the star of the show. In fact, we usually call the genitals “vagina” as a whole, which isn’t accurate. It’s okay to use this term because you’re used to saying it. But keep in mind that vulva is the word that covers it all.

What does a vagina do? For one, the vagina is the path out of the body for period fluids if we menstruate.

Two, the vagina is how babies are made if someone has a uterus and wishes to start a pregnancy with sperm from a willing penis!

Three, the vagina can be a birth canal. If we are born “vaginally” instead of by surgery, we come out through the vagina to the bright world.

Finally, the vagina is a pleasurable organ, just like the clitoris. While the clitoris has many nerve endings, the vagina has some as well. Plus, the clitoris sits by the vagina.

Sometimes pleasure comes from the nerves in the vagina, or by stimulating the nerves in the nearby clitoris.

Years ago, a therapist called Sigmund Freud thought orgasms from the vagina were more “mature” than orgasms from the clitoris. We now know that there isn’t a big difference—an orgasm is an orgasm, and feeling good is feeling good. It just sounds like an excuse to have vaginal sex all the time. Sorry Freud. You suck. (That’s us, being mature.)

The vagina is usually self-cleaning. Most folks will never have to put soap into their vagina or use a douche because it cleans itself.²³ The only exception is if you have a surgically created vagina or neovagina—then your surgeon will let you know how to maintain it. Neovaginas often need regular douching. If you were born with a vagina, though, you can leave it alone.

When not in use, the vagina folds in on itself. Think of a fire hose when it’s not being used. It collapses unless something is in it.

Although many people believe the sizes of penises matter, the vagina is pretty flexible in allowing for any size penis or toy (within reason). The average depth of someone called a girl at birth is three to seven inches, or about 7.6 to 17.7 cm. Often, when you get turned on, the vagina seems to get bigger because the cervix and uterus lift a bit. This makes more room for a penis or toy to enter it. Besides, the first part of the vagina has the most nerves, so long penises aren’t necessary to feel pleasure there.

²³ A douche means cleaning your vagina by forcing water or liquid into your vagina, then letting it flush out. There can be different things added to the liquid. It is forced inside the vagina with a bag or bottle. Now you know the origin of the meaning douche bag!

Troubleshooting

Vaginismus

Muscles in the pelvic region can be very strong. If something triggers those muscles and they spasm, they can clench tight and make it difficult to get anything inside the vagina—rather like hitting a wall. This clenching is called **vaginismus**. It is quite common in people with vaginas. Unfortunately, in our society, we teach folks with vaginas that sex for the first time is going to hurt. This may actually be what causes the pain! Thanks society.

There are many causes of vaginismus:

- sensitivity in the vulva region
- vulvodynia²⁴
- medication side effects
- aging and menopause
- injuries from childbirth
- trauma from an assault
- notion that sex or penetration will hurt
- chronic constipation
- **endometriosis**²⁵

Talk to your health care provider if pain is an ongoing issue. It can really impact your sexual wellbeing if you wish to be penetrated and find it difficult or painful. You can always be referred to a gynecologist (also called an OB/GYN).

If your nervousness is a result of previous trauma (like someone sexually assaulting you), you may find it helpful to chat with a professional counsellor.

²⁴ See next section.

²⁵ Endometriosis is a painful condition in which cells similar to those found in the uterus grow outside of the uterus. It causes pain in the pelvis, especially during periods. If you have unpleasant periods and other pain in your lower body, talk to a medical professional. Endometriosis can often be inherited, although we don't know what causes it.

Otherwise, if you can find some dilators, you can start “training” yourself with small dilators and work your way up to something bigger—but only if you want to. Dilators are also used by folks with neovaginas.

Vulvodynia

Some bodies are super sensitive in the vulva region. Sometimes this can cause pain in the whole vulva, around the vulva, or at the entrance to the vagina. This pain can be worse with any kind of penetration, even with a tampon. If relaxing and lube doesn't help with penetration, then you will want to consult with a doctor or nurse practitioner. They can offer you support about how to work with your sensitive parts. Penetration or tampons aren't supposed to hurt.



If you have a neovagina, chat with your trans-friendly health care provider if you have pain during penetration.

Dryness

Lubrication is essential to any kind of penetration. You may be uncomfortable if there is not enough. If someone is aroused and “turned on”, their vagina walls will generally produce natural lube. Some bodies produce more lube than others. Typically, neovaginas produce less lube. Once someone goes through menopause in their middle age, they

will also produce less lube.

It's easy enough to add some lubrication from a bottle if you need it. No one should be ashamed of having a dry vagina. It doesn't mean you aren't turned on. It doesn't mean you don't want to have sex.

If you use latex condoms, stick with a water-based or silicone lube. These lubes are generally safe to use with latex. Oil-based creams and lotions may cause the latex to break. Read all lube bottles to make sure you have the right kind for condoms. And avoid mixing silicone lube with silicone toys—it can actually destroy the toys.

Some people prefer the feel of silicone lube because it doesn't absorb into the body as quickly as water-based lube. It can also be used in a shower or bath. Others prefer water-based lube because it does not stain some fabrics. It just has to be reapplied more frequently, which can be half the fun.

Infections

Many vaginas have a special ecosystem that keeps the vagina in tip-top shape. (The exception is when someone has a surgically created vagina, because it doesn't necessarily contain the same skin or cells.)

Sometimes this unique ecosystem gets out of balance. Then you might get a yeast infection or bacterial vaginosis—two very common vaginal issues.

Symptoms that are worth checking out include pain, irritation, and itchiness. These are signs something has gone astray with your vaginal ecosystem. A fishy smell is often a sign of bacterial vaginosis. Anything that looks like cottage cheese could be a yeast infection.

If you have a neovagina, you may also experience infections. Proper douching will be part of your infection prevention because you may not have the same ecosystem (and vaginal flora) as someone who was born with their vagina.

While drug stores sell remedies for various infections (e.g. yeast infections), check in with a health care provider if this is your first rodeo. People often misdiagnose themselves, so don't waste your money if you're not sure about the infection.

FGM

FGM stands for female genital mutilation. Other folks may call it female circumcision even though it can be far more drastic than penis/male circumcision.

FGM may happen after birth or be done when the child is older. FGM happens in different parts of the world like Africa or the Middle East. It is often performed by other women in the community. There are many reasons why communities do FGM. Sometimes, it is to keep girls and women from enjoying sex. Sometimes, it's tradition since all the other girls and women in the community have it done too.

This surgery can be incredibly dangerous. Some of these surgeries just remove the clitoral glans (or the small exposed part of the clitoris) while others stitch up everything in the vulva. They might leave just a small opening for urine and menstrual blood. Anesthesia, or numbing, may or may not be used during the surgery. It may also not be done in a hospital, or sterile setting. This makes the risk of infection high.

As you can imagine, this surgery may lead to future health problems including issues with childbirth. It may also cause pain during sexual penetration.

Many people criticize FGM (even the term *mutilation* shows judgement). However, there are no health benefits, and many risks. The World Health Organization considers it a violation against the rights of girls and women.

It is worth pointing out that male circumcision also offers few to no health benefits. One exception is that some evidence shows circumcising a penis may help reduce the risk of some STIs like HIV in developing countries.

In the end, while traditions are important, it is also important that genitals remain functional and healthy.

Maintenance

Vulvas are pretty easy to keep clean, but do require maintenance. It all depends on whether you were born with your vagina or had one created for you.

There are lots of sweat glands in the groins of all bodies, so people sweat there more than other areas. It's important to wash vulvas once or twice a day with gentle soap and water.

If you find one soap irritating, try another. You do not need fancy soaps to keep your vulva smelling fresh. Vulvas are supposed to smell like vulvas. If you are washing regularly, your vulva should smell exactly as it should smell.

Scented douches and sprays to smell feminine fresh or like ripe produce are a no-no. They may irritate your genitals and actually cause them to smell *worse*. They are a big waste of money.²⁶

²⁶ Plus, they don't make penis sprays, so something definitely seems off-balance about the marketing of these products for women and how they suggest the vulva is somehow smelly or messy. Imagine if there were penis sprays that smelled like new trucks or beer?

If you have a surgically created vagina, douching is part of your regular maintenance. Your surgeon will let you know when to douche and what to use that is safe for your tissues.

If a person is menstruating, soap and water is all that is needed to maintain their hygiene. In our society, adults typically clean themselves once or twice a day. Use your best judgement. If you have extremely dry skin or eczema, you may need to cut that down to fewer baths.



Keep in mind you do not need a full bath or shower. You can wash your face, feet, armpits, and genitals with just a sink of water. Some people even use special appliances called bidets which use water to clean your groin.

Cleaning up after going to the toilet? Remember to wipe or pat front to back. It's best not to get any poop near your vagina although this sometimes happens naturally because they are in the same neighbourhood.

If you are sensitive, try patting your vulva dry.

Pubic Hair

Our society makes a big deal out of hair, especially if we are supposed to be feminine or appear as a girl or woman. There is a misconception that body hair is not feminine.

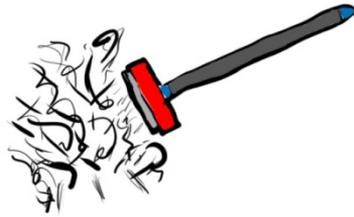
Don't groom your body hair a certain way because you think you *must* do it. Maintain your body in a way that is comfortable for you! There are many ways to keep your

body hair, including all natural, wild, and woolly.

You can shave or wax your pubic hair. You can also use special creams called depilatories, which are chemicals that weaken hair and allow you to rub the hair out and off. Make sure you have a gentle product. Your pubic area may be sensitive to harsh ingredients and chemicals.

Shaving or waxing may cause ingrown hairs.

Ingrown hairs are not usually a big deal, but they itch. It can make for some awkward moments if you are in public when the itchiness starts! In the worst case scenario, you might get a nasty abscess or infection, and require a trip to the doctor.



If you are shaving, be careful not to nick or cut the area around the crotch. Again, it may lead to itchiness or soreness.

Waxing is best left to the professionals. If you wish to get a wax job (sometimes called a bikini wax or Brazilian), talk to your parents or caregivers about making an appointment with someone who knows what they are doing. Make sure they have a clean business that follows a strict code of hygiene.

Anyone who is removing hair and planning to have sex should know they are at a higher risk of getting a sexually transmitted infection if they have recently shaved or waxed. People who do wax or shave before sexual activity need to be extra careful and use protection. (We will talk about that later.)

Not quite ready to lose all your fur? Consider clippers to trim the long ends. A small pair of scissors also works. Whatever you use, be careful and gentle. And remember that natural is okay too.

Some people also dye their pubic hair. Never use regular hair dye because it is too harsh for the genital region. Only use gentle products in your vulva area, or products specifically marketed for that zone. There is also some evidence permanent dyes may increase your risk of breast cancer, especially for folks of colour. We're not 100% sure, so use cautiously.

Q & A

We don't talk enough about vulvas, so folks have lots of questions about them. Here are a few!

Can eating different things change how I smell or taste?

Eating different things to change your taste is more a myth than anything, such as eating pineapple to make your fluids taste sweeter. If you are concerned about smell or taste, remember to clean once or twice a day with unscented cleanser or water. This should be all you need.

Is it true that vaginas have fewer germs than mouths?

You can get STIs from vaginas as well as mouths, so the question is irrelevant. Remember that condom or dam!

Can I use talc or powder on my genitals to keep them fresh and dry?

Your genitals don't need to be kept fresh like a sandwich. If you wash regularly, you will smell just as you are meant to

smell. If sweating is a big concern, avoid using products containing talc, or talcum powder. Health Canada recommends avoiding talc because it may cause ovarian cancer (they're not really sure). If you need powder, cornstarch is safe and cheap. You can probably even get a bag of it from your own kitchen.

I seem to get a lot of yeast infections. What should I do?

Talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner about preventing or reducing yeast infections. Some bodies are just prone to more yeast infections. People who are diabetic, for example, may get yeast infections often.

What is a virgin?

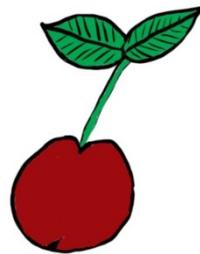
Many people consider someone a virgin if they haven't had sex yet. Virginity usually focuses on the bodies of girls and women. In this case, a virgin is typically someone (usually a girl) who has not had a penis inside their vagina. However, not everyone wants a penis in their vagina. And not everyone thinks that the first time is a special moment. Some people believe it is important to remain a virgin until marriage. Some people feel it isn't that big a deal. You get to decide how you feel about it.

If I wear a tampon, will I no longer be a virgin?

Being a virgin *usually* means you have not had any sexual activity with a partner yet. A tampon cannot change whether or not you have been with a partner.

When I have sex for the first time, will it hurt? Is it really like popping a cherry?

Many people are born with a small bit of



skin across the entrance to their vagina. It is called a **hymen**. It usually starts stretching and thinning during puberty. Any kind of penetration may stretch or break the hymen, including when you are penetrated with a penis, finger, or sex toy. Using a tampon or riding a bike may also change your hymen. If you have any hymen left, there may be some discomfort the first time you are penetrated. If you see spots of blood, do not worry. These may just be from the hymen stretching or being irritated. Using lube will likely help penetration feel better. One study found that half of all cisgender women hurt during their first time having vaginal intercourse, with only about 1 in 10 having an orgasm. Relax. Get warmed up with foreplay or other activities. And use lube. Don't worry... no cherries will be popped or broken!

Can people tell I'm no longer a virgin?

Since not all bodies have hymens, there is no way to tell if you are a virgin or if you have been penetrated. However, if someone has forced penetration on you, there may be evidence of rough intercourse including bruises and tearing of the tissues.

Is it true a penis can get stuck in the vagina?

Not really. It's rare in humans that the muscles in the vagina would lock onto a penis. And in the rare case it does happen, it is over quickly. Don't panic.

I found a lump on one of my lips. What do I do?

It's quite common to get lumps or cysts in your vulva. If you're not sure about it and it doesn't go away, you can always get an appointment with a doctor or nurse practitioner. If you have had any kind of genital contact with another person, you may want to get checked for a sexually transmitted infection as well. Don't try to pop it like a pimple, though, because you are not Dr. Pimple Popper. Try relaxing in a warm bath instead.

What is the G-spot?

Some folks assigned girl at birth may have an area inside the vagina that is extra sensitive and may cause strong orgasms. This area is called the G-spot. It's not really a spot in most bodies so much as an area close to the clitoris and urethra. The G-spot is named after the doctor who "found" it, Ernst Gräfenberg. Some people discover the spot on the front of the vagina by making a "come here" gesture. It's okay if someone never locates their G-spot. It doesn't mean they are broken or not normal. There are plenty of ways to make a clitoris happy. Trying to find it through the inner wall of the vagina is just one way.



What is cumming?

Many bodies experience something called an orgasm when they are having sex or touching their genitals. Sometimes people can have an orgasm when they imagine something sexy. Cumming is another way to say "orgasming". If someone asks "Did you cum?" it means "Did you have an orgasm?" Often, a person feels a build-up of some kind, then a release that may make certain muscles go wiggly from muscle contractions. Not all sexual activities have to end in an orgasm.

What is squirting?

Some people with vulvas may release extra fluids when they have an intense orgasm. Research suggests it is from the urethra, or pee hole. It may also be from certain glands. There isn't enough scientific information on what exactly

happens during squirting. But if you are worried about extra fluids during sexual activity, you may want to put a towel beneath you. Then you can focus on having fun. Many partners are honoured when they cause their companion to squirt!

Should I douche?

It depends on your parts. A douche is a cleaner for vaginas. Often it includes a thingamajig that allows you to force liquid into your vagina. Some people think vaginas smell. A vulva cleansed once or twice a day will have its own odour, but not a bad odour. It may smell musky, or a bit salty. Sometimes it might smell a bit sour, which is also normal. If you were born with your vagina, you won't need to douche. In fact, it may make your situation worse—douches can irritate some vaginas. This is not the case if you have a surgically created vagina. You may not produce enough discharge naturally to keep your vagina flushed, so you'll need to manually wash your vagina to keep it clean. Your surgeon will let you know how often you need to douche. Otherwise, let your vagina clean itself.

What is a Kegel?

A Kegel is an exercise for your pelvic floor muscles. Your pelvic floor muscles are responsible for keeping your urine in your bladder, your poop in your chute, and your pelvic organs where they're supposed to be. In other words, they are very important! Age, childbirth, obesity, and constipation can be hard on the pelvic floor muscles, so it's important to strengthen them like any muscle. Pretend like you're holding in a fart or big pee. These are the muscles you want to hold regularly, then release. Do sets of 10 three times a day as a goal. P.S. Kegels will not make you tighter, but may help orgasms feel more intense or longer. P.P.S They can also help men, trans women, and those with penises.

Can I put things in my vagina to help with Kegels?

No special equipment is necessary! Just do Kegels regularly. Some objects can be hard to keep clean, and some just take your money.

If I have sex too often, will my vagina become too loose to please my partner?

No. Natural vaginal childbirth may alter your vagina temporarily, but sexual intercourse won't. Your vagina is a collapsible tunnel that adjusts to whatever thing you put into it (within reason!). No one can tell how much sex you've had by looking at your vagina or feeling whether it is "loose" or not. Generally, the more turned on someone with a vagina is, the more loose they will feel. Finally, vaginas (like penises) come in different makes and models. Some will be bigger and looser than others, but not because of too much sex. A person with a penis can only wish to have a ginormous erection that destroys vaginas because of its size! Speaking of which...

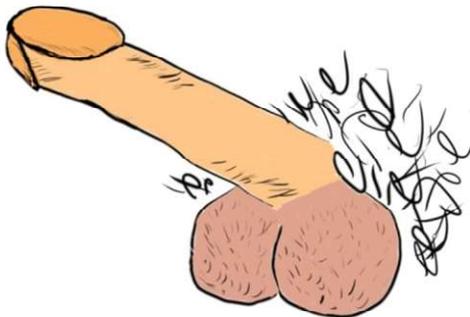
Penises

Penises get a lot of credit for being awesome. They are. But as you just read, vaginas and vulvas are awesome too.

So what exactly is a penis? How does it grow?

Most people who were assigned male at birth have a **penis**. Sometimes the penis is even seen on an ultrasound, which leads the parents to believe they are having a boy. Usually they are right.

Penises have all sort of names, some that can be used in polite company, some that are best reserved for other company! Some new and old slang terms for the penis can include: dick, prick, cock, willie, baby maker, ding-a-ling, Mr. Happy, and so on. What slang terms have you heard to describe the penis?



Construction

The penis is a tube or **shaft** of tissue that sits in front of the testicles. The penis looks lazy when it's not erect, and settles in against the testicles without a thought or a care. But when it gets excited, it may stand up at attention and demand to be seen. Sometimes its owner doesn't even *want* an erection, but the penis has a mind of its own. (Unfortunately, you cannot blame it for any bad decisions!)

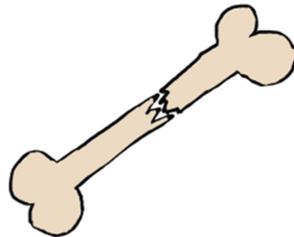
Then, when you want an erection, the penis may very well decide that there are no erections for you today.

Erections can even happen in the womb during pregnancy! This is just the penis practicing for when it becomes an adult. It can become erect when the person is an infant or toddler, but it isn't until puberty that erections start producing a fluid called ejaculate or semen or cum. (Cum is the slang term you'll hear a lot.)

An erection happens when tissue tubes (the **corpus cavernosum**) inside the penis fill with blood (the same tubes are also in the clitoris!). The penis becomes strong and stiff—just like a bone. This is probably why erections are sometimes called boners. Other slang terms include woodies, stiffies, chubbies, hard-ons, and so on.

Once filled, pressure keeps blood from going back into the body before ejaculation happens. This keeps the penis hard in case it is needed for any kind of penetration.

Although there are no bones inside the penis, it can break. There is a thin lining around the tubes in the penis that fill with blood. This is called the



tunica albuginea. When the tubes are full of blood, you have an erection. If they rip, they can't fill with blood. If they can't fill with blood, you can't have an erection.

Don't panic. Broken penises happen rarely. But should you *ever* hear a ripping sound or pop during intercourse moments before feeling pain in the penis, you need to get to a hospital as soon as possible. While broken penises can be fixed in surgery with great results, leaving a broken penis unrepaired can lead to long-term damage. Long-term damage to your penis is not a good thing. It may mean you might not get erections when you want.²⁷

As you can see, blood flow is important for erections. It's important to keep your heart and blood vessels healthy to ensure you have good flow to the penis. Anything that can damage your blood

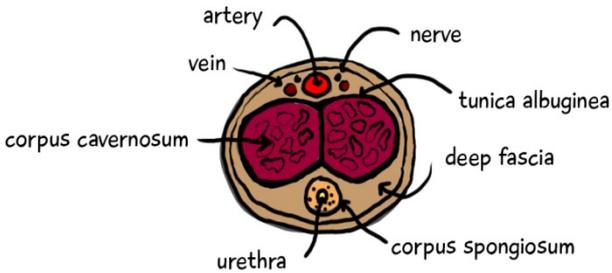


vessels, like diabetes or smoking, can hurt your ability to get blood into the penis for an erection. Quit smoking and stabilize your sugars as best as you can. If you have high blood pressure, take care of yourself and follow medical advice.

Covid has also changed things. Since the Covid-19 virus can affect blood vessels, it is not unlikely that some folks will experience erectile dysfunction as a result of the infection.

²⁷ Side note: The author knows of someone who this happened to, so it definitely does occur to regular folks.

Cross Section of a Penis



Some evidence suggests that the virus does have an effect on the blood vessels of the penis. It is not known whether this will be a long-term problem or will heal as the body recovers from Covid.

Appearance

Penises, like vulvas, come in all shapes and sizes. They're like snowflakes or fingerprints—no two are alike.²⁸ This variety can be difficult when we look at others to see if we are normal. We all want to be normal, and people with penises are no different. It can be challenging to look around at the urinals and see different looking members.

There are all sorts of penises. Some grow from birth. Some started as clitorises and now look more penis-like. Others are prosthetic and come in different styles with different functions.

²⁸ In case you are wondering (we were), identical twins may not have identical penises. Apparently, environment can play a role in penis size. However, we aren't 100% sure what environments makes penises grow larger in some folks. Unfortunately, most studies rely on self-reporting penis size. As anyone knows, this can be off by several inches. As of yet, there is no food or exercise that has been shown to grow penises. Even spinach.

Watching pornography can also make someone feel inadequate—as you might imagine, mainstream porn actors are chosen for their penis appearance and unusual erection skills (as well as their ability to deliver pizza). So don't judge your member by what you've seen in porn.

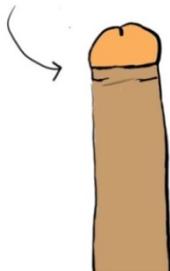
Some penises have extra skin called the **foreskin**. (Think of this as the penis wearing a turtleneck.)

Some people are **circumcised** as babies. This procedure removes the foreskin for religious or family reasons. Many people have circumcised penises. (Imagine these penises have a crew T-shirt neckline instead of a turtleneck.)

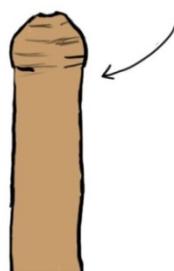
There are risks to circumcision, but they do not happen often. Should anyone want to circumcise their infant, they need to have an honest conversation with their doctor about whether it's the right procedure for their child.

Some research has suggested that circumcision may reduce the risk of getting HIV and other infections, although this research is relatively new and often specific (e.g. to men in Africa). There does seem to be enough information to suggest that circumcision does change a person's risk for infections, although there are no firm answers on whether the risk of side effects from the procedure are worth it.

penis without foreskin



penis with foreskin



People who still have the foreskin on their penises need to take a little extra time to clean underneath. This is only once the foreskin can be pulled back gently. Sometimes it doesn't pull back a lot until puberty. (Never force it!)

It's important to clean under the foreskin because smegma may collect there. **Smegma** is just a bunch of tissue and cells that accumulate under the foreskin in people with penises. It can gather under the folds of vulvas too. Use mild soap so you don't irritate the sensitive skin of the penis.

A penis, like a clitoris, has a head called the **glans**. Around the glans, you'll find the **corona**. In most folks, these parts feel wonderful when they are touched.

At the tip of the head, you'll find the peehole or urinary opening where urine and semen leave the body. Your body knows the difference, too! You don't pee or ejaculate at the same time.

Recipe for Semen

Semen is more than just sticky goo that comes out of the penis. It is actually a complex concoction filled with many different things:

- sperm (200-500 million)
- vitamin C
- proteins
- amino acids
- enzymes (they help with chemical reactions)
- prostaglandins (to cut down on an immune response from partner)
- citrate
- flavins
- acid phosphatase
- citric acid
- fructose (sugar to energize the sperm)
- prostate specific antigen (may help dissolve cervical mucus to create a passage for the sperm)

- proteolytic enzymes
- zinc (protects DNA)
- galactose
- mucus (to help sperm swim)
- pre-ejaculate
- sialic acid

These ingredients are designed to help sperm get to the egg inside a fallopian tube. Many of these chemicals help the swimming and fertilization process. For example, our bodies are designed to kill invading cells—that's why prostaglandins in semen help protect the sperm from being harmed by the immune system of their partner. Interestingly enough, these are the same hormones that are involved in menstruation. Sometimes synthetic or human made prostaglandins are used to start labour in folks who are pregnant.

Some of the unique smell and flavour of semen comes from putrescine, spermine, spermidine and cadaverine.²⁹ Spermine from the prostate likely causes the most noticeable smell and flavour. Spermine is also a bit harsh if someone accidentally gets it in their eyes, so ejaculate responsibly or have your partner wear goggles.

Troubleshooting

Premature Ejaculation

When you're young and hoping to impress someone, the last thing you want is to ejaculate too fast when you're ready to penetrate your partner!

What are the signs of premature ejaculation? Typically, to be considered a premature ejaculator, you come in less than a minute, have little control, or feel worried as a result

²⁹ Putrescine and cadaverine cells, when they die, are responsible for the lovely smell of decay and rot. They are also in period blood.

of your performance.

However, many folks with penises ejaculate rather quickly at the best of times—which is totally natural. Most ejaculate within 10 minutes, many less than six. It's just the nature of the system. Don't be panicked if you feel like you're ejaculating too fast. If you have been watching porn, you may have picked up the idea that a thrusting and erect penis lasts forever.

Here are some facts about early ejaculating:

- It may be inherited, but there isn't a lot of research in this area.
- Anxiety may make it worse.
- Folks may be more likely to ejaculate fast when they are with a new partner for the first time.
- Humour is helpful when facing premature ejaculation because it can feel very stressful.
- Talk to your partner—they may not be as concerned about the thrusting time as you are!
- Consider having a purposeful ejaculation before you're ready to start the show—you may last longer the second time.
- If you're partnering with someone with a clitoris, remember that penetration alone isn't usually enough to cause an orgasm; they may need direct stimulation of the clitoris with a finger or toy.
- Some condoms come with numbing creams inside to help you extend or maximize your thrusting time. Use cautiously because they may cause irritation.
- Use your masturbation time to practice control. Just before you ejaculate, stop and allow the sensation to pass. Then start again. Eventually, let yourself have an orgasm. The important thing is to feel a sense of control over how you orgasm and when.
- Consider doing Kegels to exercise your pelvic floor muscles. Pretend you have to hold in a big fart. Feel those muscles? Those are probably the right ones. Each day, practice holding them for a few seconds. Try for sets of ten. Do at least three times a day.

If you are continually bothered by premature ejaculation and nothing seems to fix it, chat with your health care provider about possible solutions including medication.

Penis Interruptus

During puberty, penises can get in the way at the worst times. This won't last forever, but can be embarrassing during junior high when you'd rather blend in with the crowd instead of looking like you pitched a tent in your pants.

Spontaneous erections can happen anywhere to folks assigned boy at birth

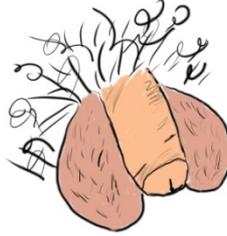
It doesn't take a lot for one to occur. Sometimes you might rub against your clothes the wrong way, you smell something nice as an attractive person walks by, you are facing vibrations from a car, or you have to pee really bad.

Most people with penises have survived random boners during junior high and beyond. Here are some tried and true tricks for minimizing the erection:

- Put a book in front of your crotch
- Wear baggy pants
- Wear jeans not sweatpants
- Sit down
- Think about something that isn't sex related like your grandfather's casserole
- Walk around and walk it off
- Shift your position in case your clothing is making it worse

Even though random erections feel embarrassing, they are a natural part of growing up. Random erections are common when you are an adolescent, and can happen even as an adult (although not as often). Think of it as your body practicing to reproduce.

Finally, if you have a real or prosthetic penis, you may feel proud when it is visible through your clothes.



DIY Packers

If you want to appear like you have a penis when you don't have one, you can make your own packer until you purchase a real one. A **packer** is a fake penis or prosthetic worn by someone—a trans man, for example.

- Socks are probably the easiest method on a tight budget. Roll up a sock and place it into another sock until it makes a bulge. Put it into your underwear.
- One website suggests using a condom filled with water, although this seems risky if the condom gets a hole in it! This would be the only time to use two condoms at once.
- Take panty hose or tights in your favourite colour, and fill with material similar to the sock option. You can also buy flesh-coloured hose for a more realistic look.

Q & A

Here are some questions people have about penises.

Why is it important that penises be long and thick?

Our society tends to believe that the bigger your penis, the more masculine (and manly) you are. This is all myth, though. There are many different shapes and lengths of penises. They are all normal. And they most definitely do not influence how manly you are.

If I have a small penis, will I ever satisfy a partner?

Partners are satisfied by more than just a penis! Yes, there are folks who dig certain sizes including large penises. You'll also find people who love smaller ones too, including those that may have started out more as clitorises. There is more to sex than just penetration. Remember that tongues and fingers are essential to making your partner feel good as well. Finally, small penises gain more size when they are erect. You might be more of a grower than a shower.

My penis is crooked. Is this normal?

Everyone wants to know they're normal. And yes, erect, crooked penises are definitely normal. They stick in unusual directions and this is okay. If the angle is a bit different, it just means the person with the penis and their partner may need to try various sexual intercourse positions.

What is morning wood?

It is slang for the erections that happen early in the morning, which can make it hard to pee! It doesn't mean you're turned on in the morning. It is probably caused by changes in hormones that time of day, relaxation that allows blood into your penis, or accidental touching. It is very common for people with penises, but is more likely when you are young. It means your penis is working properly! Try not to be too annoyed by your hard working penis (and try not to pee up the wall).

Can I use Viagra to have a harder penis?

Viagra and other drugs used for **erectile dysfunction** (a non-working penis) can be helpful if someone needs them and a health care provider prescribes them. *Research suggests that they do not improve erections in people who are healthy.* Plus, it can be risky to use Viagra with recreational

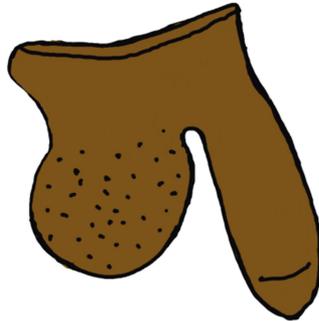
drugs. If you have difficulties getting hard, see your health care provider. Keep in mind that if you're getting morning erections, things are probably working okay. Don't pop Viagra so you can pretend to be a porn star with a permanent boner. Have realistic expectations.

Is it true that people who are Black have bigger penises?

No. It's a myth. The reality is that you cannot tell a person's penis size from looking at them. The myth probably started because in North America, many Black men were slaves, and white slave owners feared their sexuality—which was rather ironic, since many slave owners sexually assaulted their girl and woman slaves. The children made from these assaults would then become slaves themselves.

What is a stand-to-pee?

Folks who use a prosthetic penis have a few options. They can pack with a soft packer or a harder packer. There are also **stand-to-pees**. A stand-to-pee is a prosthetic penis for peeing standing up. The device sits against the vulva and catches urine, directing it out through the prosthetic penis head. People can also use a **pack-and-play** which may also be used during sexual activity. It can be an advantage not to have to change your penis when you want to have sex. However, it can be challenging to find the right kind of device that allows for comfortable packing, peeing, and penetration. Many folks try different devices to get the right feel and experience.



What is a chode or choad?

It is a slang term for a short, thick penis.

My penis is four inches long. Is that normal?

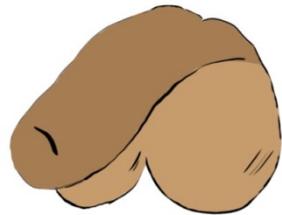
Many folks like to measure their penis to see how they compare to other people with penises. Typically, the penises of those assigned boy at birth are about three to four inches when soft, or seven to 10 centimetres. They become five to six inches when erect, or 12 to 18 centimetres. However, these are just *typical* sizes. They can really vary, especially if someone is intersex, takes hormone therapy, or has a penis created through surgery.

I know someone with big hands/big feet/long fingers. Does that mean they have a big penis?

Nope. We have yet to find a measurement that lets us know the size of penises. Looking at a person isn't enough to know the size of their genitals (unless their pants are off).

How do transgender people get penises?

There is more than one way to get a penis. Sometimes, people who take hormone therapy (testosterone, for example) can grow longer clitorises that begin looking more like penises. They may become one inch longer, up to three inches longer (that's up to 7.62 centimetres long). Finally, if someone wishes to have surgery, they can have ligaments released that will allow the clitoris to hang a bit lower. Or they might decide to have a penis built for them. One surgery does this out of sensitive forearm skin.³⁰ This is a big surgery and does not mean the new penis will work the same as other penises. Finally, if you don't want surgery or have to



³⁰ I know you just touched your forearm right now.

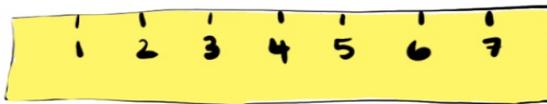
wait too long for the procedure, you can buy packers. They give the appearance of a bulge in your pants. Some look realistic. Some packers can even help you pee standing up. Finally, remember that a penis is not needed to identify as a man.

If I have surgery to get a penis, will it work?

There are pros and cons to different procedures. Releasing the ligaments of the clitoris (also called **metoidioplasty**) can help make the clitoris look more like a penis while keeping its sensitivity and natural function. It is a much more simple procedure. Some people, though, prefer to have a larger penis so they can penetrate with their member. They might get a **phalloplasty**, which makes a more “realistic” looking penis, which may not have all the sensitivity of the original clitoris. In fact, folks may have to get an implanted erectile prosthesis—a tool to help them get erections with their new penis. Chat with a surgeon about the best options for you.

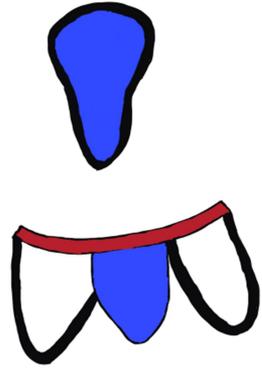
Can anything make the penis bigger or longer?

Don't believe the ads. There is no way you can stretch your way to a longer penis, or put a cream on your shaft that will make it thicker. Focus more on appreciating your own penis and what it can do for you. Does it feel good when you masturbate? Are you able to get hard when you want to? It is just a myth that penises need to be big and thick.



What is a cup or a jock strap?

Playing sports can be hard on your penis and testicles. Anyone who has ever taken a ball to the scrotum knows what we're talking about! There are ways to protect yourself, like wearing a cup. Your future self will thank you for saving your penis and testicles from destruction.



Why is my penis a darker colour than the rest of me?

Penises can be different skin tones. Remember, they're like snowflakes. No two are alike. Some folks may have darker or lighter penises. Some might have freckles. They are all natural.

Why am I finding it hard to keep an erection?

Erection difficulties (also known as erectile dysfunction) are common even in folks assigned boy at birth. First, get to a doctor or nurse practitioner to see if there is a physical cause. They will likely want to know when you can't get an erection, and whether you have one in the morning or wet dreams through the night. Some prescriptions and recreational drugs can monkey with erections, including antidepressants. Side effects go away in a month or two, but sometimes you need a different prescription if you cannot get aroused or have an orgasm.

Are steroids harmful to the penis?

Steroids may have long-lasting effects to the penis and testicles because they impact testosterone levels. Keep in mind these are performance steroids and not what might be in your asthma medication. Performance steroids are used by some athletic performers, and in many cases, are against the law.

What is the effect of marijuana on the penis?

There hasn't been a lot of research on the matter. While the high of weed may cause some arousal and relaxation, there is potential for erectile dysfunction in long term, frequent users. Hopefully, now that marijuana is legal in Canada, more studies on its benefits and side effects will be published. If marijuana is smoked with tobacco, there may be more likelihood of it affecting the penis because tobacco is known to increase the risk of erectile dysfunction.

Breast Before Date

Let's move up in the world. Whether you make or take estrogen, you are probably curious about how to take care of your breasts. If you don't have breasts, you may be interested in learning more about them. There are also facts here for people who have chests instead of breasts.

Breasts may feel nice when they are touched or caressed, although some breasts are more sensitive than others. They are made up of fatty tissue and ducts that end in the nipple, where milk can come out to feed a baby. (This happens due to hormones that come after childbirth, so most people don't randomly lactate, or make milk.)

In fact, until puberty, all bodies have the same breasts. Estrogen causes most of the breast growth in puberty or during transitioning.

Underthings

Many people choose to wear bras to support their breasts. It depends on your culture, your body, and what activities you do. There are no bra rules, so you will have to develop your own. Your parents or caregivers may also have expectations about how you dress. And your school may have a dress code.

There are many kinds of bras. You will develop personal likes and dislikes as you try different ones.

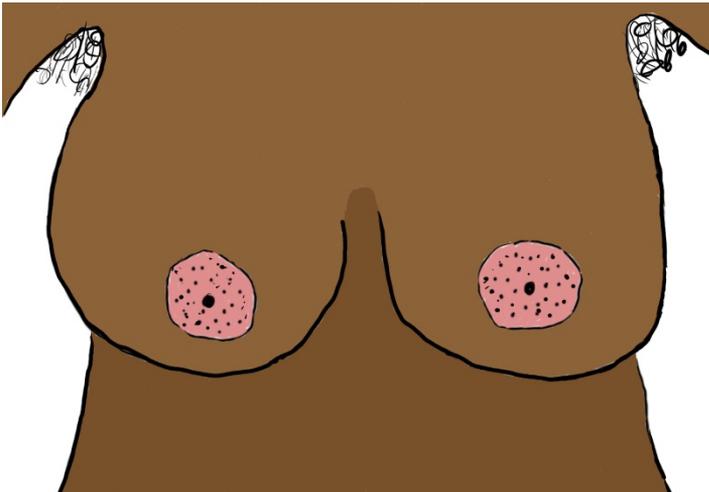
Some have wires that line the cup (the part which holds the breast). These are called underwire bras.

Some have straps. Some are strapless so you don't see straps while wearing armless dresses or tops.

If you exercise, you may want to consider a sports bra, which keeps your breasts from bouncing around. Exercise can be uncomfortable if your breasts are heavy.

Sports bras can also help flatten chests like binders, especially if you're athletic and struggle to breathe during sports.

People with smaller breasts may be fine going without a bra, or just wearing a tank top. It all depends on what you like to wear, and how much support feels right for your chest.



If you do not want to wear a whole bra, you can buy nipple covers to keep your nipples from sticking out. These are sometimes helpful if you are wearing fancy clothes and don't want to show any bra straps, but are modest about your nipples appearing under the fabric. Also feel free to rock those nipples.

People do not have to wear bras, although some people may be shamed for not wearing them. Breasts are natural and can be covered by a variety of clothing or underwear that meets your needs and values.

Cups and Bands

Finding the right size bra can be a challenge.

Bras typically have two measurements: cup sizes and band sizes. For example, a 34A is an A cup bra that has a band of 34 inches.

If you have a friend or family member who's able to measure you, get a measuring tape. Measure the fullest part of the breast as well as around the chest (without the breast).

Subtract the chest measurement from the full breast measurement. The answer will give you your estimated cup size based on the chart below.

1" = A	5" = DD	9" = I
2" = B	6" = DDD & F	10" = J
3" = C	7" = G	11" = K
4" = D	8" = H	

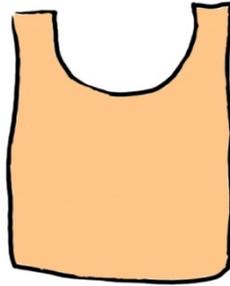
So, if you are 36 inches around your bust and 32 inches around your chest, you have a difference of 4 inches. Looking at the chart, you can see 4 inches equals a D cup. So you would be a 32D.

If you are 36 inches around your bust and 35 inches around your chest, you would be an A cup. Your complete measurement would be 35A. You would then decide if a 34A or 36A is more comfortable (they don't make bras in 35s).

Keep in mind bra sizes are a bit different across companies, like jeans. Try on all bras, because you cannot usually return them once you've left the store.

Binders

If someone does not want their breasts to look obvious, they may use a **binder** to bind their chest or breasts. Some organizations that serve 2SLGBTQIA+ youth give them away for free. You can also order them online.



DIY Binder Tips

Here are a few tips for flattening your chest with common items until you can get a purpose binder.

- Don't use bandages or duct tape. Ever.³¹
- If you're going to use any kind of tape, buy trans tape and have oils on hand for safe removal. Your skin also might become irritated, so consider having some kind of salve or balm for when you remove the tape.
- Use only one method at a time.

³¹ Really. Ever.

- Try two sports bras.
- Wear a camisole backwards and fold the bottom part up over your chest.
- Cut the legs off pantyhose, tights or leggings to make a top (and cut the crotch to use as the neck hole).

Binder Basics

- Take breaks and avoid sleeping in your binder, even for naps. It can cause broken ribs. And binding will be impossible while you heal (also, ow!)
- Try not to bind for more than nine hours a day.
- Some folks have to wear a different size for exercising. If you experience discomfort during sports, slow down, and take a break.
- Watch out for bruising, redness, or swelling under your arms.
- Wash by hand or put on the washer's delicate cycle. Air dry or place in the dryer for only a short amount of time.

Chest Exams

Breasts and chests may be sensitive, but don't require much extra attention—except for monthly checks.

Everyone should feel their chest for lumps and changes every month. Lumps and changes may mean breast cancer, although not all lumps and changes *are* cancer. (They

usually aren't.)

Don't panic if you find anything. Many people get cysts or lumps in their breasts or chest. However, you should get anything odd checked by a health professional, who can rule out anything serious, and provide reassurance.

Chest Care

Wash your breasts or chest with your usual soap. It is natural to get pimples or acne in this area, especially if you have large breasts. If the acne bothers you, use the same over-the-counter acne treatment as you would on your face. Wash or wipe yourself after exercise or sweating a lot.

People with large breasts often find they sweat under the breast. You can use deodorant or antiperspirant there, or a gentle powder like cornstarch. If anything causes irritation, stop using it and try something else. Avoid powders made with talc or talcum powder.

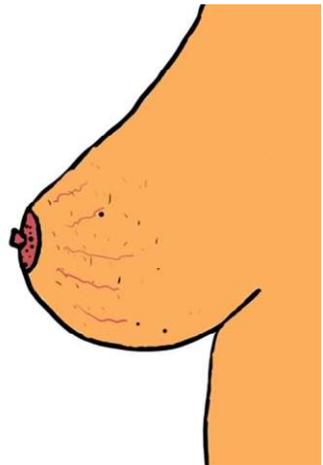
If the area under your breast becomes red or inflamed, you may need an over-the-counter treatment to get rid of it. Chat with your doctor or pharmacist about creams that can help irritated skin.

Talking to your health care professional about your breasts may feel awkward, but it is okay to talk about your body with an adult you trust like your parent or doctor. Get some support from your parents or caregivers if you need help making appointments. It is important to learn how to take care of our health and get it checked by a medical provider.

Fast Facts

- Breasts do not always match completely. The left or right breast may be bigger or differently shaped. That is completely normal.

- Nipples, breasts, and chests can be very sensitive. Folks may enjoy when they or a partner touch their breasts or chests in a sexual manner. Some people get more excited than others by touching, or fondling, the area. It all depends on the person.
- When aroused, the areola (the dark circle around the nipple) gets even darker.
- Almost everyone has nipples because we all start in the uterus the same way!
- Breasts are mostly fatty tissue.
- It's natural to have some hair on your breasts or chest.
- Bras do not cause breast cancer. This is a total myth!
- Nipples can point in different directions.
- Breasts can change according to your menstrual cycle, sometimes feeling more lumpy, perky, not-so-perky, and so on. It is often in response to the sex hormones of your cycle.
- Your breasts will change if you become pregnant, give birth, and go through various life stages.
- The average breast weighs about one pound. Some may weigh as much as two pounds. Some may be over 10 pounds combined! Talk about a weight on your chest.
- Many cis boys fear they are growing breasts. It is common for the chest to grow during puberty. It sometimes takes a year or two for the rest of the body to catch up. If you are not taking or making estrogen, you don't have to worry about growing breasts. Your body will sort itself out.



Q & A

We all have questions about breasts and chests.

Can boys get breast cancer?

Anyone with breasts or a chest can get breast cancer. This includes cis boys or transgender people. Everyone should look at their chest on a regular basis and go to the doctor if anything seems unusual.

Do abortions cause breast cancer?

No. We have no evidence linking abortions to an increased risk of getting breast cancer, according to the Canadian Cancer Society. The “abortions cause breast cancer myth” is often used by religious groups to keep folks from having abortions. They hope to scare them into having the baby. There is a small statistical benefit to having fewer periods, though. And pregnancy plus breastfeeding/chestfeeding decreases the number of periods you get for a spell. So that’s why they tell you abortions “cause” cancer, but there’s no causing involved.

Do antiperspirants cause breast cancer?

No firm evidence has linked antiperspirants to breast cancer. Some people do avoid underarm products containing aluminum. If it makes you feel better to steer clear of aluminum, there are many products on the market that do not contain this ingredient. As of yet, we have no firm evidence it is dangerous. Do what feels best for your peace of mind.

My breasts hurt. Is this normal?

There may be times when your breasts feel tender and sensitive. Puberty may be behind this, or the monthly menstruation cycle. Sometimes breasts are fine until they get hit in gym class. While some tenderness is natural, get a

"I am naturally a very petite/thin person, but for some reason I thought that when puberty hit I was going to grow huge breasts. I didn't fully accept the fact that I was going to have to rock an A cup for life until I was in university. My body is perfect just the way it is, but I wish I had started investing in cute bras sooner instead of just buying cheap ones and thinking I was going to outgrow them!

Tiny titty tip: you can sew stitch or use a clothespin to modify plunging necklines on clothing made for girls' larger busts in mind."

- All Titties are Pretty, 25

doctor's appointment if you feel too much pain.

One nipple sticks out and one sticks in. Is this normal?

It is. A nipple that is stuck in is just called an **inverted nipple** and it should not be an issue, even when feeding an infant.

Do small breasts make it more difficult to feed a baby?

Size makes no difference when it comes to nursing a baby. Some folks find nursing easy and some folks find it difficult. And then there's everyone in between. Size is not a factor that matters. A small chest can produce enough milk for a baby while a large one may not.

My nipple has fluid coming out of it, but I'm not breastfeeding!

Some people may notice fluid or discharge coming from

their nipple or nipples. It is nothing to panic about, but check with your doctor or nurse practitioner.

What are the funny red or white marks on my breasts?

Breasts, like other areas of the body that grow fast, may get stretch marks. Often, they look like little lightning bolts on your skin. They can start out red and turn white. They are perfectly natural in all bodies, but some people are more prone to stretch marks than other people.

Why are large breasts considered sexy?

Societies view breasts in different ways. Currently, large breasts in women are viewed as sexy, but it hasn't always been that way. In the 1920s, when flapper dresses were popular, even cisgender women bound their breasts or tried to make them look flatter. Trends come and go. And people find different things sexy. One person may prefer small breasts. Another person may prefer larger breasts. There are pros and cons to having any size breast.

Can people who adopt babies breastfeed them?

Sometimes. All bodies can produce some milk under the right conditions (usually with physical stimulation and/or medicines.) However, some folks may need to supplement their baby's diet with formula or donated breast milk. Keep in mind breastfeeding or chestfeeding can be set up with any body if another source of milk is used. A tube can be placed on the breast and end at the nipple, allowing the baby to enjoy the closeness of the chest.

Can trans women breastfeed?

Yes. Some can. Hormone therapy can help their breasts or chests grow larger. With physical stimulation and/or medicines to help make milk, some trans women can feed babies. If they don't make enough breast milk, they can add

formula or donated breast milk to the baby's diet, including the tube feeding method listed above this question.

Hi Jean & Health

We live in a pretty clean society. In fact, we're probably a little obsessed with being clean. However, if you go out in public or interact with humans, chances are, you'll need to stick to some standard of hygiene. The following are some suggestions and they should be adjusted as needed to fit your culture and body. For example, if you have eczema, your doctor or dermatologist may have some better suggestions for you

Once you're an adult, cleaning somehow once or twice a day should do it. This doesn't always mean a bath or shower (though it can).

The face, armpits, groin, and feet can all get sweaty after you hit puberty and the **apocrine glands** there start working. Focus on these areas. If you have large breasts, you will have to clean underneath them too.

Gentle soap and unscented deodorant or antiperspirant works for most folks. Many schools and workplaces these days are scent-free, so try to stick to unscented products—or at least products that don't create a cloud of perfume around you that sets off headaches wherever you go.

Acne

If you are prone to zits, you can buy over-the-counter washes and creams. Don't think that washing your face 10 times a day will solve your acne problem. It will just cause irritation, which can increase oil production in those pesky pores.

Anyone with severe acne that isn't helped by drugstore creams should see their doctor or nurse practitioner. Medications can help severe acne. There are also doctors who specialize in skin called dermatologists.

The best remedies to buy for acne have the following ingredients:

- Benzoyl peroxide
- Salicylic acid
- Clay
- Tea tree oil
- Alpha hydroxy acids
- Sulfur

Some people with ovaries who take birth control find acne can be improved. Estrogen often makes your skin more clear, and sometimes can be found in birth control. If you start taking testosterone, you may notice an increase in oil and acne. If you take estrogen, you may notice the opposite.

Shaving

Feminine Appearances

It can feel like a big deal when you are finally allowed to shave your armpits and legs.

It has been about 100 years since women started shaving.

Basically, razor companies wanted to sell more razors, so they dreamed up a way to market them to women! Plus, in the 1920s, women started wearing clothes that revealed armpits and legs. Being feminine was soon linked to not having hair in those areas. This trend has pretty much stuck around since then.

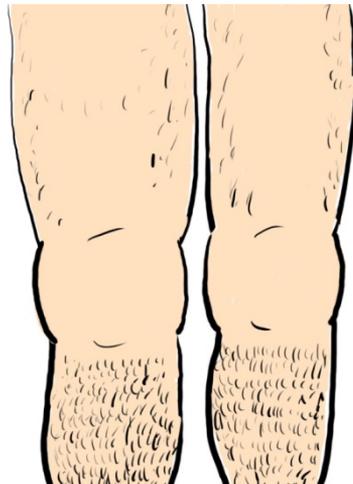
Obviously, hair does not make you feminine or masculine. You can grow your hair if you want.

Talk to your parents or caregivers about getting razors and shaving foam or gel. It sometimes pays to spend a bit extra on razors because quality matters. Cheap razors can lead to razor burn or small cuts called nicks. Sharper razors tend to last longer too.

You can also use an electric razor. Electric razors do not usually cut the hair as close to the skin as other razors. On the positive side, they do not require shaving gel. They also rarely cause nicks or cuts. If you don't have a steady hand, go with electric!

Most people shave with manual razors in the bathtub or shower. Shaving works best if your hairs have had an opportunity to soak in warm water. (Just don't use your electric razor in the tub unless it's waterproof!)

If you are shaving with a blade, you'll start by rubbing shaving cream over your legs. Let it soak into the skin if you have time. (If you don't have shaving cream, hair conditioner also works in a pinch!)



Shaving around the knee is the hardest. Bend or straighten the knee until you can shave around the joint safely and with few nicks.

To shave your armpits, follow the same routine—put gel or foam over your hair, then shave gently.

When you're done, remember to clean out the tub for the next person! They may not appreciate a hair-covered tub that looks like spiders exploded in your bathroom.

If you have hair on your upper lip, you can shave there as well. Be extra careful, because you probably don't want nicks on your face.

Some people tweeze upper lip hairs. Others use bleach to make the hair less visible. Don't use regular household bleach. Buy purpose facial bleach like Jolen and use carefully. If you leave it on too long, it will burn. It may leave redness on your upper lip.

You can also wax the hair on your face. However, waxing does irritate the skin so you may want to consider going to a purpose salon and having a professional do it. This way you can learn to do it properly should you ever try it yourself.

Finally, there are more permanent hair solutions. Electrolysis and laser are alternatives to shaving, but they can be pricey. However, some people may want to get rid of hair forever. Electrolysis and laser should only be done by qualified professionals.

If someone is having a vagina created out of their penis and scrotum, they may choose to remove some of their pubic hair (especially on their scrotum) prior to the surgery. Chat with your surgeon about the right time to have it done. Some surgeons take care of the hair during surgery.

Remember, there is no way you have to appear. Do not feel you have to shave off every last hair to appear more feminine! Many girls and women rock body hair. Some even dye it funky colours.

Just remember that some hair removal options may increase your risk of catching an STI from your partner. The only STI that benefits from hair removal is pubic lice, probably because there are no hair to hang onto!

The rest of the options can cause small openings in the skin. Ensure these are healed before having sex with someone. And make sure you use a condom or dam.

Masculine Appearances

Shaving may also be a big deal when you want to appear masculine.

You will also need either a disposable or refillable razor, or an electric razor. Experiment until you find something that works for you.

Many people who make or take testosterone will develop facial hair. It often starts on the upper lip, and, for many folks, eventually covers much of the beard area. It can take years, though, before the beard area fills in. Don't be disappointed if you don't get a woolly beard right away!

Once you start seeing facial hair, you may want to consider shaving. Masculine people have many options when presenting their face to the world.

They may prefer to be clean-shaven, or have no hair on their face (except their eyebrows!) They may prefer to grow a moustache. Or they may prefer to grow a goatee. Finally, they may prefer not to shave at all. Many Sikhs, for example, do not shave or cut their hair as part of their faith.

Shaving can be irritating, so it's important for all genders to find a way to soothe your skin afterwards. Moisturizer can be helpful.

When some people work out, they like to show off the definition of their muscles by shaving off their chest hair. Some people prefer a hairy chest and consider it a sign of manliness. Appear to the world how you want to appear—not how you think you *should* appear. If you prefer to get rid of your hair, do it safely. If you prefer to go natural, there is no shame in that either.

Some masculine folks have a lot of body hair. Some have less. There is no right way to be. If you're curious about how much hair you may grow, look at some of your relatives. Hair growth is often genetic. If Uncle Bob is hairy, you might become hairy as well.

Don't Sweat the Small Stuff

There are lots of ways to control or manage excess sweating.

Deodorants generally deal with sweat once it's on the outside of your skin. Deodorants help kill bacteria. Generally, it's the bacteria eating your sweat that causes odour, not the sweat itself. (Actually, the stank is basically bacteria poop.) Kill the bacteria and kill the odour. Some deodorants have scents to hide the smell of sweat, although strong scents can cause reactions in some people.

If you want to make your own deodorant, you can mix together coconut oil and baking soda. There are a number of recipes online.



Antiperspirants keep sweat from being released. They generally block holes in your skin where the sweat would come out. Some people think it's better to sweat, so they do not choose antiperspirant. There have been no scientific studies, though, that link antiperspirants to any ill health effects like cancer. Many antiperspirants contain scent, but you can buy unscented.

Some people sweat more than others. If regular deodorants and antiperspirants are not cutting the mustard (or sweat), there are clinical versions and stronger formulas. One kind, Drysol, cuts down on sweat over time. The company even recommends wrapping your skin in plastic wrap to help it work better. (Now you will know how leftovers feel!)

If these stronger versions don't help, talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner about sweating, especially if you are embarrassed by any excess sweat.

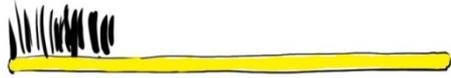
Athletes will notice that they sweat more because their bodies are used to cooling down during workouts. If this is the case, a shower after working out might be better than trying to stop sweating altogether. After all, our bodies sweat to maintain a proper temperature.

Dental Care

Dental care is an important part of going through puberty. If you haven't mastered dental hygiene by now, it's a great time to learn how to keep your chompers spick-and-span!

One of the most important tools is your toothbrush. Make sure you have one that fits your mouth and has the right softness. You can even buy spinning toothbrushes that do the work for you. Brush your teeth at least twice a day at the bare minimum.

Flossing is essential.
It's often a chore
that goes undone,
but flossing gets the
junk between your



teeth. It helps maintain healthy gums and works to keep your breath smelling fresh—key if you're hoping to impress or kiss someone. If you bleed when you floss, go easier. Usually we bleed when we haven't been flossing enough. Regular flossing will help it go away.

Mouthwash can also be a regular part of dental care. Find one that works for you. There are some with extra fluoride, which helps protect against cavities. This is important if you live in the country, where no fluoride is added to the water. Xylitol is also a helpful ingredient to prevent rotten teeth.

Other tools include tongue scrapers. Bacteria love to grow on the tongue and can lead to bad breath. If it doesn't make you gag, consider adding tongue scraping to your routine!

Finally, be careful of sugary gum and candies, since they can help grow cavities. Gum with xylitol may help cut down on cavities, and can be found in many sugar free treats. Saliva also keeps your mouth from getting too dry.

Need pearly whites? There are many whitening products in stores. Ask your dentist if these are right for you. Be warned that whitening your teeth can make them extra sensitive to hot or cold foods or air. Don't do it right ahead of ice cream season.

Remember that beige teeth are also a perfectly normal colour, which can be hard to rock when celebs and influencers often have white smiles.

Teeth don't have to be perfect, but some basic dental care will help your mouth and breath stay fresh and healthy.

Hair Care

Like the rest of your body, your scalp produces more oils as you hit puberty. As a result, you may have to wash your hair more often than you did as a child.

Find a shampoo and conditioner that work for you. There are many to choose from—in fact, sometimes there are too many to choose from!

Some folks wash their hair once a day, some once a week. See how long you can last before your hair gets the greasies. Most people probably need to wash their hair every two to seven days. If your hair is fine, you will probably need to wash it more often than if you have thick hair or tight curls. If you have cornrows, you may wish to wash them only every week or two.

There are other people who prefer no poo, and go as long as they can without washing their hair. You can also use dry shampoo, which is a type of spray that helps absorb greasiness and adds scent to your hair. Any kind of powder (including our cheap favourite cornstarch) added to your hair line will help with greasiness.

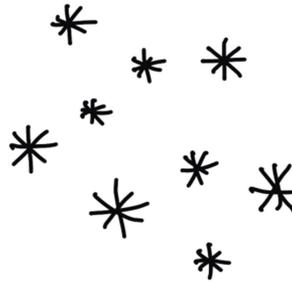
From blow dryers to curlers, there are many ways to enhance your hair or change your style. Enjoy experimenting, or live with what you've always had—your choice. Some parents and caregivers may set rules around what you can do with your hair. Our cultural background will also help us decide how to rock our locks.

Dandruff

If you are bothered by pesky white flakes, try using a special shampoo that is marketed to get rid of dandruff.

Look for the following ingredients to combat the flakes:

- Salicylic acid
- Sulfur
- Pyrithione zinc
- Coal tar
- Selenium sulfide
- Ketoconazole
- Tea tree oil



The more products like gel and mousse you put in your hair, the more likely you are to get flakes and dandruff. Experiment until you find a routine that works for you. If you don't see results, talk to your health care provider.

STIs

What is an STI? And an STD? Or a VD?

They are all infections that affect the genitals or are shared sexually. At first we called them venereal diseases. Then sexually transmitted diseases. Now we call them either STIs (sexually transmitted infections) or STBBIs (sexually transmitted and blood borne infections).³²

Some adults like to focus puberty education on infections so that youth won't ever want to have sex. (Hasn't worked yet.)

The reality is that you can get some pretty nasty infections as a result of sexual activity. But you *can* cure or treat them.

Many STIs are treated with an antibiotic or prescription you

³² To get technical, an infection can lead to a disease. Many people can be infected with an STI without producing symptoms or signs of a disease. In fact, that's why they spread so easily. And that's why we usually call them infections.

get from your doctor or nurse practitioner. Infections like chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis are all treated with antibiotics.

Some of the viruses are another story. Most people who get herpes or HIV (the virus that can lead to AIDS) have them forever. But even something as serious as HIV can be managed in Canada with drugs and medical care, and become so scarce in the body you cannot pass it to your sexual partners.

There is a lot of stigma around having a sexually transmitted infection. This is too bad. It is no more shameful to get an STI than it is to get the common cold. Many people will get a STI in their life. The important thing is to make an appointment with a doctor or nurse practitioner for screening and treatment.

Often, people don't know they have an STI. This is why STIs spread like wildfire. Everyone thinks they are infection free, so they don't use condoms.

Because there are often no symptoms, people who are sexually active should get tested regularly. Some STIs can be deadly if they aren't treated. Some may lead to infertility, or take away a person's ability to make a baby in the future. Some may lead to cancer.

There are several ways to protect yourself from the damages of STIs:

- Delay intercourse until you're a bit older if you have a cervix. Until you're 18, the cells of your cervix are not as "mature" and are more easily infected with STIs.
- Regardless of your age, use a condom or barrier for any kind of genital contact, whether that is for vaginal, oral, or anal sex.
- Get vaccinated for HPV and Hepatitis A & B.
- Have STI tests regularly.

- Go to the doctor or nurse practitioner if you get any symptoms like burning pee, itchiness, or redness around your genitals.
- Be extra careful if your adventures include alcohol or other substances. Ideally, no one has sex when they're not sober. The reality is that people who aren't sober may not use condoms properly.
- Do not use spermicide if infections are a concern. You may prevent pregnancy, but actually put yourself at a higher risk of STIs. The spermicide can irritate the sensitive tissues of the vagina.
- Follow your treatment plan.
- Take relevant medications (like PrEP for HIV) if you are at high risk.
- Tell your partners to get treated too.
- Reduce the number of your partners, or at least ensure that you are taking all precautions.
- If your partner injects drugs, be extra careful. If they share needles, they may be at a higher risk of catching something like HIV than someone who doesn't use drugs.
- Have honest conversations with your partners so that you know you're on the same page about reducing your risk of STIs.



Sexually Transmitted Infections

	Symptoms	Treatment
genital herpes	none, sores or pain, inflammation or redness, fever	antiviral medication
hepatitis C	chronic infection can lead to liver cancer or cirrhosis, flu-like symptoms	treatment available but expensive
HIV	flu-like symptoms eventually becoming life-threatening illnesses like cancer	antivirals and strict health care required
HPV	none, warts, various cancers including cervical cancer	no treatment available although warts can be removed; vaccine available
chlamydia	none, different discharge, painful pee, pain during sex, infertility	antibiotics
gonorrhea	none, painful pee, pain during sex, infertility	antibiotics
syphilis	sores, feeling unwell, damage to major organs, eventual death	antibiotics
pubic lice	itchiness in genital area, spots and redness	lice killing cream or shampoo as well as cleaning clothes and bedsheets
scabies	intense itchiness at night, rash visible on genitals and other body parts	creams or lotions as well as cleaning clothes and bedsheets
trichomoniasis	none, different discharge, painful pee	prescription medication

Health Care Rights

Generally, by the time you are a teenager, you are able to seek out your own health care. You can talk to a doctor or nurse practitioner by yourself. And you have the right for that conversation to be kept confidential. (Sadly, though, you may still need your parents to pay for treatments!)

Anyone who works in a helping field (whether they are a pharmacist, psychiatrist, or doctor) *must keep your health private*. If you'd like reassurance that your health care provider will keep things on the down low, ask them about their confidentiality policies.

Many organizations are confidential, including sexual health centres. Confidentiality is a big deal. If anyone ever violates your privacy, you have the right to call them out on it.

One note: If you are under a certain age and report that someone has assaulted or harmed you, the professional must report it to the police or Child Protection. In Nova Scotia, they have to report any harm done to someone under 16. If the person doing the harming is a parent or caregiver, that age goes to 19. If someone has to report anything, they should still be careful with your privacy, and treat you in a respectful manner.

At your age, you're usually able to consent to medical care and treatments. For example, if your doctor wants to run a test on you, you have every right to know why they are doing it—and you also have the right to refuse it. (Usually, though, it's probably a pretty good idea.)

When you hit puberty, you may want to start seeing your health care provider without your parent or caregiver. If it's hard to get time alone, ask for five minutes with them. You will need to get used to dealing with medical professionals

on your own.

Q & A

We get lots of questions about bodies and hygiene—and oodles on STIs. Here are some of our favourites.

What is the most common STI?

Some of the more common STIs include chlamydia, HPV (human papillomavirus), and herpes. Chlamydia is easily treated with antibiotics. Without treatment, it can damage the fallopian tubes of people with uteruses. Some types of HPV can lead to warts and cancer, although many students in Nova Scotia receive a vaccine for the most common varieties.³³ Finally, herpes cannot be cured, but can be managed through drugs that prevent flare ups and spreading to partners.

Will I ever have sex again after getting herpes?

Of course, yes! Your health care professional can let you know about ways to cut down the risk of passing herpes on to your partner/s.

Only people who are gay get AIDS, right?

Thankfully, few people in Canada go on to get AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome). It happens after having HIV (human immunodeficiency virus infection) a long time without treatment. Canada's health care system is pretty good at helping people with HIV live long lives, and we can now help folks get to a point where there are such little amounts of virus in the body that they can't infect someone else. There is a myth that HIV/AIDS is only caught by people who are gay. While it started appearing in gay men in the 1980s, it quickly became a massive issue for all orientations. Receptive anal sex (AKA being the one to

³³ If you didn't get your vaccine in Grade 7, contact public health.

receive a penis in the bum) is a high risk activity for getting HIV. However, vaginal sex without a condom is also a high risk activity, especially for the person being penetrated and receiving the semen.

So if someone has HIV, they can't have kids?

Actually, there are drugs that help people with HIV get to the point they are unlikely to pass HIV to another person. If the virus is undetectable, they can reproduce with another person safely. People who have HIV can also carry pregnancies to term and have healthy babies—as long as they have access to health care.

Are there benefits to keeping my pubic hair?

Of course, yes! You cut down the risk of getting STIs (except pubic lice), and you don't have to explain what those weird shaving bumps are on your labia. Plus, tugging on hair often feels erotic because they are connected to nerves.

Can a yeast infection make it easier to get an STI?

Yes. Anything that irritates genitals can make it easier for germs to enter your body. Thanks yeast infections. As if you weren't already annoying.

If both partners have not been sexually active before, is it okay to not be tested for any STIs?

It is. But if your partner isn't telling the truth, you will not only have a partner who lied to you, but potentially gave you an STI as well. It's probably best to get used to using condoms and dams for all activities.

Can I catch an STI from a toilet seat?

No. STIs love warm and wet places, hence why they pass through sexual activity. These infections die when they are

on something like a toilet seat. It's too cold and lonely for them there, even if someone comes along right after. Just wash your hands and hopefully all will be well.

Is it true that spermicide spreads STIs?

Sort of. Spermicide can irritate mucous membranes like vaginas. This irritation leads to tiny tears in the tissue, which can let in infections. Spermicide only kills sperm, not STIs. So it means you might be at a higher risk of catching an STI if your tissues are irritated in any way.

If two people have HIV, do they have to use condoms?

They should consider it. Sometimes, people can get different versions (or strains) of STIs that can make their health worse. They should definitely talk to their healthcare provider before not using a condom. However, with proper care, people with HIV may get to the point the virus is “undetectable” in their bodies, which makes it unlikely they will give it to their partner/s.

If I snort birth control, will it still work?

Birth control pills are absorbed into your blood through your digestive system—your small bowel/intestine actually. Snorting drugs through your nose is a whole different process—often the medicine gets into your bloodstream faster because of the super thin tissues in your nose (that's why drug users sometimes take substances this way). If you experience side effects from the pill, you may notice they are worse if you snort them. Plus, snorting *any* kind of substance can lead to nosebleeds and other issues. If, for some reason, you haven't absorbed your pill through your guts, use a backup plan like condoms. This includes vomiting after taking the pill.

Self-Love

We've chatted about your parts. Now it's time to learn what they can do.

Mention masturbation and almost everyone giggles, including adults! That's why we're calling it self-love.

But masturbation or self-love can be a wonderful way to explore your body—and it is very safe. You can't get pregnant when you masturbate! And you can't get hurt unless you do it while you're driving. (Please don't do it while you're driving or when other people are driving.)

Many young children discover touching themselves feels good even though children don't link it to sex. Sometimes it can be very calming for them.

A lot of adults freak out when they see children handling their genitals—perhaps because toddlers think the dinner table is an okay spot to play with their penis!

Unfortunately, some children are told that touching themselves is dirty. It isn't. We just have to touch ourselves in private. For many youth, that is in your bedroom or bathroom at home. It is definitely not in the dining room. (Nor school washrooms.)

In the Victorian period, people were discouraged from masturbating, which was sometimes called self-pollution. Graham crackers and Corn Flakes were actually created to keep people from masturbating. Apparently delicious food stimulated sexual desire. (Think of that the next time you eat a sexy breakfast cereal!)

Not everyone likes masturbating. Some people don't feel any desire to touch themselves. That's okay.

It's also okay to like touching yourself in private. It can be a healthy way to learn about your body and how it works.

Often, people with penises touch themselves more than those who have vulvas. This is probably because penises stick out more than clitorises! People with penises also get used to handling them because they touch them to pee. No wonder the penis gets a lot of attention!

Whether you have a penis or a clitoris, you can use your fingers to explore yourself in your bed or in the bath. What do you have? What does it feel like?

Masturbation Basics

People with penises often enjoy putting their whole hand around their penis and pumping up and down until they ejaculate. It can be helpful to use some gentle hand cream or other lubricant to keep things moving without friction.

People with vulvas may find touching, circling, or pressing the clitoris glans or head feels good. Some folks may find indirect pressure better than touching the very sensitive glans.

A gentle lubricant may also help things feel pleasurable, although the vagina often produces its own lubricant and

some people dip a finger in there for lube. Tugging on the labia also may feel good.

Obviously, there are many ways to touch your genitals. Each person will find ways that appeal to them.

Some people also like to explore their genitals with objects, even trying electric toothbrushes.

Those who have vulvas sometimes test putting things into their vagina. If you are using things from around the house, make sure they are clean first and afterwards.

Other folks put things into their rectum. This can be dangerous. Unlike the vagina, which stops at the cervix, the rectum turns into the colon. And the colon goes up there a long way! If something gets lost in your colon, you may have to go to the emergency room to get it removed. And yes—it does happen.

Adults who experiment with things in their rectum often buy special sex toys that are safe to use in their bum. These objects have strings or large bases that stick out of the body.

While the anus, or your bum hole, may feel good when you touch it, when you're young it is safest to use only your fingers in this area. Sex toys are safe, but as a youth, it is hard to buy these—and parents or caregivers may not be willing to buy an anal sex toy on your behalf! If you have your own credit card or Pay Pal account, you're golden. (One of the benefits to online shopping.)

Some people don't like the idea of anything touching their bum, and this is okay too. It's all right to not like something.

If you touch the area around the anus, don't put the same finger into a vagina without cleaning it first. You won't die, but your vagina will thank you.

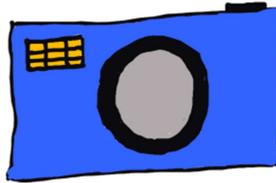
Lights, Camera, ACTION!

Some people like visuals called porn when they masturbate. Part of the problem in talking about porn, erotica, and SEIM is that different people use different definitions of all three!

Erotica tends to be stories or art intended to arouse sexual desire. It is often seen as more artistic than porn, although the artistry is all in the eye of the person seeing it!

Pornography is often described as media used to create desire. Sometimes, when people talk about porn, they narrow it down to hard-core acts. In fact, some people define porn as media that portrays violence against women.

However, it can mean various forms of sexual media. We will use this word more often just because it tends to be used by many people. But we are not limiting it to hard-core or violent porn. We also include ethical, feminist, and queer porn in this category.



SEIM is short for sexually explicit internet material. Again, it includes media that is meant to arouse.

Is there a big difference among all these words? It all depends on how people feel about materials that show sex. They may see erotica as okay and artistic, while things they don't like, they call porn.

Since there is such a variety of media that portray sex, it's too simple to say they are all good or all bad. It's kind of like saying all movies are bad, or all pictures are good.

Different people feel different ways about all sorts of materials. Some may be offended by certain videos, while they re-read *Fifty Shades of Grey*, a porn/erotica that went mainstream.

When you're young, it's best to not create any intimate media, whether that's homemade videos of sexual activities, or photographs of people without clothes. There are laws around child porn in Canada, which is seen as any sexual media of someone under 18—including cartoons.

However, watching porn does have some benefits if you're willing to think critically about the media you're seeing, and search out kinds that suit your needs. Some benefits to watching explicit material are:

- Learning about body diversity in feminist, amateur, or queer porn.
- Seeing many different genders and orientations in feminist, amateur or queer porn.
- Relieving stress if you enjoy and get aroused by intimate media.
- Enjoying humour, especially in amateur porn.
- Space to experience unusual desires without harming other people.
- Self-acceptance and self-confidence.
- Learning about the mechanics of bodies and sexual health.

If you explore videos or pictures that are sexual, keep in mind some of the following things:

- Many mainstream porn videos are staged and not real (kind of like how fast food burgers never look the same in real life as they do in commercials!).
- Many mainstream porn actors have large penises, bare vulvas, and large breasts.
- Mainstream actors are chosen because of their bodies and

abilities to have sex on camera in front of a whole crew of people.

- Condoms or dams are not often used, even though they should be used every single time you have sex.
- Consent is not always given, but it is essential when you're with an actual person.
- Some porn videos show people doing things that not all bodies will like. Before doing a move you saw in a video, ask your partner if it's something they'd like to try.
- Penetration is often the main goal in mainstream porn—but in real life, foreplay and warming up are essential to any kind of penetration. Plus, they can be enough on their own.
- In porn, people orgasm often and easily—and with a lot of screaming. In real life, not everyone screams. And not everyone has an orgasm with every sexual act.
- Not everyone likes semen all over their body or face, so never ejaculate on someone without permission (better yet, use a condom!)
- Anal sex can never be a surprise, or just started without any warm up—in fact, avoid anal sex until you learn how to do it properly (hard-core or mainstream porn videos do not always count as proper education!)
- Communication isn't always highlighted in porn, but is essential to a real sexual experience that is pleasurable for everyone.

You get to decide whether porn, erotica, or SEIM are part of your sexual life. If you have a partner, they get to have a say when you're together and about to watch something erotic.

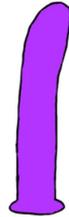
There is no shame in watching any media, as long as you are able to tell the difference between real life and what's shown on screen. Some people find porn or erotica stimulating. Sometimes they like to learn new sexual activities. It's all up to you and your values. Use responsibly.

Sex Toys

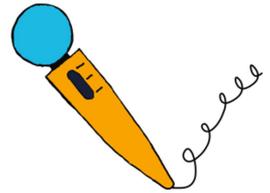
Sex toys or adult toys are just objects made for sexual stimulation. Generally, they are not available to youth. However, youth can get sex toys through older caregivers by ordering online or by picking up small vibrating objects at drug stores. There aren't very risqué things at the drug store, but you can find a few vibrating tools that may help you masturbate or bring a partner to orgasm.

Here are some common sex toys:

Dildo: hard penis-shaped object that can be inserted into vaginas or bums



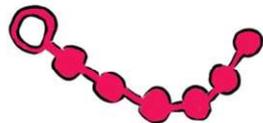
Vibrator: object that shakes and can be put in or against your genitals; comes in various shapes



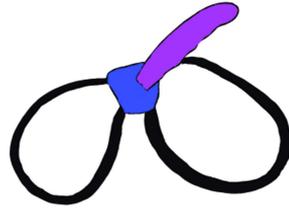
Butt plug: hard object that can be inserted into the bum, but has a flared base for safety so it doesn't get lost



Anal beads: hard object that looks like a big pearl necklace that is inserted into the bum for stimulation



Strap on: a dildo that is strapped onto a body with a harness so it can be used to penetrate another person



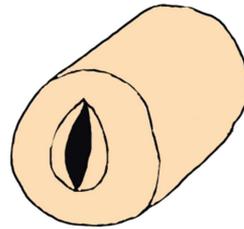
Cock ring: a ring that goes around a penis to help with erectile difficulties, or to help the person stay hard



Masturbation sleeve: AKA pocket pussy, an object for inserting a penis; mimics lips, vulvas, or anuses

It's super important to use all adult toys appropriately and safely, because they can spread infections.

If you are planning to share a toy with a partner, the easiest way to protect yourself is to use a condom on the toy. Just remove the condom and put on a fresh one before passing it to your partner. Use condoms for every sex act, including those you do with any kind of object.



Remember that lube can be used with adult toys, but you should never mix silicone lube with silicone toys unless you need an excuse to get a new toy!

Q & A

Let's cover some common questions about masturbation or self-love.

Can I masturbate too much?

Yes, but your body will likely tell you your limit! You may get a bit sore or chafed if you masturbate too much or too hard. Some people are more likely to hurt themselves if they masturbate with an object, so using hands or fingers may prevent you from being too rough. Keep in mind that masturbating should not keep you from your daily routine. For example, you need to go to school, eat, do your homework, and so on. If you find masturbating is keeping you from these things, consider cutting back. Also, keep masturbating private.

Masturbating won't make me blind, right?

Years ago, people tried to make kids believe that masturbating would make them go blind or grow hair on their palms. If this were the case, lots of people would be blind. And lots of folks would have hairy palms. There is nothing wrong with masturbating. There is also nothing wrong with *not* masturbating. You don't need silly myths as an excuse to avoid it.

Are there health benefits to masturbating?

There are! Some folks sleep better after masturbating. It can release tension and stress. It can help you relax or make you feel better about yourself. Sometimes, it can relieve menstrual cramps or headaches. It even helps the muscles in your pelvis get stronger.

Is it okay to masturbate if you're seeing or dating someone?

Anyone can masturbate, whether they are in a relationship or not. Sometimes, people masturbate together and learn more about their bodies.

Is it okay to fantasize while you masturbate?

Totally! It's a great way to think about what you like. Some

people think of different people and different situations. Some people even imagine other genders than what they are normally attracted to.³⁴ It's all fair game. Fantasies are just that. They do not have to be real.

Can I bend my penis the wrong way?

Yup! It's important to avoid bending an erect penis too much in the wrong direction (you'll know when you feel the wrong direction!) It might snap and break the thin lining that keeps the blood in your penis. This can result in a broken penis. It's not fun and requires surgery. Penises don't just break, but use some common sense and listen to your body.

What happens if your parents walk in on you when you're masturbating?

It is definitely an awkward situation. But masturbating is healthy and nothing to be ashamed of if you are doing it in private. If they have already caught you, then you may have to sit down with your parents to remind them you're going through puberty and need some privacy. If you have a lock on your bedroom door, use it so no one can walk in on you. If you have no lock, come to a mutual agreement with your parents to knock before entering a bedroom. It won't fix your current problem, but will help in the future. If you're feeling bad, consider watching *American Pie* (1999) for the ultimate in embarrassing masturbation scenes.

Can you masturbate while having your period?

Sure! Worried about fluids? Take a long bath and masturbate (though be prepared for parents to wonder what's taking so long!) If you wear a tampon or menstrual cup, you won't have to worry about fluids at all. Orgasms during your period can even help cramps.

³⁴ Fantasies do not necessarily change your orientation. It's up to you to decide your orientation based on who you want to be your partner.

What if I masturbate too much and can never have sex with a real person?

Masturbating and having sex with another person are two different things. Learning about your body through masturbation can actually help you when it comes to having a partner. You will know some things you like or don't like.

Can watching porn while I masturbate give me erectile dysfunction or a limp dick?

Some people report that masturbating to porn videos makes it difficult to have sex with a live partner. If you are concerned you may find it challenging to be with a partner, reconsider how you masturbate. You might want to take a break or use different inspiration for masturbating. Maybe use a fantasy in your head instead of a video. Often, though, people are ashamed of masturbating to porn. If you don't feel right watching porn, then don't do it. If you enjoy it, don't shame yourself. Some partners even watch porn together if they both consent to it. The biggest dangers of watching porn include:

- Accidentally watching something that has someone under 18 in it (child pornography is against the law, even cartoons!).
- Getting a computer virus or spyware.
- Learning about sex from videos that do not portray real relationships or even realistic sexual activities for all bodies.
- Being exposed to sexual assaults and other violence.

I sometimes fantasize about violent stuff. Is that wrong?

Fantasies are different from real life. If your fantasies are different from your beliefs or how you live your life, don't stress over them. The important thing is how you live your

life in the real world. If you *do* feel as though you'd like to do something violent to a real person, talk to a mental health pro before something bad happens. Older folks may act out scenes that seem violent, but are only done with the *strict consent* of all parties. These activities are sometimes called kinky or **BDSM**, among other things. They are generally not meant for young youth. Proceed with caution and proper education.

Why do people use anal beads and butt plugs?

Some people like the feeling of things in and around their bum. It is considered an **erogenous zone**, or an area that feels sexy. Anal beads and butt plugs are just specific sex toys that are safe for the bum. The beads look like a large necklace with a string. They are inserted into the bum and pulled out for stimulation. A butt plug is placed into the anus for a feeling of fullness. Some vibrate.

What is mutual masturbation?

It means masturbating with a partner. It could mean touching your own genitals in front of them, or touching theirs.

Can you use condoms while masturbating?

Sounds like a great way to get used to putting on condoms! It also makes clean up easier. Socks are also a traditional way to catch semen, although the laundry



person may get a surprise! You may kindly want to use paper towel instead (tissues just stick to the penis and semen).

What kind of cream can you use for masturbating?

Your genitals may be sensitive to strong perfumes or creams. If the rest of your skin is sensitive, you can assume your genitals are sensitive as well. Go with something perfume free and gentle. You could also use a bit of canola or olive oil from the kitchen. Just remember oils never go with condoms.

I masturbate until my hand gets tired, but I don't feel an orgasm or relief. What's wrong with me?

Perhaps nothing! Some bodies take a while to have an orgasm, or they might not orgasm at all. If you are on any medications like an antidepressant, they might be to blame. Some bodies are just wired a bit differently, too. You can purchase sex toys online or at a drug store to help if your hand gets tired. It can be challenging to get toys as a youth because you need a credit card for ordering online, and most stores won't let anyone under the age of 18 check out the adult section. Some drug stores do have vibrating options alongside condoms if you want to check them out (and maybe pay for them at the self-checkout).

Bow Chicka Wow Wow

Okay. Let's talk about sex. The big It. The old wink-wink nudge-nudge.

It's important to go over sexual activities because not everyone knows what they are even if they pretend to have the facts. We should also know that sex is not just about penises in vaginas. If there are any assumptions about sex, it's that sex is about a penis going in a vagina and that's all there is to know.

Obviously, some sex does focus on penises and vaginas. It's okay if people like to have sex this way, but we want folks to know there is more to life than putting a penis into a vagina. However, we will cover this activity first because it is the stereotypical activity everyone links with the word "sex".

Vaginal Sex

When people talk about sex, they often mean vaginal sex or vaginal intercourse. If this is your only view of sex, you may get confused about how two people who have the same genitals have sex.

Vaginal intercourse is literally what happens when a penis

goes into a vagina. This is pregnancy-making sex, since the penis squirts semen into the uterus if no birth control is used.

It is probably the more traditional view of sex, since some folks believe people should only have sex for reproductive purposes. (Keeping in mind that many people believe sex is important to feeling good, and/or enhancing your bond with your partner/s.)

Telling you that a penis is going into a vagina doesn't really describe what happens when someone has vaginal intercourse, so we'll go a bit deeper (pardon the pun).

Although many porn videos may suggest otherwise, vaginal intercourse requires a little more effort than just inserting a penis and going at it.

First, the person with the vagina should be warmed up. Penetration is much more comfortable if the person with the vagina is turned on, wet, and relaxed.

Different people are turned on by different things. They may want to be warmed up with a finger or tongue (we will discuss oral sex in a later section). They may want their breasts or chest touched, or their bum. It's important to know what parts of their body feel good when touched. Is it an ear? The neck? The small of the back? It's different for every body.

Some people call this warm up **foreplay**. It assumes that putting the penis into the vagina is the goal, so anything before that is just getting ready.

If the person with the vagina doesn't make enough natural lubrication, it's important to use artificial lube. Most water-based or silicone lubes are safe to use with condoms (and you should definitely be using condoms!)

Before the person with the penis can do any penetrating, they need to be erect. They also need to be erect before they can put on a male or external condom. Foreplay is also good for people with penises!

Sometimes, both partners can have an orgasm before they try any kind of penetration. An orgasm can help the person with the vagina be relaxed and wet, while an orgasm can help the person with the penis last longer. Young penises sometimes come to orgasm very quickly because they are so excited.

There are many positions that people use when they are having vaginal intercourse. The most familiar is probably the missionary position. This means the person with the penis is on top, while the person with the vagina is on their back. No studies have been done to confirm whether missionaries actually have sex in this way.

Many positions exist. Resources and magazines can offer tips on different poses. There's always the traditional *Kama Sutra* from India. Another great resource is *The Guide To Getting It On* by Paul Joannides. Some moves may be for advanced users or those who are very flexible. Some moves may be necessary due to the different ways we all use our bodies.

Generally, once a penis is in a vagina, both partners move or thrust their bodies so the penis goes up and down in the canal. This is why we use lube—slippery is good while friction is bad (and breaks condoms!)

Since vaginal sex can pass a number of sexually transmitted infections, condoms should be used every time.

Vaginal sex can also include toy insertion. If someone straps on a dildo (and it becomes a “strap on”) they can

penetrate anyone's vagina or anus.³⁵

Keep in mind that it can be difficult for people with vaginas to have an orgasm through penetration alone. It can happen for some folks, although other people need stimulation of the clitoris during penetration. This could be with a finger, a different position, or a vibrating object. It is not a sign that someone with a penis is not big enough or strong enough to make them orgasm. It is how the system is often built.

Anal Sex

Some couples enjoy anal sex. There is a myth that anal sex is only done by gay men. Maybe they assume that if someone doesn't have a vagina, the anus is the next best thing.

The reality is that anal penetration is an activity done by all sorts of couples, including those that are straight.

The anus or bum can be entered by a penis, finger, hand, or toy. This means all genders can be penetrated or do the penetrating.

Why do people have anal sex? The anus, or bum, is a zone that can feel good when touched. People with prostates can also be stimulated by action in the bum.

Some folks feel uncomfortable with their anus or bum area, and that's okay. Other people may enjoy touching or penetration. That's okay too, but it's important to be safe.

The anus and rectum³⁶ are not as flexible as a vagina. And

³⁵ Don't forget the lube.

³⁶ P.S. The anus is the opening or door while the rectum is the entryway or lobby where poop makes its last stop before leaving the body via the anus.

remember how the vagina still needs to be warmed up? Plus, you definitely need to wrap up with a condom for anal sex because the tissues there are more likely to tear than vaginal tissues under typical circumstances.

Relaxation is essential to any kind of bum play. If someone isn't relaxed enough, there could be pain or tearing. And tearing increases the risk of infection.

The rectum doesn't lubricate itself like a vagina, so lubrication is a must for any kind of action in the back. Water-based or silicone lubes are available. Look for those specifically designed for anal sex, but make sure they are safe to use with condoms. And never use numbing lube, either. If you have to use numbing lube to have anal sex, you shouldn't be having anal sex.

When using things around the anus, remember that the colon goes up inside your body a long way. Never use a toy for anal sex unless it is a purpose toy with a flared base or string. You may lose objects inside the colon. This involves a trip to the emergency room to retrieve it. Try explaining *that* one to the triage nurse!

If a condom comes off inside your partner, don't panic. It is smaller than a toy and should come out on its own or during a bowel movement or poop. If it doesn't come out, you may want to see a health care provider.

There are three rules for anal sex:

1. always use lube
2. always be relaxed
3. always use bum-approved toys that won't get lost in your colon

If you cannot follow these guidelines, reconsider anal sports.

Oral Sex

Oral sex is just what it sounds like—sexual activity involving the mouth.

Using your mouth to stimulate another person's genitals or anus is oral sex. When it is done on a person with a penis, we often call it a blow job, fellatio, or giving head. When it is done on a person with a vulva, we often call it cunnilingus, eating out, and so on. Rimming is oral sex with an anus. It's also called **anilingus**³⁷.

A blow job is probably the worst name for oral sex on someone with a penis because there really is little blowing involved. Often, the person puts the penis in their mouth. They either suck on the penis or use their tongue to stimulate the head. There are many ways people like their penises touched, so it's important to ask your partner what they prefer.

Oral sex on someone with a vulva means licking, sucking, or flicking the clitoris glans with the tongue. Again, different people will appreciate different motions from someone's mouth.

Since infections can be passed by oral sex, you should use a flavoured condom for blow jobs and dental/oral dams for oral sex with a vulva or anus. The flavoured options are a little more fun and taste better than traditional condoms. The important thing is using protection for every sexual act.

Even sandwich wrap is better than nothing for oral sex (but don't think sandwich wrap and grocery bags will work as

³⁷ Latin for licking butt. Seriously. I can't make this stuff up.

condoms for intercourse).³⁸

Manual Sex

While we've discussed vaginal, anal, and oral sex, we haven't talked about fingering and handjobs. Fingering is the term typically used in relation to people with vulvas, while handjobs is the slang used for people with penises. Both terms mean using your fingers or hands to explore another person's genitals. It can also be called manual sex.

If you don't have protection, manually stimulating and pleasuring your partner can be a great way to avoid pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections. To be extra safe for any intimate touching, you can use latex or nitrile gloves. Generally, you need gloves if you have any cuts on your hands or fingers. If you are cut free, you are not likely to catch much from your partner.

You can explore each other with your clothes on or off. Sometimes this is part of foreplay. Sometimes it is the main activity.

Things to remember:

1. You need permission from your partner to ensure they want this activity to happen.
2. Lube is helpful for every kind of sex including manual sex.
3. Start slow and see where it goes.
4. Have clean hands and wash after use.
5. Avoid having broken jagged nails that hurt your partner.

³⁸ No research has been done on whether plastic bags prevent the spread of viruses like HIV. Also, think of how most grocery bags tear easily when they are full of groceries. You don't want that happening during sex!

Other Sexual Activities and Intimacy

We have talked about the Big Three—vaginal, anal, and oral sex. We've also mentioned manual sex. Now we are going to remind people that intimacy isn't always focused on genitals.

Different things can be erotic or sexy, including making out, touching breasts or chests, or caressing body parts.

The cool thing about these other activities is that you are not usually at risk for an unplanned pregnancy or sexually transmitted infection.

While these things are often lumped into foreplay, they can be enjoyable on their own. Sometimes, we are so focused on the outcome (penis in a vagina) that we forget humans have lots of areas on their bodies that feel amazing when touched.

If someone becomes paralyzed, for example, they may lose sensation in their genitals, but still become turned on by other things. They may enjoy someone blowing warm air into their ear. Or they may enjoy kisses on their neck.

Be creative. Intimacy is more than just erect penises going into wet vaginas. There is more to sex than that.

First Times

How will you know if you're ready to have sex, or to be intimate with another human?

There are some things you should consider before

approaching your first time—or even your second time. (After all, you don't become an expert on the first go!)

Are you ready to use protection from infections?

Condoms and dams are a must for every single sexual activity. Anyone can get condoms and dams, and learn how to use them properly. Try a YouTube video if you need visuals on how to use one.

Are you ready to prevent pregnancy?

If you or your partner could become pregnant, consider a form of birth control along with a condom. That way you're doubly protected!

Can you go to a doctor or nurse practitioner about your health?

People who have sex need to stay healthy by checking in with their doctor or nurse practitioner, whether that's by taking an STI test or asking for a birth control prescription.

Can you ask for consent?

Is your partner of legal age? Can you ask your partner for specific things, like whether you can kiss them or suck on their penis? If you aren't able to communicate about sex, consider waiting until you can.

Can you give consent?

Are you able to give consent to your partner? Are you of legal age to consent? Are you able to ask for things that you like?

Are you doing it because you want to? Or because you have to?

You never have to have sex. If someone threatens to break up with you because you won't have sex with them, consider letting them go. You don't need that kind of pressure from someone who is supposed to respect you. Never have sex because someone guilted you into it. And never have sex because you think everyone is doing it—they aren't! Some teens are sexually active, but not everyone is. Decide on your own timeline.

Do you feel comfortable with that person?

Sex can get messy and awkward, especially the first time you are with a new partner. Be comfortable with yourself and that person. A sense of humour also goes a long ways!

Tonsil Hockey & Hickeys

We've talked a lot about sexual activities but kissing is a topic that deserves its own section. Kissing may be something done before other activities (especially if someone sees sex as the goal) but it is something that can be done on its own.

Same as you would ask a partner what they like about any sexual activity, it's important to find out how they like their kisses. Do they like them sloppy or passionate? Soft or wild?

French kissing is the term used for any tongue action that happens in another's mouth. If you explore your partner's mouth with your tongue, you are French kissing.

Here are some tips towards having a happy make out session:

- Ensure your dental hygiene is good, whether by brushing or freshening up with some gum.
- Flossing = level expert.
- Follow your partner's body language.
- If you want to kiss someone, ask them, or lean in to their face and make eye contact.
- Start light, exploring your partner's lips gently.
- Don't be too aggressive with your tongue unless your partner has told you they like this—approach carefully and playfully.
- Remember to breathe—try breathing through your nose while your mouth is busy.
- Keep track of your nose and either use it with purpose, or try not to hit your partner with it.
- If you wear glasses, you may want to take them off.
- Don't give them a hickey unless they want one (hickies come from sucking on another person's skin, usually their neck)
- Remember that you can kiss other parts of their face or neck, not just their lips.
- Try it with your eyes closed or open.
- Touch their hair or face, as seems appropriate.
- Only touch other parts of the body if your partner seems into it and has given you permission
- Be careful if you have braces (tongues and lips might get hurt on the metal, but you rarely have to worry about braces sticking together!).

Q & A

The following are some common questions we get asked

about sexual activities.

Can you get pregnant from anal sex?

Technically, yes. If semen seeps away from the anus and into the vagina, an unplanned pregnancy could happen. It's not likely, but it's possible.

Is anal sex dangerous?

It can be. You might catch an infection like HIV, especially if you are on the receiving end of semen (also called being the **receptive partner**). And if you aren't relaxed or using enough lube, you might be at risk of tears (tares not teers). Although a lot of research has not been done on anal sex, no long term damage should happen if you do it responsibly. Follow the three rules every time! Revisit them if you forget.

Is rimming risky?

Since you can catch stomach and bowel stuff through oral sex on an anus (along with STIs) always use a dam! If you don't have a dam, at least use sandwich wrap (it's better than nothing). Ideally, if your partner hasn't been feeling well (for example, has had the diarrhea) then try a different activity, not rimming.

It hurts when I pee—do I have an STI?

Maybe. Urinary tract infections can also cause pain during peeing. They aren't technically a sexually transmitted infection, although sexual activity can be a risk factor for a UTI in people with vaginas.

What if anal sex hurts?

Slow down. Instead of trying to insert something big like a penis or toy, start with a well-lubricated finger. Try to relax. And if it doesn't feel right, it's not meant for that particular moment.

Is there any kind of prep for anal sex to make sure there is no poop?

You may come into contact with poop during anal sex—so be forewarned! If you need to have a bowel movement, it may not be a good time to try anal sex. Otherwise, a bath or shower should be enough preparation. Some advanced users do enemas,³⁹ but don't consider that a rookie move.

Is it okay to use numbing lube to cut down on pain during sex?

No. No, no, and no. You should listen to your body's pain signals, especially during anal sex. Please. If you are hurting, try more regular lube and relaxation—or try again later.

I can't come to an orgasm. Am I broken? Or uptight?

Some people do not orgasm without great effort, and that's okay. Sometimes you need patience. Sometimes you need sex toys to help out (for example, something vibrating can help a hand from getting tired!). It's okay to not have an orgasm every time you do a sexual activity. But it's also okay to want one. If you take any medications, ask your doctor or pharmacist if they can affect your ability to orgasm or get aroused. Antidepressants are one common drug that can make it hard to have an orgasm or get turned on, especially when you start taking them. (You're also allowed to ask your doctor or nurse practitioner to find you an antidepressant with side effects that you don't mind.) Some physical disabilities can change how we have orgasms too.

³⁹ It's like a bath for your rectum. You might do an enema if you're constipated, because it encourages pooping—hence why it's used in preparation for some people's anal activities. If you're thinking of trying any kind of enema, ask your health care provider first.

Is it okay to choke people or be choked to make the orgasm better?

This is the one activity we don't recommend. You need oxygen to breathe and live. Please do not try activities that involve choking. Buy a sex toy instead if you need to spice up your sex life.

What if my partner doesn't want to perform oral sex on me?

Oral sex isn't for everyone. If you feel it is important to you, you can take it into consideration when deciding whether you want to see someone.

If my partner ejaculates or cums into my mouth, should I spit or swallow?

Since STIs can be passed through blow jobs, condoms should be part of the deal. Then you don't have to worry about spitting or swallowing. Otherwise, it is a personal preference whether someone wants to spit out semen, or swallow it.

What is BDSM?

It is sexual activity or roleplaying involving bondage (tying someone up), discipline (maybe spanking), dominance and submission, sadomasochism,⁴⁰ and other related things. These are activities that may get rough. However, if people want to discover BDSM, they need to be educated on safe practices. There are communities of people who explore these things together. Safety is number one. Anyone who does BDSM must know what they are doing and have the consent of anyone involved. Because there are risks with rough activities, youth should not engage in them when

⁴⁰ Sadomasochism is the receiving or giving of pain or humiliation. This could include whipping or spanking. Tickling is also included!

they are first discovering their sexuality. Learn Sex 101 first, then enrol in advanced classes.

What is a safe word?

A safe word is used when partners are doing something a little more advanced—usually falling under **BDSM** and **kink**. If anyone agrees to do a sexual activity or act out a scene that involves roughness and/or fantasy, they need a code word for when someone is feeling uncomfortable, like saying “Uncle” when you’re wrestling and have been pinned down too long. That safe word means the activity needs to end because consent is no longer given. It is very important that people have a plan to communicate when things are too much for them.

Is it possible to get pregnant from oral sex?

No. Sperm need to get into the vagina and uterus.

Can I get HIV through oral sex?

It is definitely not as high a risk as being on the receiving end of anal sex. But it is possible. Make sure there are no cuts or sores in your mouth. And use condoms or dams! (Recognize the theme here?)

I can only come to an orgasm during oral sex. Is this normal?

Not every person, especially if they have a vagina, will have an orgasm as the result of penetration. Sometimes, people are more likely to cum as a result of oral or manual sex.

What does it mean to deep throat?

It means to take a whole penis into your mouth and partially down your throat. (This is only for people without a gag reflex.) There is no doubt some people want the bragging rights to own a penis that is long enough to go into the throat. The term became popular after a porn film

called *Deep Throat*.

Is it all right to fake orgasms?

If you're interested in having a healthy relationship with your partner, avoid faking orgasms. You should be honest with your partner about what makes you feel good and what doesn't. You will never get to experience pleasure if you pretend that everything's fine and dandy when you're actually uncomfortable—or just not feeling it. If you want to train your partner well, respond to things you like with compliments. They'll probably get the hint.

What is scissoring?

It is often done by two people with vulvas who rub against each other while their legs are locked together. This stimulates the vulvas and clitorises in a pleasurable way.

Is it possible for people to have multiple orgasms?

Yes. People assigned girl at birth may be capable of having multiple orgasms. They typically don't happen the same way in people with penises. The penis often needs rest between orgasms (it's called the **refractory period**). The older a person gets, the more time they will need to rest before getting back in the game. It's typically not an issue for youth. The refractory period when you're young might be half an hour. When you're a senior, it might be a day.

What is the best position?

It depends on the partners and what they like stimulated. It will also depend on body size and physical ability.

What is fisting?

Some folks like the feeling of a hand inside their body, whether that is in their vagina or rectum. However, despite its name, you do not just shove your fist into these holes. It

is an act that must be done gently and with knowledge, so learn more before ever trying it. Consider it an advanced activity and not something for a first date. Done wrong, it can be dangerous.

Is it normal to pass gas during sex?

Yup. Gas can come out of the anus, while queefs can exit the vagina. Queefs may sound like a fart, but aren't really a fart—just a little air escaping the vagina. They are natural, so try to have a sense of humour about them. Sometimes sex requires a sense of humour.

If someone becomes paralyzed, can they still have sex?

Yes! Some bodies can still have orgasms. They might be different, but sexual activity is something that can still be enjoyed. Have patience, but discover new ways to be sexual. People can even make or have babies if they are paralyzed, although it doesn't happen for everyone. Some people may need help from a fertility doctor. Did you know that some paralyzed folks can even give birth vaginally?

What are watersports?

It is just slang for using urine as part of sexual activity, like peeing on someone intentionally. Sometimes they are also called golden showers. Urine is actually sterile when it comes from a healthy person.

What is doggy style?

There are many slang terms for positions used when people have sex. Doggy style is a term that comes from how animals have sex. It often means someone is penetrated from behind.

Can you get herpes from cold sores on mouths?

Yes. There are two types of the herpes simplex virus

(HSV)—the kind that generally form on your mouth and the kind that appear on your genitals. However, they can be passed through oral sex if that person has sores or is contagious. If you are concerned, use a dam or condom for oral sex.

What does the term 69 mean?

It's slang for two people giving each other oral sex at the same time. It's supposed to be how two bodies look when they are facing each other's genitals. The 69 position can be challenging if bodies are different sizes and heights.

My partner wants to have sex more than I do.

What do I do?

Mismatched sex drives are pretty common. If you find a partner who wants to have sex the same time you do, consider yourself lucky! It's common for people to have different interests in sex—but ultimately, you have to come to an agreement about what works for *you both*. Talking about it is the only way to learn how much sex each of you wants. Find a way to meet in the middle—and have a sex life that fits both of you. Many relationships are about more than sex, but a reasonable schedule that both people enjoy is essential, too. If one of you likes sex once a year, and another enjoys sex every day, it may be hard to come to a compromise. Then you'll have to decide if you want to stay in the relationship based on what the other person prefers. Never let anyone guilt you into having sex more often than you want—consent is always necessary. And, of course, never guilt someone into satisfying *your* wants when they aren't game to have sex.

Sex hurts—could my partner be too big?

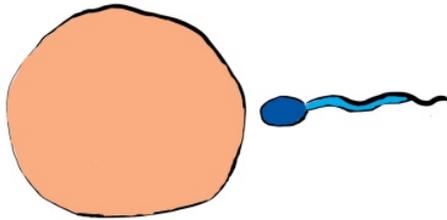
Sex might hurt for many reasons, as we've discussed. You might have anxiety (especially if it's a big penis you think will cause discomfort), you might not be warmed up enough, or you might not be producing enough lube. And

some folks have sensitive vulvas. First, try relaxing and lube. Many vaginas are stretchy and can accommodate different sized members and toys. Try a different position—longer penises may bump into the cervix. Some folks love this—some folks find it uncomfortable. If you have a neovagina, or surgically created vagina, you may need to talk to your health care provider about whether the depth is enough and you've been using your dilators properly. If nothing gets better with relaxing, lube, or different positions (or dilating), get to a health care provider. Just remember there is a solution—you aren't doomed to never enjoying sex with your partner.

Repro-Depot

One of the main reasons we go through puberty is to grow into adults capable of making babies. All species reproduce to be successful—otherwise they die and go extinct like the dinosaurs. Humans are not exactly going extinct, but we *are* animals that have developed clever ways to increase the population. Thankfully we don't have to make babies if we don't want to be parents. But it's important to know how our reproductive systems work.

Prior to going through puberty, we cannot start pregnancies. That's great—otherwise we would be reproducing long before we are old enough! Even still, our bodies are capable of reproduction years before most of us are ready to become parents.



Fertilization

Pregnancy starts when an egg cell meets up with a sperm cell. This is called **fertilization**. Fertilization generally happens after vaginal intercourse.

At one point, we thought the sperm cells were the active participants, and the first, bestest one penetrated the egg. Now there is some evidence that the egg actually chooses the best sperm to penetrate it. In other words, we're not 100% sure if the sperm or the egg does most of the choosing. It's probably a team effort and a bit of chance.

Bodies with functioning ovaries produce egg cells while bodies with functioning testicles produce sperm cells. Sperm look like twitchy tadpoles under a microscope.

There's a lot more that goes into starting a pregnancy, but these two cells are needed.

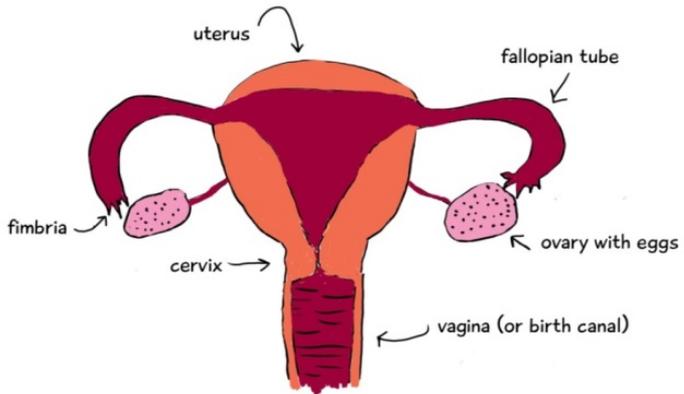
That's why some labs can start pregnancies outside of human bodies. All they need is an egg cell and a sperm cell. The fertilized **embryo**, which is the seed of a pregnancy, can then be implanted into a uterus.

Where do the eggs come from? They need to be released from the ovary. Ovaries release an egg or two once a month during **ovulation**. The egg is picked up by the **fimbria** (the fringes at the end of the **fallopian tubes**). The egg travels down the fallopian tubes in case sperm are swimming to meet it. If the egg unites with a sperm cell, the egg is now fertilized! It's a match! The fertilized pair will head for the uterus unless it's a tubal pregnancy.

A tubal pregnancy is one where the fertilized egg implants in the fallopian tube (which doesn't stretch) and not in the uterus (which does stretch). Needless to say, a tubal or ectopic pregnancy is always fatal for the embryo, and

sometimes fatal for the person who is pregnant if the tube bursts and causes non-stop bleeding. Tubal pregnancies require emergency medical attention to ensure the pregnant person survives. Symptoms include significant pain, bleeding, and more.

The fertilized egg is first known as a **zygote**, but becomes known as an embryo once the cells start dividing. The **embryo** becomes a **fetus** after about two months of pregnancy.



Twins

Typically, only one egg per month is released from one ovary or the other. If two eggs are released and both eggs get fertilized, the pregnancy may result in twins! Twins made from two eggs are called fraternal twins. They are different from identical twins—because they are literally two separate, fertilized eggs. They are the same as brothers and sisters—and as different as brothers and sisters.

Identical twins happen when one egg and one sperm divide to make two embryos. Because they start from the same egg and sperm, they look alike. Interestingly, though, they often have different personalities!

Miscarriage

It takes a lot of processes for embryos to become fetuses capable of living after birth. Sometimes, things don't go right and the person who is pregnant miscarries. This means that something goes wrong, and the embryo is released with the uterus lining. It comes out through the vagina. A miscarriage can feel like a very heavy, painful period. They can be frightening. If someone is happy about being pregnant, they may grieve the loss of their pregnancy.

Miscarriages are common. Some statistics say one in 10 pregnancies will end with a miscarriage. Some numbers put it as high as one in five pregnancies. Many folks who miscarry go on to have healthy pregnancies with later attempts. Some folks won't even know they miscarry, and it will come out as a heavy period.

Many miscarriages happen because there is something wrong with the chromosomes of the embryo. It is rarely the pregnant person's fault. However, avoiding drugs, cigarettes, and alcohol can help improve the odds of carrying a pregnancy to term.

Some miscarriages may require medical intervention, especially if all the tissue does not empty from the uterus. Pain relief is also needed for comfort. Seek medical attention if you think you are having a miscarriage. Symptoms include bleeding and passing tissue, as well as feeling unwell and dizzy.

Abortion

When someone does not want to complete their pregnancy, they may choose to have an abortion. An abortion is legal in Canada, but for a long time, it was against the law.

Part of the controversy around abortion is that people cannot decide when human life begins. Some people think human life begins when the sperm and egg meet in the fallopian tube. Some think human life begins when the fertilized egg settles in the uterus. Others think life begins when the baby takes its first breath of air after delivery. People decide on abortion according to their own values.

Abortions are safe in Canada when done in hospitals or special clinics. A person can choose a medical abortion, which involves taking two drugs to cause a miscarriage. Another kind of abortion, surgical abortion, happens in a hospital or clinic. This usually involves having a suction device take the tissues out of the uterus.

Most abortions are done before the person is about 15 weeks pregnant. They are only done afterwards if the fetus has severe birth defects and will not live, or will suffer if it is born. It can also be done if the pregnancy is dangerous to the person's body.

People feel many different emotions after an abortion, although many people do not regret them—as long as they are not pressured into getting one. Research has shown that relief is a common emotion.

Adoption

There are three options available to people who experience an unplanned pregnancy:

1. Abortion
2. Adoption
3. Raising the baby

Adoption means carrying the fetus to term and delivering it. Usually, adoption happens right after birth. It doesn't happen before birth, because some people change their mind about adoption while carrying the pregnancy or giving birth. It's important that people know 100% they want to give up their baby for adoption.

Adoption can lead to a lot of emotions for the child and birth parents, or those that give up the baby. There can be a grieving process and regret about not being in the life of the child. Adoption is permanent, which means once birth parents have given up their rights, they will never get them back. However, this is exactly what some people want.

There are various options to the adoption process. Family can adopt your child. Or you can pick the folks that adopt your child. Some folks choose to remain relatively anonymous.

It's important to talk with someone you trust about which of the three options are best for you—and ultimately, what you can live with. It's your choice if you are carrying the pregnancy—even if you are 15.

There are pros and cons to all the options, but what matters is how they work for you.

Pregnancy

Pregnancy lasts about 40 weeks. Some pregnancies end earlier, some later. Generally, anywhere from 37 weeks to 41 weeks is considered a normal pregnancy. The date is calculated by knowing the first day of the last menstrual period (which will likely be ahead of conception because it cannot take place any earlier than ovulation). For example,

if you are considered six weeks pregnant from the date of your last period, the sperm and egg likely met four weeks back.⁴¹

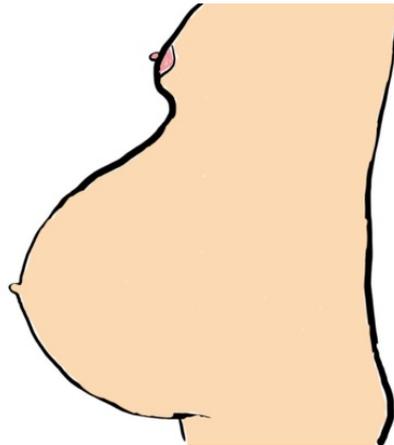
Babies that come earlier than 37 weeks are called premature babies or preemies. Some premature babies can survive as early as 22 weeks thanks to medical advancements, although they may face many health issues as a result of their early arrival and their fate is uncertain. About 24 weeks is considered the “age of viability” or the time when babies are more likely to survive.

As the weeks pass, the survival rates go up. Keep in mind babies born before 32 weeks have higher rates of death and disability.

There are many reasons why preterm births happen. One reason might be the person is carrying multiple fetuses. Dangerous, high blood pressure is another frequent cause of preterm births. Illnesses like Covid are another.

A pregnancy is divided into three sections or trimesters.

During the first trimester, many people have symptoms that bother them, like tiredness and nausea (morning sickness). It is also when most people discover they are pregnant. They may notice the above symptoms



⁴¹ Kind of messes with the mind a bit, doesn't it?

or that they have missed their period. They can take a test from a drug store to see if they are pregnant, then confirm it with a doctor, midwife, or nurse practitioner.

Many symptoms ease during the second trimester. The pregnancy is growing and many people will start noticing a distinct “baby bump” while the pregnant person may feel kicks and movements.

The third trimester is the home stretch. The baby bump may feel more like a giant mountain. Symptoms may start feeling worse again as the pregnancy takes up a lot of space and squishes the organs including the bladder. (That’s why people who are pregnant need to pee lots!)

It’s important to be as healthy as possible when one is pregnant. Ideally, people eat healthy foods, exercise, get lots of sleep, and avoid substances like drugs and alcohol. Doctors, midwives, and nurse practitioners help people who are pregnant with tests and routines that promote a healthy pregnancy.

Vaginal Childbirth

Most babies are born by coming out through the vagina. During labour, the cervix opens wide (to 10 centimetres!) to allow the baby’s head to leave the uterus.

Babies are pushed out of the uterus through a combination of the uterus squeezing (or having contractions) and the pregnant person pushing. If all goes well, the baby is born head first into the arms of waiting health care providers. Not long after that, the placenta will come out of the vagina.

Childbirth can be extremely painful, so many hospitals have drugs and treatment that can help cut down on pain.

Caesarian Section Birth

If something goes wrong with vaginal childbirth, or health care providers know vaginal childbirth won't be safe, the pregnant person has surgery to remove the baby or babies. This is called a caesarian section, named after Julius Caesar (and not the salad). Sometimes it is called a c-section or just a section.

The person who is pregnant is put to sleep under anesthesia, or more commonly, they are numbed so that they can be awake, but not feel the surgery. (FYI They put a curtain up so you can't see yourself being gutted like a fish.)

The surgeon cuts open the abdomen and uterus, bringing the baby into the world. The cuts are then stitched or stapled shut. It can be painful healing from this kind of birth (although tears from vaginal birth also hurt!).

There are more risks with a surgical birth, but sometimes they are needed to keep the baby safe or the person who is pregnant.

Birth Control

Not everyone wants to become a parent each time they have sex. (If so, there would be a lot of people in the world!)

Birth control is a prescription or routine that helps people avoid pregnancy. Sometimes birth control is called contraception. Birth control has been around since the beginning of recorded history, but it was only in the 1960s that it became quite effective. In fact, until 1969, birth control was against the law in Canada!

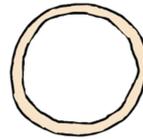
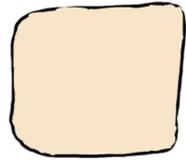
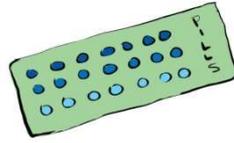
In order to prevent a pregnancy, we have to keep the sperm from meeting the egg. There are several ways to do this.

Birth Control

	Pros	Cons
the shot	effective, can reduce periods and related issues, works for three months	may reduce bone density, side effects take awhile to disappear
hormonal IUD	very effective, lasts up to five years, reduces periods and related issues, may reduce risk of some cancers	expensive (\$400+), may be painful to insert, requires professional, may pierce uterus, may cause ectopic pregnancies
the pill	easy to get, affordable, may help periods and related issues, may reduce some cancers	may cause side effects, easily forgotten, hormones may not be for everyone
the patch	similar effects as birth control pills, only need to remember once a week	similar side effects as the pill, may not work in folks who are larger
the ring	similar effects as birth control pills, only need to remember every three weeks	similar side effects as the pill, may fall out, may cause vaginal irritation
the implant	similar effects as birth control pills, lasts up to three years, very effective	similar side effects as the pill, may be painful when inserted, expensive
copper IUD	very effective, cheap over the long term, no hormones	may cause periods to be more intense, similar issues as hormonal IUD
diaphragm	no hormones, used only during intercourse, can be inserted before sex	not super effective, requires proper insertion, spermicide used with diaphragm may cause irritation
internal condom	protects against infections, can be inserted ahead of time, does not require full erection of a penis	may feel odd, may break or slip, requires proper technique
external condom	protects against infections, only birth control for people with penises, cheap or free or easy to find	may break or slip, requires proper technique, may interfere with erection
sponge	does not require prescription, no hormones, cheap	not very effective, may irritate vaginas, may cause toxic shock syndrome if forgotten inside
withdrawal method	better than nothing	pre-cum may contain sperm, doesn't protect against infections, person usually doesn't withdraw in time
fertility awareness	free, no hormones, can be used to conceive	requires abstinence or barrier on fertile days, requires strict monitoring, does not protect against infections

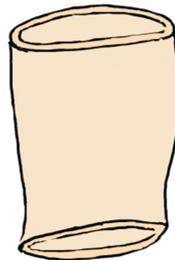
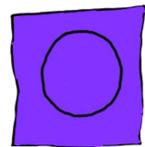
Hormonal

Birth control that uses hormones generally keeps the ovaries from releasing eggs. It mimics hormones bodies already produce. There are side effects from taking these hormones artificially, but for most people, these are minor. Changing brands can be helpful in finding a pill or device with fewer side effects. The birth control pill is the most common form of hormonal birth control people use, but there are also injections, patches, rings for the vagina, and intrauterine (IUD) devices that stay in the uterus. Some require more memory than others. People need to take the birth control pill every day while an IUD can last for years.

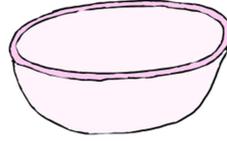


Barriers

Sometimes you just need a wall or barrier to keep the sperm and egg from meeting! A condom is a very popular way to prevent pregnancy (as well as sexually transmitted infections). A condom is usually worn on a penis. It collects the semen (which contains sperm) before it goes into the vagina. There are also



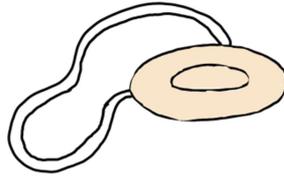
internal or female condoms which go inside the vagina, rather than being worn on a penis.



Some people use barriers like diaphragms that form a road block to the cervix. While diaphragms were an early form of birth control, they are not super duper effective even to this day.



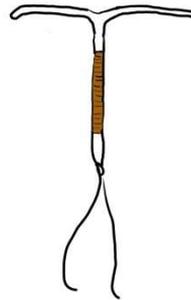
People have to insert them before they have sexual intercourse, then keep them inside until it is safe to remove them. A special jelly or cream containing spermicide (sperm killer) is often used with diaphragms.



Special sponges with spermicide can be bought for birth control. They are one of the few forms of birth control that do not require a prescription from a doctor or nurse practitioner. Please note they are not very effective.

Copper

The copper IUD doesn't fit in any of the other categories, but it can be an effective form of birth control. For some reason, copper and sperm do not get along. The copper acts as a spermicide. As long as a copper IUD stays in the uterus, the person is not likely to get pregnant. Like the hormonal IUD, the



copper IUD needs to be put into the uterus by a doctor. It stays there for several years until it needs to be removed by a professional. Never try to pull it out yourself.

Other

Although they are not as effective, there are other ways to prevent pregnancy. Sometimes they work for people. Sometimes they don't.

If the person with the penis pulls out of their partner before they **ejaculate** or **cum**, they will not release semen into the vagina. However, most people don't pull out in time. That is not very effective! This is called the withdrawal method. Used often enough, it might be called the minivan method.

Some people with scientific minds like to track their menstrual periods by checking their waking basal body temperature or seeing whether their cervical mucus is stretchy (which is a sign of being **fertile** or able to make babies). This method involves a calendar, careful planning, and abstinence when you are most likely to release an egg. This is sometimes called the fertility awareness method or FAM. *It is only effective if the person is 100% faithful to their routine. This also does not include the rhythm method, which is horribly ineffective.*

Please note some fertility tracking apps may not be accurate, so don't use these to plan or avoid pregnancy. Everyone's cycle is different, so an app may not reflect your actual timeline.

Permanent

If folks are 100% sure they do not want a baby, they can take a permanent step to remain child-free.

People with testicles can get a vasectomy. Each **vas deferens** is snipped or clamped, which basically shuts down Sperm Road! Any sperm which are made in the testicles are just absorbed into the body when they reach the end of the road.

People with fallopian tubes can get a tubal ligation. The tubes are snipped (or burned or clamped) and the egg can no longer travel from the ovary to the semen. The Egg Road also has a detour! (The teeny tiny egg is just absorbed by the body.)

Both of these procedures are permanent. Some vasectomies can be reversed for a high cost, but they are not guaranteed to work.

Things That Do Not Prevent Pregnancy

- Douching
- Having sex standing up
- Being on the bottom
- Having sex in a hot tub
- Having sex during your period
- Peeing after intercourse
- Hormone therapy
- Wearing socks with sandals
- Having sex for the first time

Q & A

Let's go over some of the questions people have about making babies—or not making them.

What's the best form of birth control?

It all depends on your needs. Some things to consider are the price, how often you take it, how effective it is when used properly, and potential risks. Discuss with your family doctor or nurse practitioner which options are best for you.

Is it true you can get blood clots if you smoke while you are on birth control?

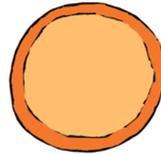
There is always a risk of blood clots when you are on hormonal birth control containing estrogen. Plus, smoking increases the risk of developing clots. Tell your doctor or nurse practitioner the truth about your smoking habits. They may advise you to take the birth control pill without estrogen, also known as the minipill. And, of course, there are several non-estrogen birth control options.

What is the best condom brand?

There isn't really a best brand. There are many kinds of condoms out there that work to protect you from infections and unplanned pregnancies. Read packages to make sure the brand meets your needs. You'll probably have to try some different ones to find a brand that provides comfort and pleasure, kind of like shopping around for jeans.

Why are there different condom flavours?

Infections can be passed to any **mucous membrane**, which is the slick skin found in the vagina, in the mouth, under the foreskin, and in the anus. This means that anything you can catch on your genitals, you can often catch in your mouth. Flavoured condoms are a good way of protecting yourself during oral sex. (Regular latex condoms aren't especially tasty.)



Can you use a male (external) and female (internal) condom at the same time?

Never use two condoms at the same time. The friction can cause them to break. Use just one and add lube to reduce friction.

Can more than one sperm fertilize an egg?

Technically, yes. But it results in a zygote that has too many chromosomes and the pregnancy doesn't continue. (A baby can only have half a set of chromosomes⁴² from each parent.) It is super duper rare for a baby to be born after this situation happens.

Is it true that you can't get pregnant if you pee right after sex?

No. There are no special tricks to avoiding pregnancy except abstinence or birth control. A penis ejaculates semen into a vagina, not the urethra, where you pee. These two systems are completely different. Urine will not wash semen out of a vagina. Showering after intercourse, or even douching, will not prevent pregnancy. In fact, douching may force sperm into the uterus, thus closer to any potential eggs. And douching increases the risk of ectopic or tubal pregnancies, which are fatal for the embryo and potentially for the pregnant person as well.

What is the morning after pill?

There are two different kinds of emergency contraception pills in Canada. One contains levonorgestrel, the other contains ulipristal acetate. They are taken after unprotected sex in order to prevent a pregnancy (they stop an egg from being released). However, they are not abortion pills, and cannot end a pregnancy. The pill containing levonorgestrel can be bought at any pharmacy without a prescription, although you sometimes have to ask for it at the counter. It ranges from \$15 to \$40, so shop around and ask for the generic version to save bucks. The levonorgestrel option may not work as well if you are a larger person. The second

⁴² Chromosomes carry genes, or the blueprints for our cells. You get 23 from the egg cell and 23 from the sperm cell to equal 46. Too many chromosomes can result in changes for the baby. For example, just one extra chromosome causes Down's syndrome.

pill, ulipristal acetate, works a little longer after sex—up to five days—and is thought to be better for people who are overweight, or over about 160 to 170 pounds. Unfortunately, you need a prescription for it. It is also more expensive.

I have a long clitoris, but a condom won't really fit on it. Does this mean I don't have to use condoms?

Although it's not a perfect solution, you might be able to use latex glove fingers, or finger cots (which look like finger condoms!) from any drug store. You can also get smaller condoms from some companies. If you can't use barrier protection, at least get tested on a regular basis for STIs, whether that's when you change partners or every six months. Medicine may also be helpful in preventing HIV.

If you are late getting your period, are you pregnant?

Not always. It is one of the early signs of pregnancy. But other things can make your period late. Stress, eating disorders, weight changes, lots of exercise, sicknesses, vaccines—all of these can affect when your period comes. Don't panic. Get a pregnancy test from a store (they are also sold at dollar stores) or from a sexual health centre, where they are often free.

"When I was 16, I wanted to go on birth control pills. I asked my mother about it and she literally ran down the hall and slammed her bedroom door never to discuss again. I went to the doctor on my own, but wish there had of been a Sexual Health Centre nearby at the time to have someone to discuss this with!"

- Anonymous, 45

I saw an ad on the bus for a clinic that offers free pregnancy tests and options counselling. Is it like a doctor's office?

It might be, but it might also be a crisis pregnancy centre or sexual health centre. Crisis pregnancy centres are run by religious groups that want to discourage people from getting abortions (which in their view are wrong). They get people in the doors by offering free services and pregnancy tests. They also help people with pregnancy and parenting. However, they will not refer people for abortions and will offer poor information or lies about abortion to keep you from getting one. Sexual health centres may offer you free pregnancy testing and options counselling as well, but it is often done in a judgemental free way. The best way to know what you're getting is to ask questions. Are they pro-choice? Do they have medical staff? Do they have trained staff? Do they refer for abortions? Be an educated consumer and ask away!

Is it true I can get a copper IUD to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex?

Yes! It is actually effective *longer* than emergency contraception pills, and does not require you to be a certain weight. The downsides include cost (about \$100 to \$150) and whether you can get an appointment with someone who can prescribe it and then insert it ASAP. It can work up to seven days after unprotected sex. The bonus is that you have effective birth control afterwards, too.

Can the birth control pill cause infertility, or make it hard to have a baby?

Nope. Only while you're on it. Once your pill wears off, you may become pregnant. The only birth control method that takes a while to wear off is the shot, which stays in your system for months.

Relationships

It wouldn't be a puberty guide if we didn't take a moment to chat about relationships—and their alter ego, relationships.

As we go through puberty, our relationships become more important to us. We are changing from a child dependant on our caregivers into an independent adult. Somewhere along the way, we have to learn how to be good humans and interact with the people around us in positive and productive ways!

There are lots of relationships we have growing up. Regardless of what kind of relationships we have, there are many ways to make them as healthy as possible.

Healthy Relationships

Almost everyone wants healthy relationships. (If you don't, it's probably best if you become a hermit.)

As humans, we are designed to be social, even though socializing may look different for some of us. You may be introverted and prefer your own company to large crowds or you may be extroverted and thrive around people. But all of us need human contact of some kind.

Here are ways you can make your relationships as healthy as possible—at least on your end. We can't always control how other people act.

Love Yourself

In order to have healthy relationships, we need to love ourselves—most of the time. We all have moments of doubt. But overall, you need to be your number one fan. Work on finding ways to show love to yourself, whether it's by doing sports, or enjoying something you really love. Sometimes we think having someone love us will save us from being down in the dumps, but it is really the other way around. Loving ourselves will bring people to us.



Communicate Openly & Directly

When you have something you need to say, state it clearly and directly. If you want something, ask for it. If you don't want something, say you don't want it. It's important to learn how to talk about things in a confident manner. And if you cannot be confident, at least pretend to be confident. This is what we call being assertive—letting people know your needs while respecting their needs. (On a related note, don't make people read your mind. They aren't a Magic 8 ball! And they will likely disappoint you when they don't read your thoughts properly.)

Learn to Set Boundaries

“Boundaries” is a term that gets said a lot, but what are boundaries? They are like fences. Good fences make good neighbours—and good boundaries make good relationships too.

When you set boundaries, you let people know how you expect to be treated. It can be a hard skill for some of us to learn, especially if we have low confidence or self-esteem. But it's important to let people know where we stand.

They're like relationship rules. It's important to have them, but also to be as confident as possible in sharing them with other people. Don't forget to follow with a consequence you can live with. (For example, unless you are strong as steel, don't threaten to never speak to your best friend again!)

An example of a boundary might be, "I will ignore any texts sent after 10 until I get up in the morning." Sooner or later, people will learn that you don't text at night. You can always respond to messages in the A.M. Boundaries you don't enforce usually don't work out, so stick with them even when other people protest.

If people don't respect your boundaries, you'll have to decide if it's okay to keep them in your life. You may want to keep them in your life, but spend less time with them. It's up to you. You decide on the deal breakers and whether you have to walk away if the person doesn't respect your boundaries. This can even include family.

Keep Personal Time Sacred

When we are young and in our first relationships, it can be hard to respect the other person's space because we want to be with them all of the time. The feelings that come from attraction can be very strong! But remember that in healthy relationships, people take time to enjoy activities they like doing alone or seeing friends and family. Not only will a little space be good for everyone, you'll probably have some new things to talk about when you finally get together!

Be Yourself

Sometimes we try to become too much like our crushes. If they like football, suddenly we think we need to like football. If they love science, then maybe we get into science. While there's nothing wrong with trying new things, you really have to be yourself to have a healthy relationship. If you love being independent, but start dating someone who wants to be more of a caretaker, you both could become quite unhappy fast. If you stay true to yourself, you'll be more likely to find a partner or friend who is compatible with you.

Never Expect Someone Else To Change

We can only change ourselves—we cannot change people if they do not want to work on themselves. It can be tempting to think that dating someone will change them. Our culture often thinks it's okay for women to work hard at changing a man—even if he's a real fixer upper. If you are with someone expecting them to become a different person, you will likely be very disappointed when they stay the same. No matter how much love is involved, some people just stay the same and that's on them, not you.

Remember Equality = Happiness

The best relationships are equal in many ways. You and your partner should be relatively equal in the grand scheme of things. You should be similar ages (at least while you're a teen). And you should both have similar amounts of control in the relationship. For example, if you have to give your partner your social media passwords when they won't even let you borrow their phone, then something is unequal about your relationship. In this case, your partner is trying to control you while not giving up control themselves. Think about what things like this mean to you. You will have different deal breakers than other people. (See the

section on Boundaries.)

Refuse to Tolerate Abuse

No one should have to tolerate abuse. Sometimes it means letting people out of your life. (If they refuse to leave, you may need to consult a trusted adult.) The most obvious cases of abuse include physical abuse, like hitting. But abuse can also include keeping control over someone, or saying nasty things to them. You can decide how many chances you give someone. But if they won't change and respect you, you deserve to find people who *do* respect you. (See above on "Never Expect Someone Else To Change".) Also, no matter how bad you feel for them, you don't have to tolerate abuse. For example, if someone has an addiction, you still don't have to tolerate any abusive behaviour. It's on them to seek help when they're ready and that may not be now.

Write Your Own Rule

What ideas do you have about making relationships healthy? Does it involve keeping a sense of humour? Or never lying? Put your favourite relationship rule down here.

Signs of Abuse

Many people say they will never be in an abusive relationship. Sadly, we judge people for getting into abusive relationships or not leaving. But it's actually very complicated.

Unfortunately, abuse can happen to anyone. Sometimes people pretend to be nice while they are wooing or trying to get someone into a relationship. Then things go downhill.

Sadly, pregnancy can be a time when you first notice an increase in abusive and controlling behaviour from your partner. It could be due to the stress of pregnancy, or jealousy that your attention will now be set on a little human.

The following signs suggest you may be in an abusive relationship. If you aren't sure your relationship is healthy, reach out to a reliable adult like your guidance counsellor or teacher. There are also non-profit organizations that provide support and counselling to people in abusive relationships, even if you're not 100% sure it is abuse, or are not ready to admit that it's abuse.

If you notice your relationship has developed some of these signs, please seek help.

1. Are you afraid of disagreeing with your partner?
2. Does your partner criticize you or put you down?
3. Have you been forced to do a sexual activity that you didn't want to do?
4. Does your partner always want to know where you are every second? And who you are with?
5. Does your partner want to control you by having your social media passwords, or telling you what to eat, or other things that make you feel uneasy?
6. Are you often accused of flirting with other people or leading them on, when you haven't?
7. Does your partner have a temper?
8. Has your partner ever used physical force or the threat of physical force to make you do something?
9. Has your partner threatened violence or suicide if you leave them?
10. Is there something about your relationship that makes you uneasy or unhappy?

Getting help might look like support, gaining confidence in setting boundaries, or other tools to help you explore meaningful relationships.

If someone threatens to commit suicide if you don't do something, let them know about options like crisis lines or mental health supports. It's not up to you to save them by continuing a relationship that is not healthy. That isn't on you. You come first. You can support them from a distance, but it's important they seek the help they need.

Bullying & Harassment

We've discussed abuse in our intimate relationships, but bullying and harassment can happen outside those relationships too.

Bullying is an old problem. Even though many schools have a no tolerance policy, bullying seems to happen often—usually away from the eyes of adults.

Bullying means someone is repeatedly hurting you, either through words, behaviours, or physical aggression like shoving or hitting.

Cyberbullying just means that the abuse happens online, either on social media, or through texts.

Whether it's bullying or cyberbullying, it can be cruel and painful. Some people have even hurt themselves as a result of bullying, or attempted suicide.

Generally, we talk about bullying and cyberbullying when it comes to youth. **Harassment** tends to be the term we use for adults. In the end, these terms mean someone is consistently being abused and it isn't right. We shouldn't pretend any kind of abuse is okay.

Victims usually have little way to defend themselves. They might be bullied or harassed for different reasons. They may be larger. They may be gay. They may have a unique nose. As you've no doubt seen bullying before, you can probably think of many reasons why someone is bullied. Usually, the reasons are things victims can't change about themselves—nor should they have to!

There are many bullies and harassers out there. Some may be unhappy with their lives. Some may have been bullied themselves. Regardless of why they do it, you don't deserve to put up with any kind of harassment.

What are some ways you can deal with bullying?

- Walk away from the bully or harasser if you can.
- Tell a trusted adult and get some advice on how to deal with it.
- Keep a journal or log of every incident, including when it happened. If you have to report it to the school or police, a record will come in handy.
- If it is safe to do so, stand up to the bully in your most confident voice (even if you aren't confident, fake it!)
- Stay calm, because many bullies are looking for a reaction—don't give them one.
- Take bullying or harassment seriously if someone comes to you for help.
- Set a good example by refusing to be abusive to other people. Don't put people down.

Sexting

What is **sexting**? It means using technology to engage in sexual activities. For example, someone might send a photo to their partner of themselves wearing no clothes. Or they might send messages about how they would like to have sex with you.

Sexting itself is not against the law. But if you are under 18 or the person in a photograph is under 18, you might break the laws around child pornography or child luring.

In Canada, child pornography is any image (including a cartoon) that shows someone under 18 doing sexual activities or showing their genitals in a sexual way.

People can be charged if they have sexual images on their phone, tablet, or computer of someone under 18.

It gets complicated when someone has a picture of themselves. Generally, these people are not charged with offenses around child pornography.

It is even *more* complicated if someone is in an equal, consensual relationship with someone and they send a naked photo of themselves to their partner. Usually, police are not charging these folks, either. (But it is still a risk.)



However, if that image gets shared without permission to anyone outside the relationship, police might get involved. Sharing includes just showing your friends the picture on your phone. It definitely includes emailing it to others or sharing it to a cloud where other folks can access it.

Sometimes people use naked photos to blackmail victims or embarrass them (like “I will send these to your parents if you don’t do what I tell you”).

Our society sometimes shames people who share photos—especially girls and women. You are not at fault if someone breaks the law and shares your photos without permission. Should this happen, seek out support from an adult like a parent, teacher, or school police officer.

It's probably best not to share nude photos at all if you are under 18 and have plans after school of being in a public job like teaching or policing. But if you get to the point you are exploring your sexuality through pictures, take some steps to remain as safe as possible.

- Keep photos of yourself on your own device
- Use passwords to protect your content
- Don't put your face or identifying features like tattoos or piercings in photos⁴³

Don't feel pressured to do it by the myth that “everyone does it” because not everyone does it. It's the same with sex.

However, your sexuality is a beautiful thing and nothing to be considered shameful. Until laws stop penalizing folks who are in consensual relationships, step cautiously.

Trafficking

Even though people don't think trafficking is a big problem, it does happen—even in smaller communities.

So what is trafficking? It happens when someone lures a person (usually a young person) into selling sexual activities against their will. The people who traffic other folks often

⁴³ This doesn't protect you from law enforcement. They can still track where pictures come from. However, it does help keep your family or friends from knowing it's you in the picture so there aren't any awkward holiday dinners explaining it to Grandma!

use violence and threats to keep someone in “the game” which is slang for the world where this happens.

Traffickers target people who are vulnerable or at risk in some way. If you are at risk, you’re already having troubles that make life difficult. This means you might have family problems, or are poor, or have been suspended from school.

The criminals who traffic people play nice at first. Often they pretend to be a boyfriend or girlfriend. They give the victim presents, sometimes very expensive ones. Eventually, they try to get the victim away from their family by taking them on a road trip or vacation.

When that happens, the relationship goes bad quickly. Suddenly, the victim is asked to pay for those expensive gifts or even the trip itself.

Unfortunately, they are asked to pay off those things by doing sexual activities with the trafficker’s friends and even strangers.

If someone starts wooing you as well as giving you big expensive gifts for no reason, be suspicious. There is no free lunch. That means you should be cautious when someone you have only known for a short time buys you a new iPhone or wants to take you to a faraway province or city.

Traffickers threaten their victims to keep them from reporting to police, or leaving the game. They might tell you that sex work is against the law and you’ll get in trouble. Or they might say they will attack your family if you leave.

There are organizations that help people escape trafficking.

No one is safe from trafficking, but everyone can be aware that it happens. You might see a friend who is at risk

because she just received a new laptop from her boyfriend.
Or hear of a friend who is going to Toronto over March
Break for a vacation with his new partner.

Keep your eyes open and refuse to be taken in by fancy gifts
and trips. If you think someone is talking with a trafficker,
reach out to your school, parents, or support workers.
Remember: there is no free lunch!

Dating & Hooking Up

Adolescence can be a great time to explore your sexuality, even though you have to be on guard for people who mean you harm. It also can be terrifying to realize you are now old enough to do things like ask someone out to the movies. Or see if they want to go to the prom with you.

Depending on your parents' or caregivers' rules, dating and romance may have to look a certain way.

Many peoples' first experiences of dating include going to the movies (or some other outing) with a bunch of friends. It is often a way to learn more about dating while also getting your parents used to the idea you're growing up!

Flirting

Flirting is about having fun and showing your interest in another person, even if you don't plan to start a relationship. It may mean making a few light-hearted jokes. Or smiling when they look your way. Flirting includes body language—like lightly touching someone on the arm—that is warm and playful.

What is not flirting? Generally, it is not sexually explicit behaviour. Sending someone a **dick pic** or nude photo isn't

really flirting. On the other hand, giving them a wink might be considered flirting. It all depends on your culture and social norms.

The most important thing about flirting is that it is done with the consent of the other person. It should make both of you feel good.

If it makes the other person uncomfortable, or they do not respond back with flirting, they are not into it. Continuing to flirt with them could be harassment or stalking. Stop immediately.

Online Dating

Many people use online dating apps and sites to search for people they are interested in. Generally, you have to be an adult to register for these sites. But because you'll be in contact with people on the internet, it's important to go over some safety tips. These tips are helpful whether you meet someone while playing a game or actively search out an app to introduce you to new folks .

Stay relatively anonymous

Create an email or user name that doesn't have your actual name in it. Think anonymous like hotkitty6578 or radunicorn54. Avoid using your whole name so people cannot track you down easily. (But if you do it to commit any crimes, you can be tracked down by the authorities. It's not 100% anonymous, just a little discreet.)

Never give out your address

Ever. Not your civic address. Not your community if you live in a small town. Keep it general, like "southern Nova Scotia". Be careful the app isn't tracking your movements

or location. Turn off locations if you can.

Avoid posting pictures showing your house, car, or identifying features

This goes for any of your social media sites because people can easily track you across platforms like Instagram. The outside of your house should never be seen online. If you have a car, remember that it can be used to figure out where you live.

People aren't always legit

Anyone can be anyone online. Make sure you don't 100% believe everything someone says on the internet. It could be a creepy old man posing as a 17-year-old boy with a thing for romantic poets. Or the kid down the road.

If you meet, meet in a public place

If you plan on taking your relationship to an "in person" level, never meet at your house or theirs. Always meet in public, like at a coffee shop or the movies. Even better, have a friend who is willing to help you out in a pinch and rescue you from a boring date—or worse. Let someone know about your plans.

Never send money or financial info

Never. Ever.

Block if you need to

Sometimes, you just need to block people who are rude or abusive. Regret nothing in blocking them.

Use privacy settings

Remember to use privacy settings for apps and social media.

Do your research

Google them or do a reverse image search to ensure they are a real person.

Be careful in giving out your number

People will pester you for your number. Only give it to people you really trust. Otherwise, you will have a hard time blocking them. Use in app messengers only, or email.

Asking the Person Out

If you are interested in going beyond flirting with someone, you'll have to get around to asking them out.

For some folks, asking people out is easy. They can just say, "Hey I like you—do you want to go out?" For others, it is a nightmare.



No one wants to be rejected. But if you ask someone out, you are risking rejection. No matter how awesome you are, they may not be interested in you—and that's okay. If you're honest, you too aren't interested in everyone who comes along.

Step 1

Determine if the person is already in a relationship. Check out their social media accounts or ask a friend. Or better yet: ask them!

Step 2

Try flirting with them to see if the feeling is mutual.

Step 3

If the flirting is going well, come up with a date that might be appealing to both of you, whether that is a movie, dinner, or walk.

Step 4

Ask them out. Let them know it's okay to say no because there's no pressure. (Then make sure there's no pressure.)

Step 5

Take their answer with grace. If they decline your offer, be polite. Tell them they are welcome to change their mind, but you won't bother them anymore. If they say yes, enjoy!

Rejection

Not every rejection is because of you! Here are some reasons why people might say no to your offer:

- They are already in a relationship.
- They are not interested in people of your gender.
- They are not interested in dating at this time.
- They are not allowed to date.
- They are focused on their education.
- They have faced abuse and are not interested in getting into another relationship.
- They have just broken up with someone.
- They are having problems at home.
- They prefer people with a different hair colour or eye colour.
- They are asexual.

What other reasons could there be?

Handling Rejection

When you put yourself on the line and ask someone out, you have no control over how they will respond. They may be polite and decline with a “No thank you, I’m not interested.” They may be rude and reply with a “Not in a million years”.

Regardless of how they respond, it’s important to learn how to handle rejection.

First off, rejection hurts. Sometimes a lot. Sometimes you build up something in your mind only to discover it’s never going to happen.

Remember that some people are too nice to just say no. Read between the lines. If they decline your offer and say they are too busy, recognize this as a no. If they are really interested, they will let you know a time they are free.

If someone rejects you once, don’t ask them out again unless they show very clear signs they have changed their mind. No one likes to be hounded for dates or hook ups after they have said no.

No matter how awesome you are, you will face rejection in your life. You can’t control another person. And sometimes, they are just not into you.

If you’re really bothered by rejection, find a safe outlet for your feelings. Talk to your friends. Go for a run. Get into an activity you really like. Take time for yourself. And remind yourself that someday, someone will love you for *you*. Unfortunately, you have to kiss a few frogs before you find your prince or princess or non-binary royal.

When you need reminding that you’re awesome, make a list of things you’re good at. Refer to the list as needed to feel great about yourself.

Rejecting Kindly

Maybe it is you who is being approached by someone else. Maybe someone has asked you to the prom, but you're not really into that person.

Treat others as you would want to be treated. Be direct, firm, but polite. Saying, "No thank you" is enough. Sometimes people will annoy us and demand to know why they are being turned down. You don't have to justify saying no to anyone. "I am just not interested" is all you have to say.

If they don't take no for an answer, consider that a clue as to how they will treat you in a relationship. Anyone who respects you will take a no for an answer—even if rejection can be hard.

Q & A

Here are some questions about dating.

If a woman says no, doesn't that mean I should try harder?

Most people say no and mean it. If you feel your no wasn't genuine, you can always ask one more time. But pestering someone does not work—no matter how often you see it done in the movies or on TV. Respecting someone's wishes is far more attractive than begging them for a date.

I always seem to be in the "friend zone" even though I'm a nice guy. What's wrong with me?

Probably nothing. It can be hard to find a companion that meets your needs as well as their own. Sometimes it just doesn't work out. It doesn't mean you're not a nice guy. And being a nice guy doesn't automatically make you worthy of

a relationship or sex. It can be hard to be rejected or considered a friend when you want more, but the reality is *you* aren't attracted to everyone who comes along. Work on being the best person you can be, and you will find someone at some point. The most important thing is respecting other peoples' choices. That really makes you a nice guy.

What's an incel?

It's a term used by men who feel they are involuntarily celibate (not getting sex) as a result of outside influences. They may have a hatred of girls/women and the boys/men who date them. Much of this culture is online. It focuses on the idea that men are owed sex, and are being discriminated against in some way because they are not getting sex. No one owes anyone sex. Girls and women do not exist just to pleasure men. Some of the incel community can be very violent and members have been accused of causing mass shootings in the United States. Quietly distance yourself from anyone who thinks they are owed sex for any reason.

What's monogamy?

Monogamy is a term used when two people stay together in a relationship and don't see anyone else. They might consider themselves going out, going steady, dating, cohabitating, and so on. Many married couples, for example, are monogamous. (*Mono* means one whenever you see it on the front of a word.) Our mainstream North American culture sees being monogamous as the highest standard, but that is not the case for all cultures or people.

What is an open relationship?

An open relationship means people consent to see or date other people, sometimes even having sex with them. Sometimes it might be called an open marriage. However, both partners and their other partners must agree and

consent to this arrangement. If you don't tell your partner that you're in an open relationship, you are just cheating. Communication and boundaries are key to having relationships with more than one person. A similar word is **polyamory**, which means being involved with more than one person.

What is swinging?

It's an older term for couples who engage in sex with other people. It might be called wife swapping or husband swapping. Some people have found it improves their relationship, although like all forms of non-monogamy, it requires the consent of all parties involved. Communication is vital—as is protection against STIs. Typically, swinging involves parties or people in groups that engage in the lifestyle together.

Is a threesome the same as a thurple?

It can be. Both refer to relationships involving three people. As with any relationship, people must have consent and communicate freely to ensure the needs of all participants are met.

Consent & Sexual Violence

Consent is one of the most important things you can learn. Consent is a philosophy, a way of life—a way to interact with the bodies around you.

What is consent? *Consent just means you have permission to do something.* In this case, it is a sexual activity—or any kind of touch.

The person who is starting the sexual activity *must always ensure they have consent from their partner.* There is no responsibility for the other person to say no. Sometimes people think they should just keep going until they hear no. That would be wrong. Silence doesn't mean you have consent.

It's up to you to make sure your partner is able to consent. Sometimes, when people drink alcohol or take drugs, they are unable to think clearly. When they cannot think clearly, they cannot consent. You can't get a reliable answer from someone who is under the influence of too much alcohol.

What if they are asleep? Some people think it's romantic to touch people while they're sleeping, but technically that is against the law. When the prince kissed Sleeping Beauty, he was committing a crime—after all, she wasn't able to consent to his kiss!

Consent must be:

- Enthusiastic
- Given by an equal partner
- Not given under threat of harm
- Clear
- Judged from body language and verbal language
- Offered by someone who is awake and sober

Sorry, Prince Charming! What you did was pretty sketchy, even if your intentions were good.



Age of Consent

Ages matter when it comes to consent. If either partner is

under the age of 18, then there are various situations you need to know about.

In Canada, no one under the age of 12 should be sexual with their partner. This includes kissing. Obviously, masturbating by yourself is acceptable (in a private place).

If someone is 12 or 13, they may be romantic only with someone who is less than two years older than them. So, if someone is 12, they can legally kiss, touch, or have intercourse with someone who is 13.

It doesn't mean you have to have sex at 12! In fact, for most people, this will be too young. It is just the bare legal minimum at which two people can be romantic together in any physical way without legal involvement.

There are close in age exceptions for people who are 14 or 15. They can be romantic with someone who is less than five years older than them. So, if someone is 14, they can legally kiss, touch, or have intercourse with someone who is 18 and under. (Their parents may have different ideas!)

The Age of Consent in Canada is 16. But until you are 18, you still cannot

- Be romantic with anyone who is in a position of authority over you, including teachers, doctors, or even coaches
- Make or appear in pornography or intimate media
- Be involved in sex work, or selling your body for money or other things

Clear as mud, right? If you don't understand the age of consent, as well as the rules that apply if you are under 18, chat with someone who knows more about the laws. This could be your school officer, guidance counsellor, or teacher.

Enthusiastic Yeses

Years ago, we talked a lot about “no means no”. It was the most common phrase used to teach consent.

Today, no still means no, but we prefer to emphasize that everyone needs an “enthusiastic yes” before doing anything sexual.

What’s the difference?

Well, one is passive and one is assertive. If someone starts touching you without asking for your permission, you may find it difficult to turn them down. Perhaps you don’t want to make them angry. Perhaps you don’t want them to find another partner. There can be many reasons why a person wants to say no, but can’t.

It is far more assertive to say “Yes, let’s do it!” than to not say anything.

In our culture, we’re not taught to say yes to sexual activity. Quite the opposite. Some youth are encouraged to remain virgins until they get married. This works for some people, but not others.

It’s worse for girls and women. Women have been taught that nice girls don’t really like sex. It’s just something to keep men happy. Shut your eyes and think of England. You probably won’t enjoy it much.



But it’s okay to enjoy sexual and intimate activities—just as it is okay to decline them.

For any kind of activity, whether it's making out or touching breasts, people need an enthusiastic yes. People should be excited, turned on, and ready for the next adventure! Don't have sex with anyone who isn't excited to say yes!

Capacity to Consent

Consent can be complicated at the best of times! It can be even more difficult when you have a different ability, especially anything that affects your "capacity to consent".

The reality is that anyone can be sexual. It doesn't matter if you have autism. It doesn't matter if you have Down's syndrome. Some people think if you have *any* kind of unique abilities, you cannot consent to sexual activity. Wrong. You can also consent to a date with someone who doesn't have a disability.

There are no laws saying you can't consent to sexual activity, even if you have an intellectual disability. There is no legal checklist, so there may be some wiggle room as to what activities you may enjoy with a partner. Talk to the folks who help manage your care.

You may need extra support in learning the skills you need around consent. Hopefully we have covered many in this resource! If you need some practice learning skills, talk to your parents, teachers, or support workers.

There are lots of things to think about. You may want to consider whether you want to date someone who is disabled, or someone who is able.

It is also worth thinking about how equal your relationship is. Do you feel comfortable saying no to them? Are they able to communicate with you?

Disabilities and unique abilities can make consent more challenging—but it is not impossible.

However, you deserve to enjoy sex and relationships. This means saying yes to anything you and your partner want to do.

Slut Shaming

What is slut shaming? It's a complicated topic, but I bet your mind thought of certain things when it saw the word *slut!*

For one, we only use the word *slut* with girls and women. Occasionally, we may use the phrase “man slut” but that's pretty rare. Plus, it still emphasizes that men generally can't be sluts, so we need to make sure people know that sluts are typically women and this just happens to be the one exception.

It's important to look at the ways we slut shame people who are feminine.

As you may have noticed, our world is a bit odd. We refuse to talk about sex, yet sex is everywhere.

We often see girls, women, and feminine appearing folks as sexual objects. And yet if a girl, woman, or feminine appearing person is *actually sexual*, people shame them for enjoying sex. They may call them a whore or slut. If they are actually asexual or just tell someone no, they call them cold or frigid.

Needless to say, it's a confusing world to live in, because these people have to walk a fine line between being sexual enough, but not too sexual. Since humans aren't perfect, it's impossible to be the right combination.

Why don't we just stop shaming people? That would definitely solve the problem!

Sexualization of Femininity

Sometimes, people focus too much on the sexiness or looks of women. It can be this way with masculine bodies, but feminine bodies are typically the targets of being considered objects or valuable for their perceived attractiveness (and only for their outward appearance).

If you go to a clothing store, you will notice a huge difference in clothes for different genders. Boys' clothing is often quite baggy and relaxed, while girls' clothing shows more skin and is often tight. At Halloween, we really see this when women's costumes become "Sexy Nurse" or "Sexy Pirate".

What are the harms of being seen only as an object?

- Issues with one's mental health and self-esteem
- Wasting time on trying to look good 100% of the time
- Sexual harassment
- Sexual assault
- Eating disorders
- Plastic surgery
- Spending a lot of money on looks, including cosmetics
- Learned helplessness because you can only have so much control over your looks
- Making young children "sexy" when they haven't hit puberty yet

What can you do to fight sexual objectification? There's nothing wrong with someone appearing their best (although you get to decide how that looks!) But it's important not to see someone as a sexual object—but as a complicated human with wishes and dreams and fears, just like you.

Be a critical consumer of media. Question things you see. Just because they exist doesn't mean they always have to be

that way.

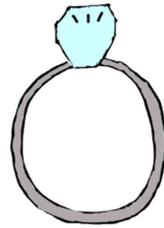
Virginity

Even though girls and women are seen as sexual objects in our culture, we often expect them to remain virgins until they are married. We may criticize them for having “too much” sex or having “too many” partners. Boys rarely face the same criticism.

Some people place a high value on virginity—literally. In the past, marrying a virgin was one way to ensure all children that came from that marriage carried the same genes. Unfortunately, anyone who didn’t fit that virgin ideal found it difficult to get married. When someone was considered a virgin, their financial value was considered higher. In some communities, marriage was a financial transaction—not just a joining of two people in love.

Some religions and communities encourage girls to pledge their virginity to their fathers with the promise they will not have sex until they are married. There might be fancy dress balls, or rings promising they will remain virgins.

By pledging virginity to Dads until another man comes along, it shows that the system is about belonging to men—not about any benefits of abstinence. While there is no shame in deciding to wait to have sex, it is also important to do it for *yourself* and not because you think you must do it.



Virginity focuses on the idea that boys take things from girls when they have sex. If girls don’t remain virgins, then they become dirty and used. Abstinence educators sometimes tell girls that with each partner they have, they

become a little dirtier—like a piece of gum that has been chewed by too many people. Another popular image is that a girl is like a rose, and each time she has sex, she loses another petal. (One stat suggests as many as 97% of folks have sex before marriage, so clearly, we shouldn't be focusing on abstinence-only education.)

It *is* true that you can catch STIs from sexual activity with many partners. However, having an STI doesn't make you dirty. And you can have sex with one person and still get an STI. If you practice safer sex, you can minimize your chances of catching an infection—no matter how many partners you have.

Virginity is complicated. Some girls see oral sex and anal sex as ways to keep their virginity. Some people see a penis in a vagina and “breaking” the hymen the moment when someone “loses” their virginity. Again the focus is on something that is lost, never to return.

If a girl is assaulted and penetrated by someone during a sexual assault, she may have mixed feelings about her value now that she may not be considered a virgin by her culture.

What about if you're not straight? Do you then count your first blow job or try at anal sex?

As you can see, virginity is a complicated idea.

If you wish to avoid sexual activity until you meet The One or get married, make that choice and own it. However, having sex or vaginal intercourse doesn't make a person lose their value.

Do what feels right for you.

Here are some things to think about:

- If you are penetrated with a finger, are you still a virgin?

- Do you think you will become a different person once you have sex?
- Do you think your virginity is a gift to give someone else?
- Is sex something that is given and taken away like an object?
- Is virginity more important if you're a girl or a boy?
- If you get a hymen rebuilt during surgery, does that mean you're a virgin again?
- Is virgin shaming related to slut shaming?

Dress Codes

In many schools, dress codes police the bodies of girls and women as well as feminine appearing folks. Bra straps are often seen as the worst thing you could possibly show, next to belly buttons.

One of the reasons this rule exists is because it *might distract the boys*.

Everyone is in control of their sexual desires. That's why we need consent for any kind of sexual activity! There is no reason for anyone to be overwhelmed by another person just because they are wearing a miniskirt.

In general, masculine clothing is not policed in quite the same way as feminine clothes. In some schools, boys may indeed be punished for breaking clothing rules—but rarely is it because they are too sexual and bothering the girls. It's often because there is a curse word on their clothes.

Schools and workplaces have the right to insist on a certain standard of clothing (especially professional workplaces), but it's important to be a critical thinker. Are the enforced rules fair to all genders? Or is one gender often targeted?

Sometimes as a youth, you don't have a lot of control over what rules adults make you follow. But it's okay to question rules and ensure they are fair for all bodies.

Toxic Masculinity

There is nothing wrong with masculinity. Repeat after me.
There is nothing wrong with masculinity.

What's wrong is *toxic* masculinity. It is an unhealthy version of what a real man is supposed to be.

Sometimes people think feminists hate men. Perhaps some do. But in general, feminism means thinking critically about gender roles, including how masculinity works in our world.

Here is a chart that looks at what toxic masculinity is and isn't. When you get to the end of the list, remember to write in or imagine what you think fits in each table, based on your own life experiences.

Toxic masculinity is

- Violent
- Using substances to deal with emotion
- Forcing boys and men to be strong, no matter what
- Failing to recognize that boys and men can be victims of sexual assault
- Assuming real men want to have sex all of the time
- Believing boys and men don't cry
- Deadbeat dads not supporting their kids
- Needing to be dominant
- Condemning anything feminine about a man
- Using words like gay or sissy to describe a man who doesn't meet certain standards of maleness
- Risk taking
- Avoiding doctors and health care
- Not asking for help or directions
- Add your example here

Health masculinity is

- Allowing all genders to express their emotions in healthy ways
- Helping others succeed by sharing social power
- Talking against sexual violence
- Positive parenting with children

- Not making homophobic or transphobic remarks
- Exploring gender safely and allowing others to do the same
- Asking for support when needed
- Recognizing that everyone needs help sometimes
- Making as many healthy choices as possible
- Thinking about risks
- Using positive tools like exercise and hobbies to deal with emotions
- Enjoying consensual sexual activities
- Calling out toxic masculinity
- Add yours here

As you can see, healthy masculinity is pretty awesome. It's the toxic violent stuff we need to get rid of. Healthy gender ideals are great for everyone. They allow us all the freedom to be ourselves.

The next time you want to criticize a boy or man for being like a girl, remember you are contributing to toxic masculinity. It makes no one a better man.

Sexual Violence

Unfortunately, lots of folks experience sexual violence. It's common. Too common. Statistics suggest that some of the people reading this resource have already experienced sexual violence or assault.

Sexual assault means someone has gone against your wishes (or not asked) and touched you in a sexual way. According to the Criminal Code of Canada, the laws we all have to follow, sexual assault can include anything done in a sexual manner from touching to actual sexual penetration. It might be a kiss. Or it might be a touch on the bum. These are both sexual assaults if done without consent.

Sexual violence is a broader phrase. It can include sexual assault, but it can also include other acts of violence. Most feminine appearing folks regularly face sexual violence. For

some, it may be street harassment, like whistles and inappropriate comments when they walk down the road.

Boys and those who are masculine can face sexual violence as well. Boys tend to talk about it less, because it really goes against society's concept of men being strong. If they were assaulted by a woman, they may be embarrassed that they were not able to fight off a woman. If they were assaulted by a man, they may be embarrassed and worried they are gay. People with penises can get erections or ejaculate even if they are being assaulted, which can confuse the situation. (It's not because they like it, but because their body is just going through the motions.) It can lead to baffling feelings.

Most boys and men do not report their sexual assaults. This is too bad, because it means we don't have an accurate idea of how frequent sexual assault is. We also don't get to support boys and men who are struggling.

Girls and women, as well as those who are feminine, often face more sexual violence than men. We still don't know for sure how many are assaulted because girls and women often don't feel safe reporting either. Trans and non-binary folks face higher rates of sexual violence as well as issues within the justice system.

Some youth are at a higher risk of being assaulted. It doesn't mean every person will be assaulted. It just means their risk is higher, for many reasons. Usually it means they do not have a lot of power in society.

People with disabilities—especially those who identify as girls and women—are more likely to be assaulted. The rate is high. Way too high.

People of colour (for example, people who are Black) as well as Indigenous folks are more likely to be assaulted. In Canada, many Indigenous women (approximately 4,500 that we know about) have been murdered or gone missing in

recent years as a result of their position in Canada's colonial society, and the government's actions of genocide.

Sexual assault is about power. Many people call sexual assault "non-consensual sex" without realizing it is not about sex.

Repeat after me. *Sexual assault is not about sex. Sex has nothing to do with sexual assault.* It is about forcing another person to do what you want. Often, the person who is assaulted has less power in society than the person who is doing the assaulting.

If sexual assault is about power and not sex, then it means dressing a certain way or acting a certain way *does not make any difference as to whether you will be assaulted.* It is never the victim's fault if they are assaulted. Usually, you are placed in a situation where you didn't have power and someone else did.

When you have power, use it responsibly.

Fight, Flight, or Freeze

We are animals. And as animals, nature has given us ways to cope with danger—these ways are built right into our body.

When faced with danger or what we think might be danger, humans resort to a system called fight, flight, or freeze.

Chemicals surge through our body in the hopes we will deal with the problem and survive.

Unfortunately, we don't always have a choice as to whether we will be a fighter, a flighter, or a freezer. Sometimes it isn't until after a traumatic situation that we learn how our body will react to danger.

Freezing is a very common way to avoid threats (deer love this technique). If you're in a robbery, you might stay still in the hopes the robber won't see you or notice you.

Many folks freeze when being sexually assaulted. A lot of people assume victims will fight back and some do. But some victims worry they might be in danger if they fight back, so they freeze. *If I give him what he wants, hopefully he'll just go away when he's done.*

There is no perfect victim. You don't have to be sober or dressed a certain way. You don't have to fight back. According to the law (remember the big old Criminal Code?) you don't even have to say no. It's up to the person who wants to have sex to make sure you give an enthusiastic yes.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Being assaulted is very stressful. Some people may deal with it relatively easily. Some people may work at dealing with it for the rest of their lives. We don't know why it's harder for some people. It just is.

Some people who are assaulted go on to have **post-traumatic stress disorder**. It's a fancy term, but really means that someone faces physical and emotional stress from a traumatic event. It may cause them to have nightmares. They may feel exhausted all the time. They may have flashbacks when they see anything that reminds them of the assault. It can be a very serious condition without treatment.

It can be even more challenging if the assault happened more than once or by someone you knew and trusted, like family.

Assault isn't your fault. Having trouble healing after an assault isn't your fault either. Reach out for help. It's out

there. Never give up. Never.

Supporting Survivors

What do you do if someone tells you that they've experienced a sexual assault?

First, believe them. Few reports of assault are fake. The number of fake stories is so small that you can be confident the person is telling you the truth.

Second, tell them you believe them. This is powerful, because many people may not—even the police or legal system. Having someone believe in you can give you some strength.

Third, don't try to fix them. You can't. Be there to listen if they wish to talk. Practice your active listening skills by staying focused on what they're saying.

Finally, ask them what they need of you. Maybe they just needed to tell someone. Maybe they want you to stay with them when they report it.

After any disclosure of sexual violence, seek support for yourself. You might want to chat to a guidance counsellor or some kind of support worker. Or you may just want to take a walk to sort out your thoughts. Remember that self-care is important to anyone who supports a survivor through a difficult time.

Justice

You have the right to report a sexual assault. If you are under a certain age and tell someone you've been hurt, they must report it to the police or Child Protection, which is the part of the government that looks out for the wellbeing of

children and youth. So if you tell a teacher you've been assaulted, they must report the assault.

What can you expect? We hope that steps will be taken to keep you safe. The least you can expect is that the person who hurt you won't hurt you again.

The legal system can be challenging. You may want the police to do something about your assault. You may expect the person to be sent to prison.

Consequences may happen, but they may not. Sometimes, people who commit assaults do not get charged or go to jail. This doesn't mean your assault didn't happen. It means that there isn't enough evidence for it to go further. In Canada, everything in court must be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. This is a difficult standard to meet. While it generally protects people from being falsely accused, it also means some assaulters walk free.

If the justice system, whether it's the police or lawyers, dismisses the case, it can be hard to accept. Remember that no one is saying you're a liar. Because you aren't.

Statistically, most people who report being assaulted do not lie. Therefore, you can assume that any time someone tells you they have been sexually assaulted, it is true. It's safe to believe them. And it might be one of the best things you can do to support them. So tell them you believe them. Please.

Safety Tips

We hate to suggest there are ways to reduce the risk of being assaulted because sometimes there is just nothing you can do. It is never your fault.

Until the world is safe for all genders, we have to offer some

tools for your toolbox. These tips do not mean you are responsible in any way for being assaulted if you forget to do them or they don't work. It's okay. We just want you to be as safe as possible.

- Remember that the most common person who might assault you is someone you know. Don't trust someone you know if something seems off, even if they are a friend or family member.
- Trust your gut. If something seems weird about a situation, you may be right. Our guts pick up on clues from body language and behaviour. It might be a look in someone's eye. Or the way they move.
- If someone is on the verge of hurting you, *you don't have to be nice*. Many folks, especially girls and women, are taught to be nice to everyone no matter what. If something doesn't seem right about someone and they are forcing themselves on you in any way, you do not have to please them. You can tell them to go away.
- It doesn't hurt to have a game plan if you are out walking by yourself, but most people are not assaulted by strangers.
- Alcohol is the number one drug used during assaults. In our culture, we often link dating and drinking. The reality is some people take advantage of others when they are drunk. If you plan to enjoy drinking responsibly, have a game plan.
- Occasionally, people slip drugs into other people's drinks. It's never a bad idea to keep your drink in your sight the whole time. Open your own drinks.
- Look out for your friends. Although you can't be responsible for another human's behaviour, you might notice something wrong, especially if your friend is under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Do what you can to make the situation safe. Call a parent. Call the police.
- Have a safety number. Maybe you can call or text your parents about anything. Maybe it's an older sister. Just have someone you can call on.
- If anything goes wrong, try to remember as many details as possible. Smells, tattoos, locations—if you need to report anything, you'll have some info to help.
- Do whatever you can to stay safe. Yell. Kick. Run. Freeze. You are

important. And you don't have to be nice.

Bystanders

Did you know that the more people who witness a bad event unfolding, the more likely they are to do *nothing*? It's true. It's called the bystander effect. If there is a crowd watching someone get hurt, almost no one will help.

That's why we need to know about the bystander effect. Any time you're in a crowd and you see no one helping, you'll know to do something!

Most importantly, don't get hurt yourself. Anything you do should be as safe as possible. If you witness someone being hurt, call 911. You might run away and look for a trusted adult who can handle the situation, like a parent or teacher.

A lot of bad situations don't start out so dramatically. You might be out with friends and notice a guy hitting on someone who is drunk and definitely not able to consent to anything. Obviously, it's not to the stage where you need to call 911. But you might want to show support.

Maybe walk over to the person. If you know the potential victim, say, "Hey, it's time to be getting you home to sleep that off, eh?" If you know the guy, you might say, "It's not cool to be bugging them when they've had that much to drink. Why don't you wait and talk to them when they're sober?"

It's much easier to be a bystander when the situation is unfolding. Remember how we need to trust our gut? When we see someone in a tricky situation, we should butt in before things get out of hand.

You don't need to be a hero. You just need to step in and

show that you're watching the situation and don't like it.

People who assault others are not hiding in the bushes. Assaults by strangers are generally rare. Usually, sexual assault is done by someone known to the victim. And usually, it's done by someone they know. Sexual assault is not necessarily done by a monster. It could be a classmate.

You can help change attitudes about sexual violence. If you hear a joke about rape, why not tell people that jokes about rape aren't really funny? Every little action helps make the world a safer place for everyone. Including you.

Rape Culture

This is a popular phrase used to describe a culture where sexualized violence is common against girls, women, and feminine-appearing folks. Trans women are at a huge risk of gender-based violence, especially if they're from the BIPOC community.

The word *rape* might mislead people. It's not just about rape. Rape is a sign of a culture that allows violence. But it can include much more than forced intercourse.

Arguably, in Canada, we live in a rape culture because violence against feminine folks is common. This doesn't mean that boys and men aren't raped, because they are. In fact, prison rape jokes often make fun of boys and men who get raped in jail, as if it's funny.

Here are some signs that a rape culture exists:

- Slut shaming targets girls
- Dress codes are aimed at feminine bodies
- People joke about things like violence against women, including rape
- Folks use the word *rape* to describe a lot of things, like

- overpowering an opponent in a video game
- Sexism is common
- Harassment happens at workplaces and schools
- The idea that “boys will be boys” is an excuse for poor behaviour and is not taken seriously
- Folks assume boys and men cannot control themselves
- Non-consensual sharing of intimate images occurs often
- Girls and women are seen as sexual objects instead of human beings
- Boys and men get violent after being rejected by women
- Victim blaming happens after assaults
- Add to the list things you’ve seen

Only we can change our culture. We do that when we stand up for our fellow humans. It makes ripples that impact those around us. Never be afraid to make change.

Victim Blaming

Violence against girls, women, and feminine-appearing folks is common and often caused by men. In fact, most violence against men is caused by men, although there are cases of boys being assaulted by women. It is rare, though, for there to be women accused. We can probably thank toxic masculinity—which is why we want to promote healthy masculinity.

When someone is raped or faces any kind of sexualized violence, they often face victim blaming. Few other crimes allow the victim to take the blame for something bad.

We victim blame when we:

- Accuse a girl or woman of walking alone late at night
- Ask what an assault victim was wearing
- Wonder what they did wrong to deserve abuse
- Don’t believe them
- Consider why they didn’t fight back

In many cases, we’d never blame a robbery victim for wearing the wrong clothes when they were robbed. But we would suggest that a woman was “asking for it” if she wore

tight clothes.

Victim blaming is wrong and is a product of rape culture. The next time someone tells you they are a victim, support them and believe them.

Q & A

Most people want to prevent sexualized violence, so there are lots of questions about this complicated topic.

What happens if I didn't consent to something and the other person did it anyway?

It becomes a sexual assault if you did not consent to sexual activity, whether that is intercourse or making out. It's important to get support after experiencing a sexual assault of any kind. You could talk to an adult or call a help-line to chat about your options.

What if I did something I now regret, like taking advantage of someone when they were drunk?

If you feel bad about something you've done, take ownership of it. Apologize if the other person is willing to hear it. Ask them how you can fix the situation. It may mean taking legal responsibility. Do what's right and commit to doing better in the future. Understand if they don't want to see you again, even if you apologize.

What does SANE mean?

SANE stands for sexual assault nurse examiner. They are nurses with special training in working with people who have been sexually assaulted. They can do a special exam that collects evidence for the police—usually up to seven days after an assault. They will look to see if there are any injuries and may collect things like hair or semen if you were forced to have intercourse. If you watch shows like

CSI, you know that evidence can be helpful if the police decide to go after someone for assault.

Someone assaulted me, but I don't want to press charges. What should I do?

Usually, the justice system needs the cooperation of someone who has been assaulted. People don't get to decide if charges are laid, but they do get to decide how they cooperate with police. If you don't want to get involved in the justice system, you likely will not be forced to do so. No matter what you decide, talk about your options with someone you trust or even someone who knows about the legal system. You can seek support or counselling even if the person doesn't get charged with a crime.

I heard I'm not supposed to shower or change if I decide to go to the hospital to have an exam.

That's right. If you want a doctor or nurse to collect evidence after an assault, you should not bathe or shower, change your clothes, brush your teeth, or drink anything. These are all common responses to having someone violate your body, but the more evidence you can preserve, the better. If you can, take a change of clothes to the hospital with you so they can keep the ones you wore during the assault for evidence. But even if you've showered, the doctor or nurse may be able to collect evidence, so don't avoid the exam for that reason.

My neighbour touched me without my permission. It doesn't seem like a really big deal. Is it?

You get to decide how you feel about it. If you feel it is a big deal, then that's okay. If you just want to forget about it because you think it was minor, that's okay too. But knowing the person doesn't make them innocent. If they

touched you in a way that made you feel uncomfortable, you should find someone to talk to.⁴⁴ Perhaps there are ways that you can avoid that person, or avoid being alone with them. No matter what, no one has the right to touch you sexually if you have not consented to them doing so.

Someone just forced me to have intercourse and I don't know what to do.

Safety first. Make sure you are somewhere safe, usually away from the person who assaulted you. If it just happened, you can call a parent or 911. If you have been forced into intercourse, you may want to go to the hospital to make sure you are protected against pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and anything else as a result of your assault. You may choose to have a nurse or doctor collect evidence from your body. Ask for support because your mental health is as important as your physical health. It is, of course, all connected.

Isn't anal sex illegal if you're under 18?

Technically, yes. However, in Canada, most people under 18 are not being charged with a crime if they have anal sex and they meet the other standards of consent. Remember the three rules of anal sex if you engage in it!

How do you know if someone is too drunk to consent to sexual activity?

Since there is no breathalyzer test for dating like there is for driving, people have to use their best judgement. Ideally, if someone has been drinking, it's best to save intimate activities for another time. You never know for sure how drunk someone is, so be cautious. Other signs to watch for include: slurring words, falling over their feet,

⁴⁴ Remember if you are under 16, people in authority must report that your neighbour harmed you.

getting drowsy.

If both people are drunk, can they consent to sexual activity?

This is a very common question. If two people have been drinking, they should leave sexual activity for another time. People who are drinking may not use condoms or dams properly, for one. Plus, you can never be sure if the person is sober enough to consent because alcohol affects people in so many different ways. Again, better safe than sorry. You don't want to find out the next day that you violated their consent.

What if I'm 15 and really want to be with my partner, who is 23? Shouldn't I be able to consent if I'm sober?

The law assumes that if you're a lot younger than your partner, you might be influenced by them, or talked into activities you're not ready for yet. It's important to have an equal relationship with your partner. If one of you is a lot older, your relationship might not be equal. Even though you want to consent to activities, you legally cannot. The person most likely to get into trouble with the law is the older person. Sex or any physical acts will have to wait until you're 16.

It almost sounds like I need a contract to have sex with someone.

You do. A verbal contract happens when you say yes to an activity. This means you are giving permission to someone to engage in sexual activity with you. Just remember the contract can be broken at any time.

Do I have to ask before I do every little thing?

It's all about using your judgement. If you are with a new

partner, you may have to ask more questions because you don't know what they like or dislike. If you have been with someone long enough, you may know some things you cannot do. Realistically, you don't have to say "I'm going to touch your arm... I'm going to touch your cheek... now I'm going to brush your hair..." But you need to ask if you are going to change from vaginal to anal sex, for example. Again, use your best judgement. Ask before any big changes. If they seem uncomfortable, ask if they'd like to switch activities.

What if you're in a relationship? Do you always need consent?

Even if you're married, you still have to ask your partner for consent. Years ago, it was assumed that women had to do whatever their husbands asked them to do. It is no longer that way. Each of us must ask for consent whether we know the person well or not.

Can someone be charged with sexual assault if they are married?

Yes, they can, if they had sexual activity without consent.

What if I ask for consent and they say no?

We all have to learn how to deal with the "nos" we hear in our lives. It is not fun being rejected. But it's important to deal with it in a mature way. Not everyone will say yes to everything you ask of them, even if they like you. Be polite and say, "If you change your mind, just let me know" or some such thing. If they change their mind, they will let you know. Don't keep bugging them. That gets annoying and becomes harassment.

Do people who are 2SLGBTQIA+ ever face violence from their partners?

Yes. It doesn't always get talked about, but sexual violence can happen in any relationship. Sometimes the abuse can look a bit different, as some of the threats might include outing someone or using their gender or orientation against them in some way. It could include withholding treatment for someone who needs to transition (like telling them they cannot dress as their gender). Anyone can be abusive or face abuse.

Check Your Knowledge

Let's review some of the main concepts around consent and assault. Decide if the following are true or false.

1. If the person says no, you can ask again in a few minutes.
2. Men are sexual beings who cannot help themselves. Once they are aroused, they must have sex.
3. If you drink too much, it is your fault if someone sexually assaults you.
4. If you wear certain clothes, you are consenting to sexual activity, which means it is your fault if someone assaults you.
5. It is possible to be sexually assaulted by someone you care about.
6. If the person doesn't scream or fight, that means yes.
7. It is possible to be sexually assaulted by your partner or spouse.
8. Sexual assault by a stranger is the most common kind of rape.
9. If you have had sex before, you do not have to ask for consent again.
10. Alcohol is the most common drug used in sexual assault.
11. If someone is unconscious or asleep, they cannot consent.
12. If you pay for your date's dinner, they should have sex with you.
13. Consent can be nonverbal, so it is important to read your partner's cues.
14. It is okay for your boss to ask you for sexual favours.
15. You must ask for consent every time.

Answers are at the back of this resource.

Mental Wellbeing

Mental wellness is an important part of going through puberty—and life in general. We're including this last only because something needs to be last. But your mental wellbeing is a crucial part of your sexual health. And vice versa.

Many people struggle with their mental health during puberty. When you become more independent, it can take some time to adjust to being more responsible for yourself.

Plus, a lot happens during your teens.

Some folks struggle with mental illness or mental disorders. A disorder is different than feeling anxious or down in the dumps for a day or two. Generally, when you have a mental illness or disorder, it causes difficulties in your life. It may mean not sleeping. It may mean being so stressed about going to school, the thought literally makes you sick. It may mean being so down, you can't get out of your bed for anything.

Your mental health is an important part of puberty and beyond—regardless of whether you have a diagnosis or not.

Get Moving

Moving is nature's antidepressant and anti-anxiety drug. Many studies have shown that regular exercise helps your mental health as well as your physical health. Some people may still need other treatments, but exercise can be a good starting point, or a helpful addition to health care.

You don't have to run a marathon to get the benefits of exercise... but you can if you want to!

Most youth should try for one hour of exercise each day. As you grow older, the bare minimum is 150 minutes every week.

Choosing something you enjoy is the best way to get the benefits that come along with physical activity. If you dread doing exercise, you will probably avoid it.

Some girls move away from physical activity during puberty. Sometimes people of any gender who are larger or different in some way find it difficult to have fun during gym—especially if they get teased or bullied. If you're uncomfortable getting exercise with your peers, find a solo activity that works for you. Dance to some Zumba videos on YouTube or go for a hike in

Exercises

- skating
- skateboarding
- horseback riding
- biking
- hiking
- skiing
- running
- pickleball
- dodgeball
- paddleboarding
- yoga
- dancing
- lifting weights
- gardening
- canoeing
- hunting
- squash
- fishing

the woods. (Or tell your bullies to get lost.)

Sleep

Sleep is needed to keep our bodies and minds feeling the best they can feel. A good night's rest restores us for another day. You probably notice this when you have a bad night and cannot function the next morning.



Sometimes when we are stressed, it's harder to sleep. You may have to work harder to relax (ironic, eh?)

Most teens should get about eight to 10 hours of sleep each night. For example, if you get up at 6:00 a.m., you should go to bed by at least 10:00 p.m. the night before. That would give you eight hours. You might find that going to bed at 9:00 p.m. is even better.

One bad night of sleep won't break you. But consistently skipping on a good night's rest can have poor effects on your health. It may even help you gain weight.

It's quite common for teens to enjoy staying up late and sleeping in. Unfortunately, our society isn't set up that way. Usually, you have to get up early and go to school or work.

Here are some ways to make sleep a priority in your life!

- Have a warm bath or shower before bed each night to get your body used to unwinding.
- Read a book or magazine before bed.
- Avoid technology at least an hour before going to bed so the artificial light doesn't keep you from getting sleepy.
- Sleep in as dark a room as possible so your body can produce

melatonin, the sleep hormone.

- Keep cool. A cool body signals to your brain that it's time to go to bed. (This is why a warm bath helps—it cools down your body once you get out of the tub!)
- Store your phone or tablet away from your bed so you aren't tempted to check messages all night. Turn off notifications. Check your messages in the morning.
- Eat a small snack, but not one that's too big or you'll find it hard to rest. Try cereal, cheese, nuts, or fruits.
- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day. Your body will become used to the routine.
- Beware of caffeine and energy drinks after supper—or even late in the afternoon. In fact, beware of energy drinks period if you have anxiety and/or heart issues.
- Find ways to ease your anxiety before bed. You may want to write in a diary or keep a gratitude journal of things that you loved about your day. Or upload something to Instagram.
- If you find it hard to fall asleep, focus on your breathing. Take big belly breaths and focus on breathing in, breathing out. When we are stressed, we sometimes take shorter breaths that make us feel even more anxious. Belly breaths force our body to slow down and relax.
- Avoid self-medication. Some people use things like alcohol to help them go asleep. Unfortunately, alcohol can ruin your rest. If you cannot sleep for a long period of time, make an appointment with a doctor or nurse practitioner to discuss your problem. They may have solutions for you.
- Exercising just before bed can rev you up too much. If you want to exercise in the evening, do it as early as possible. Physical activity during the day can help you sleep better at night.
- Cuddle a pet. A cat's purr can literally relax your body.
- Try a weighted blanket. Some people feel better when they have a lot of weight grounding them. Ask for a weighted blanket, or make your own by piling lots of blankets on your bed for extra heft.
- Too much random noise? Add some white noise to your room by running a fan or white noise maker. Try music.
- Avoid smoking or breathing in second hand smoke. Nicotine is a stimulant and may keep you awake.

- Watching the clock can be stressful. Turn it away from your bed so you cannot watch it all night.
- Cut down or avoid naps during the day. If you do need a nap, keep it short and sweet.
- Masturbating can relax you and encourage drowsiness.

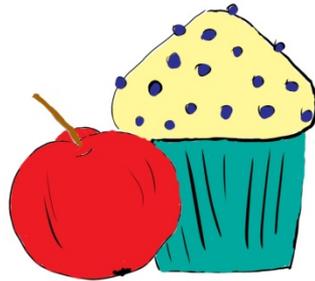
Food

Food is another important component of mental wellbeing.

There are many different diets we can eat, depending on our culture, budget, and health needs.

If your family has a hard time buying groceries, it can be much more challenging to eat healthy. That's when you need to eat as healthy as possible with the resources you have.

Follow the Canadian Food Guide as much as you can. It now recommends most people follow a plant-based diet, which means choosing plant foods over animal foods more often. The food guide also encourages eating fruits and vegetables, as well as whole grains. Drinking fresh water if you have access to fresh water is also great!



Track how you feel when you consume different foods. For example, if you are prone to anxiety, you may find certain things make you feel jittery. Excessive sugar and caffeine may amp up your body.

Some people may not feel well when they consume wheat products or certain food additives like red food colouring. Most people do not find anything wrong with these ingredients, but some people may find they are sensitive to them.

Different bodies react to different foods. Over time, pay attention to what affects your body most. Once you know how you feel after eating certain foods, you will be able to make better choices.

If you are facing a lot of stress, it's important to nourish your body with as much healthy food as possible. Although we sometimes eat sugary or fatty foods when we are depressed or upset, it's important to eat well in the long term. Enjoying a meal of macaroni and cheese is just fine. But remember to eat some carrots too.

Dieting

Sticking to a strict diet may be necessary for some people (for example, if you are a Type 1 diabetic). But often, people use diets for things like weight loss, and hope that temporary measures produce long term results.

We live in a society that rewards people for being thin. It can seem as though there are thin bodies everywhere: in music videos, in Instagram posts, in movies. Rarely do we see people in media who have fuller figures.

In real life, we come in different sizes. Our genes, our diet, and our lifestyle all influence how our bodies look. Sometimes we take drugs that make us gain weight. Sometimes we don't have enough money for healthful vegetables and eat something from a package instead.

The best research shows that short term weight loss diets don't work. None of them.

Never go on a temporary diet. Most people gain back the weight they lose while dieting—sometimes with more weight than they had originally.

Your body resists change. The only way to affect your weight is to do long term things that are good for you (and keep doing them!)

Drastically restricting calories for the short term will not help your body reach its full potential. Making long term changes can help, along with regular exercise.

The only diet you should follow is one recommended by a doctor, nurse practitioner, or nutritionist. It should take into consideration your health history and encourage a variety of foods to help you feel your best.

Going on a diet from a magazine or website will not be helpful in the long term. Diet fads come and go, but unfortunately, most people do not lose weight without changes to their lifestyle that they can maintain for a lifetime.

You will not have to eat clean because food isn't dirty (unless you drop it on the floor). You will not have to do Paleo or keto. Just pick the best food you have in front of you and get your hour of exercise most days. If you are too large for your health, get help from a professional—not a diet from a magazine.

Body Image

In a world filled with media, it can be difficult to go through puberty without feeling inadequate in some way.

In real life, there are many bodies. Some are tall and thin. Some are short and plump. Some are able-bodied. Some are not. Some are Black, some are brown. If we are gender diverse or

have gender dysphoria, we may feel that we just don't stack up to the bodies we see around us.

Sometimes we have to work at nurturing a healthy body image—especially if we don't look like the people we see on our TVs and newsfeeds. It can be extra hard if you're a person of colour, disabled and/or trans.

Here are some ways to boost your body image.

Love the things your body can do.

Can you draw cartoons really well because your hands are steady? Or can you laugh deep and hard? Honour what your body can do for you. Focus on what it does and not what it looks like.



Remember to be as kind to your own body as you are towards those you love.

Most people would never pick apart their loved one's looks. So why do you do it to yourself? Give yourself a break. Be your own best friend.

Surround yourself with people who are positive about their bodies.

Find friends or family that make you feel great about yourself! Follow people you dig on Instagram because there is a lot of body positivity there among some influencers. #bodypositive

Be a critical consumer of all media.

Professional Instagram posts are staged and posed. Often, people wear makeup or stand a certain way to show off parts of their bodies and hide others. You too

would look awesome if you were followed by a professional makeup artist and photographer!

Self-care

Sometimes, our culture encourages us to always be productive every second of every day. Packed school days and constant after-school activities can make us feel like we have to be doing something every single minute of our lives.

But we cannot be productive 24/7. The best of us must do some self-care or taking care of ourselves. You cannot pour from an empty cup. So do things to help fill up your cup!

Me time is important. You can spend your me time many ways. It might mean going for a walk. It might mean taking a warm bubble bath. It may mean logging on to your favourite game and playing for an hour (but not before bed!).

Your me time should include things you enjoy doing. Fishing. Shopping. Playing guitar. Whatever.

Support

Self-care means knowing when to seek out support during times you are unable to do it all by yourself. We all need support people.

There are many ways to find help when you are stressed or when you just need to bounce ideas off another person. We are making some suggestions while understanding not all folks will work for everyone. For example, you may not be comfortable talking to your guidance counsellor, but are okay chatting with your music teacher.

Parent – They've been through puberty and share your genes. You probably have more in common than you think.

Sibling – Older siblings can offer you advice based on their own experiences. And even younger siblings have a way of letting you know what is truly important. Reach out formally, or just ask them to play a board game with you.

Friends – If you have true blue friends, reach out. Do something fun. Talk late into the night.

Guidance Counsellor – Guidance counsellors work as an advocate for you. That means they are ready to stick up for your needs. They may have busy schedules, but can see you for an informal chat about what you need and how they can help you.

Teacher – We all had that one teacher in school we could ask anything. They were like a mentor and always had words of advice. If you have that teacher, stop by and ask them for a chat at recess or lunch.

Elders – If there are elders in your community, seek them out for their wisdom and counsel. They can offer you support based on your culture.

Toll Free Lines – KidsHelpPhone.com is one way to reach out to trained counsellors who can offer you a friendly ear. You don't have to give them your name, and the conversation can be totally confidential. No one will ever know you were talking with them. (They also do texts if you're not a phone person.)

Mental Health and Addictions – Most areas have some kind of public mental health care. Talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner about what local programs are available. Sometimes they may have groups or workers at your school.

Community Agencies – There are a number of community agencies who are capable of lending support. Women's centres often have support staff. If you are facing any kind of family or intimate partner violence, you can contact a transition house or shelter. There may also be sexual health centres in your area. A lot of these places do outreach to youth, which means they come to you or your school.

Doctor or Nurse Practitioner – Make an appointment at your family's health clinic. You may find a nurse practitioner has longer appointments that support more in-depth conversations.

Student Support Workers – Different areas have different support workers in the schools. Generally, though, they work with students who are marginalized in society including those who

are BIPOC. Ask your school who is available for support.

Pastor or clergy – If you are a church goer, you may find support with your clergy. Be forewarned you may not get the support you need if your religion does not support people who are 2SLGBTQIA+ or who need an abortion. Don't let someone tell you that you're sinning. Lots of religions and denominations are happy to tell you you're wonderful.

Mental Health Disorders

Unfortunately, many mental illnesses or disorders⁴⁵ start when a person is in their teens or early 20s. Some can be pretty scary to face alone. That's why it's important to be aware of conditions that might happen to you or people you know.

Mental illnesses and disorders usually run in families. If someone in your family has a specific condition, you may be more likely to develop one yourself. If you know depression is an issue among your relatives, you should head to the doctor if you're not feeling like yourself for any length of time.

The most common disorders are depression and anxiety. They can be mild or they can become so severe that it is hard to go to school or even get out of bed in the morning.

Everyone has a bad day every now and then. For example, sometimes you need to take a mental health day and just get back to feeling like yourself!

However, mental illnesses and disorders come and stay, often for months or years if they aren't treated. They interfere with school or work, and make it hard to do the basics like sleeping, eating, exercising, and enjoying your life in general.

⁴⁵ Some people prefer the term mental illness. Others prefer disorder. Some use the words at the same time; some consider certain conditions either/or. That's why we are using both.

If your feelings and emotions start interfering with your life, please seek help as soon as you can. You might tell your parents you need a doctor's appointment. You might talk to your guidance counsellor. If there are mental health workers in your school, you might search them out and ask if they can help you.

It is easier to treat mental illnesses and disorders early, before they really change your life. Many mental illnesses and disorders can be managed through prescriptions, lifestyle changes, therapy, or some combination.

Here are some brief descriptions of common mental conditions. If you'd like to learn more, head to the internet to get full symptom lists. These are very brief descriptions to get you started.

Depression – feeling down in the dumps, eating too much or too little, sleeping too much or too little, no interest in usual activities, crying, feeling like things just can't get better

Anxiety – feeling anxious on a regular basis in general or about certain things; may be related to being around people, new situations, or when faced with situations like crowds or places you cannot "escape" easily; may cause physical symptoms, even headaches, stomach aches, diarrhea, etc.

Panic disorder – having regular panic attacks that make it feel as though you are dying or going crazy; feelings of doom; similar symptoms as anxiety; may lead to being unable to leave house or even bedroom (agoraphobia). Physical symptoms can be intense for a short period of time.

Bipolar disorder – going back and forth between depression and mania over weeks or months; may feel really high and on top of the world; symptoms of mania include spending too much, speeding too much if you drive, talking super-fast, having grand dreams or plans that never get done; losing weight and needing little or no sleep; symptoms of depression include getting too much sleep, not bathing, feeling down or in a dark hole

Schizophrenia – having issues with deciding what is real and what is a hallucination or delusion; seeing or hearing things that are not there; drawing away from friends and social

occasions; paranoia, showing odd behaviours

Borderline personality disorder – having mood swings at the drop of the hat; unrealistic fear of people abandoning you; feeling as though you cannot tolerate your emotions; outbursts of anger or other emotions; difficulties with relationships; black and white thinking; harming one's self like cutting or thinking of suicide

Obsessive compulsive disorder – having the need to control your environment by doing certain things, often in particular numbers; compulsions or things you have to do to avoid or delay anxious feelings

Eating disorders – having an unrealistic view of one's body (for example seeing it as fat when it is healthy) and changing exercise and eating habits drastically in an effort to control weight. Includes not eating or using vomiting or diarrhea to try to avoid calories.

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder – hard to focus on tasks; may feel the need to keep moving and never sit still; may be impulsive; may act despite consequences; may have trouble regulating emotions

Conduct disorder – acting aggressive towards people and/or property; does not follow rules; may leave home; may have symptoms similar to anti-social personality disorder (which cannot be diagnosed until the person is an adult)

Substance use disorders – using substances like drugs or alcohol; doing anything to get the next fix.

Never be scared to take care of your mental health. Although there is a huge stigma around having a brain that needs care, it's important to seek help when you need it.

Self-harm and Cutting

Self-harm or self-mutilation means harming your body in some way intentionally. Not everyone who self-harms has a mental disorder, but it should be a warning signal that you need a healthier way to deal with your emotions. Self-harm might include cutting, biting, or burning parts of yourself.

We don't know 100% why people do this. It can be a way of coping with emotional pain. It may allow someone who is numb to feel pain. The pain may also cause your body's natural painkillers to give relief.

Try to find ways to cope with pain or numbness without causing permanent damage or scarring. Some people find snapping an elastic helpful. Others walk, journal, or do some other activity that's distracting.

People who self-harm or cut are not looking to end their life. They also aren't looking for attention. Support and love are needed.

Suicide

Dying as a result of suicide is common among youth and young adults—but it doesn't have to be that way.

If you have any thoughts of suicide, reach out for help. If you think you will hurt yourself in the next few hours, call 911 or get someone to take you to an emergency room—and don't let them discharge you, or send you away from the hospital, unless you are sure you feel better.

Should your friends or family say things like “It would be better if I weren't here” or “I wish I were dead” make sure you get them help. Ask them if they are thinking about suicide. If they reply yes, support them until they are safe. *Support from a distance, though, if you are worried about your safety—for example, if they have a gun or knife.*

Do remember that you aren't responsible for someone else's actions. You can offer to get them help, but you can't make them accept help.

Suicide is a permanent answer to often temporary problems.

However, some mental disorders make it hard to get away from suicidal thoughts.

Many people who jump from bridges in an attempt to die often regret the decision as soon as their feet leave the ground. We know this because some survive. Even the most intense of feelings don't last forever.

Unfortunately, some marginalised youth are at a higher risk for suicide including 2SLGBTQIA+ and/or BIPOC youth. Recognize when you have lost hope in living, and seek out support.

Signs of suicide may include:

- talking about death or making statements about their death.
- an obsession with death including their own.
- giving away their belongings.
- becoming less social.
- neglecting personal appearances, like not bathing.
- running away from home.
- taking risks like drinking and driving, speeding, or having a lot of sex without following safer sex practices.
- changes in personality (such as going from upbeat to quiet).
- suddenly becoming upbeat (it's because they have decided to end their pain).

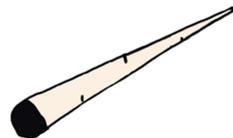
Reach out to a trusted adult if you are concerned about anyone. Including yourself.

Substances

Don't do them.

Seriously. The longer you can avoid things like tobacco, the less likely you are to become addicted to them.

There are many reasons why someone becomes addicted to substances. Sometimes there are genetic factors.



Sometimes it's their environment. Many people who use substances have had terrible childhoods that cause them a lot of pain. Indigenous folks may be more likely to use substances because of the pain of colonization, residential schools, and the Sixties Scoop. These were all very painful events at the time and are still felt yet today by many.

Also, as adolescents, we sometimes give in to impulses even though we know they're not really good for us. So if we see our friends enjoying alcohol, we think maybe it's something enjoyable for us too. Just this once.

Next you'll find a chart of some of the known issues related to substances like tobacco. These issues are drawn from various studies and research.

Tips for Avoiding Substances

If someone asks you to try a substance, be confident in saying no. Be an independent thinker! Even if you don't appear confident, make eye contact, use a firm voice, and don't make excuses.

Recognize there are reasons you might want to try substances, and think of ways to fight them.

- Peer Pressure ("Everyone else is doing it")
 - Hint: no they're not.
- Stress or Mental Health Issues ("It will make me feel better/forget my pain")
 - It won't help in the long run and will probably make it worse.
- Culture ("Everyone in the Maritimes drinks")
 - So?
- Curiosity ("It's okay to try it if it's free")
 - There may be a long term cost.
- Boredom ("There's nothing better to do")
 - Then find something to do.

What tips would help you pass up drugs when it seems like everyone and their dog is doing them?

Here are some tricks to avoiding or reducing substances during puberty and beyond:

- Join extracurricular activities and keep busy.
- Find friends that don't do substances.
- Set boundaries or rules you can live with.
- Learn to cope with disappointments and pain in healthy and productive ways.
- Seek help for mental illnesses and disorders if you are unable to cope without using substances.
- Never trust the old "I'll only do it once".
- If you need to escape something, find a healthy way to do it—maybe by exercising or working on a positive goal.
- Find guidance from a reliable adult who does not use substances.
- Use food and exercise to improve your brain naturally.
- If you need to take risks, find something that is safer and still gives you an adrenaline rush (like skateboarding).
- Talk to elders and seek their support.
- Delay alcohol use as long as possible.
- Recognize when you've started using a substance and seek support to stop taking it before your health suffers

It may not always be easy to avoid or reduce the use of substances, but your health will thank you for it in the long run—especially your fabulous sexual health!

Substances and Effects

Known issues on body

tobacco	cancer, heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, irritability when drug wears off, erectile dysfunction, chronic lung conditions like emphysema
alcohol	alcohol poisoning, liver damage and disease, cancer, motor vehicle crashes, becoming overweight or obese (beer belly), hangovers, stomach irritation and ulcers, reduced sexual performance, loss of memory, poor motor skills
marijuana	memory loss, increase in blood pressure, poor motor skills and reaction time, hallucinations or paranoia, negative issues in pregnancy including risk of low birth weight or premature delivery, same issues as tobacco if mixed
acid	increases heart rate and blood pressure, difficulty concentrating, poor motor skills, strange body sensations, mood swings, memory loss, flashbacks, trips
phencyclidine (PCP)	can cause severe reactions including violence, hallucinations, paranoia, sweating, blank staring, drooling, suicide, overdose potential
ecstasy	brain damage, nausea and vomiting, extreme overheating especially if paired with dancing or physical exertion, increase in blood pressure, severe dehydration, risk of stroke or heart attack, muscle tension, fainting, blurred vision, hallucinations and paranoia
amphetamines	includes Ritalin and can cause addiction, abnormal heart rate, anxiety, paranoia, high blood pressure, headaches, dizziness, stomach pain and cramps, irritability, can cause crash and total exhaustion, depression
meth	depression, paranoia, violence, permanent damage to blood vessels, increased heart rate and blood pressure, irritability, insomnia, confusion, tremors, convulsions, open sores, rotting teeth, weight loss, brain changes, overdose potential
cocaine and crack	highly addictive, raises blood pressure, causes risk of brain bleeds, heart attacks, paranoia, hallucinations, scratching at skin, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, nose damage, can be fatal when mixed with other substances
opioids and heroin	highly addictive, overdose easy when mixed with other depressant drugs including alcohol, collapsed veins (if injected), liver disease, sleepiness, reduced breathing, painful withdrawal, constipation, moodiness, may be mixed with fentanyl
depressants	slurred speech, staggering, deadly when combined with other drugs including alcohol, memory loss, may be used to facilitate sexual violence
inhalants	danger to organs and brain, suffocation, heart failure, death from choking on vomit, memory loss
steroids	changes to height if taken during puberty, sexual disorders, shrunken testicles, reduced sperm count, changes to chest or breasts, early baldness, increased risk of prostate cancer, liver damage, wild mood swings (roid rage)

Do You

As you've guessed from the length of this resource, puberty is kind of a big deal. There's a lot to deal with, plus new terminology and medical things you never had to think of before. Then there's all that social stuff, like becoming more independent and adulting.

One of the most important messages we'd like you to take from this resource is that it is okay to do you.

You are unique. There is no one on this planet who is quite like you, from the genes that help make you, to the experiences that you've had growing up, to the thoughts and desires you have.

On bad days, you will probably feel that yes, there is no one like you and *you* don't even want to be you. This is often true if you get bullied or shamed for being different.

On good days, though, hopefully you will understand that we are all unique. It is often our oddities and quirks that make us wonderful.

If we were all cookie cutter people, the world would be a boring place. Think about it. We would all wear the same clothes, have the same hair, drive the same cars, work the same jobs. As you can imagine, this would be horrible!

It is our diversity that makes us human. When you're going through puberty and trying to fit in (while also trying to be different), it can be a hard balancing act. But we promise there will come a day when things will get better, and being you will be the best thing ever.

Whether you're different because of your gender, orientation, body shape, ability, or your talent for remembering quotes from movies—remember that it's okay to be distinct.

Since there will be days when you forget this, below are some self-affirmations you can write out and place in your room or anywhere you need love.

You are a valuable human being

You deserve to be happy.

You are worth taking care of your health.

You deserve to live.

You deserve to love.

You are worth love.

You are a treasure.

You've got this.

Parting Words

We have tried to create a puberty resource for more genders in the hopes that people will no longer have to pick between blue books and pink books. Everybody should learn about puberty as it is experienced by many people.

Since there are no models of a gender inclusive puberty guide, we have tried to blaze a trail through the information that is out there. We don't expect to have everything 100% right. We don't expect to be everything to everybody.

But we do hope we have offered you lots of information about growing up, so that you can understand yourself as well as your friends.

Don't let this resource be your only guide to growing up. Keep searching for information so you are empowered and know all about your body. Research and science are always revealing great things about humans, especially when it comes to people who are gender diverse! We are witnessing an explosion of knowledge about the many ways humans can grow.

If you have any suggestions for making the next edition of this guide better, please get in contact with us. We would

love to hear from you. Please fill out the evaluation so you can share your wisdom with others.

If you are looking for more support, search out the allies in your area. They may be teachers or friends, guidance counsellors or clergy. Some resources are listed at the back of the book if you would like to do your own research.

Puberty can be hard, but you can do it. We hope this resource has given you lots of great info for not only surviving puberty, but thriving.

Thanks

Thank you, first and foremost, to the Queens Community Health Board and Lunenburg County Community Health Board for grants to write the first draft of this resource. We appreciate the money you put in to making us all healthier.

Thank you to my Board of Directors who are always game for my projects. I appreciate your endless support.

A shout out to the folks who shared their puberty stories with us. We appreciate your work making this a puberty book for everyone. It just goes to show that we're all in this thing together.

Props to early readers of this resource including Leigh Heide, Krista MacDonald, and Angela Ripley. You provided invaluable feedback, although it's totally on me if I haven't gotten everything right.

A nod also goes to the Awesome Foundation South Shore for giving us some dough to make print copies! And to Grant Wright for helping us out with printing tips.

As always, any mistakes are mine as the author of this resource. Please send along questions and comments for future editions. I expect that some things in this book will become outdated, or may be slightly inaccurate as I tried to make something complicated sound simple. Keep reading and learning, as I intend to do.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "julie". The letter "i" is written in a cursive style with a small heart shape above it. The rest of the name "ulie" is also written in a cursive, flowing script.

Glossary

This glossary features words we've used throughout the guide that may require a bit more explaining. If you require additional information on any of these topics or concepts, reach out to a teacher, sexual health centre, or trusted resource. You deserve to know about your sexuality.

A

Adam's apple – another name for the voice box in people assigned boy at birth

analingus – Latin for bumhole licking

androgynous – to appear as both man and woman, or as neither

antiperspirant – stops people from sweating, usually in the armpits

anus – bumhole

areola – the dark area surrounding the nipple of a breast

asexual – someone who is not sexually attracted to other people (also known as aces)

B

balls – slang for testicles

BDSM – bondage, discipline or domination, sadism, and masochism in sexual activities; requires consent

and education of all people involved

binder – helps make breasts flatter or less visible

biological sex – male, female, or intersex; usually made up of genitals, reproductive organs, hormones, and chromosomes

BIPOC – stands for folks who are Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Colour

birth control – way to prevent pregnancy while having sexual intercourse

bisexual – attracted to two genders or sexes

boner – slang for an erection

boundaries – good relationship fences, or requests and consequences that keep you from becoming a hermit that doesn't talk to people

bullying – harassment that is repeated; usually describes harassment of children and youth by peers

C

circumcised – to have the foreskin removed from the penis for health, religious, or personal reasons (can also include removing the clitoris)

cisgender – when one’s gender identity matches the gender assigned at birth

clitoris – a pleasurable organ typically in bodies with vaginas and people assigned girl at birth

consent – permission, often to do sexual activities

corona – base of the glans penis, or head

corpus cavernosum – erectile, sponge-like tissue in the penis and clitoris

corpus spongiosum – sponge tissue surrounding the urethra in the penis

cremaster muscles – muscles that control the temperature of the testicles by moving them closer or farther away from the body

crossdresser – someone who wears the clothes of another gender

cum – ejaculate (also to cum)

cumming – having an orgasm

cunnilingus – oral sex on someone with a vulva (also called eating out)

cyberbullying – bullying or harassment done over the internet or with technology

D

demisexual – to be interested in sexual activity with a person once you are emotionally attached

deodorant – kills the bacteria that makes sweat stink (also known as pit stick)

dick – slang for penis

dick pic – slang for pictures of penises often sent by text and rarely wanted by receivers

discharge – fluid that comes out of a vagina as a result of its self-cleaning magic

drag king/queen – someone who dresses as another gender for performance, which is usually exaggerated and awesome

E

ejaculate – semen or fluids that come out of the body when someone has an orgasm

embryo – the stage of a fertilized egg after it divides and before it becomes a fetus at approximately two months of pregnancy

endometriosis – painful condition

where cells similar to the uterus lining (endometrium) grow in unusual spots

epididymis – a tube located at the back of the testicles that stores and carries sperm

erogenous zone – spots on your body that, when touched, turn you on. Can include the penis or clitoris, as well as unlikely places like the back of your neck or inner thighs.

erotica – porn, but with artistic value (basically one person's porn is another person's erotica)

estrogen – a number of hormones that exist naturally in the body of people with ovaries; linked to femininity and the colour pink

F

fallopian tubes – tubes leading from the ovary to the uterus

fellatio – oral sex or a blow job on someone with a penis

fertile – able to create pregnancies

fertilization – creating a pregnancy from an egg cell and a sperm cell

fetus – an embryo becomes a fetus at about two months of pregnancy

fimbria – fringes at the end of the fallopian tubes that collect eggs from the ovary

foreplay – the intimate activities before intercourse, such as touching

or making out

foreskin – the skin covering the glans or head of a penis

front hole – another name for the vagina

G

gaff – underwear that minimizes the penis and testicles so the front is more flat

gay – someone who is attracted to the same sex or gender; can also mean someone who is any orientation but heterosexual

gender – an internal idea of who you are: boy or girl, both, or neither, or some combo of the above

gender binary – the idea there are only men and women in this world and they are separate from each other in terms of gender roles

gender dysphoria – stress or anguish related to not being the gender you were assigned at birth

gender euphoria – joy at one's gender identity, and having an expression or exterior that matches that gender

gender expression – the outside appearance of someone, including their clothing, voice, hair, and so on

genderfluid – someone whose gender changes or is fluid

gender non-conforming – someone whose gender does not stick to the gender binary

glans – the head of a penis or clitoris

grey-As – people on the asexuality spectrum (not completely asexual but not completely sexual)

G-spot – a location inside the vagina that seems to cause intense orgasms; likely part of the clitoris area

H

harassment – intimidating or bullying someone; usually used for adults while bullying is used for children and youth

heterosexual – someone who is attracted to the opposite sex or gender

hickey – a bruise left behind by someone who is kissing or sucking on someone's skin (often on the neck); not caused by vampires

hormones – chemical messengers that tell cells or tissues to do something

hormone therapy – taking hormones for a medical reason, including transitioning

hymen – thin tissue at the entrance of the vagina which does not resemble a cherry; it often thins during puberty

I

intersex – someone who has biological features that are not 100% male or 100% female; common

informed consent – a patient is well-informed about the pros and cons of any medical treatment or process, and is able to make a decision about what they wish to do

inverted nipple – a nipple that is turned inwards

K

kinky – a sexual activity that is out of the ordinary (sometimes just known as kink)

L

labia – the lips of a vulva

labia majora – the outer lips of a vulva

labia minora – the inner lips of a vulva

lesbian – a woman who is attracted to other women

libido – sex drive or a human's urge to have sex

lubrication – natural or artificial fluid to keep friction down; used in orifices and motors

M

masturbate – self-love, or using something to stimulate the genitals for pleasure (usually a finger, hands,

or toy)

menopause – when folks stop having periods, typically in middle age

menstruation – having a period; when the uterus sheds its tissue and lining every 28 days or so; also known as Shark Week

menstrual cup – a cup (usually silicone) for collecting menstrual fluids

metoidioplasty – surgery to enhance the clitoris' length to make it appear more penis-like

minority stress – the stress that comes from being marginalized in your society

misgendering – calling someone the wrong gender

monogamous – a relationship with just two people; the stereotypical Western romance is monogamous (usually one man and one woman)

mucous membrane – moist areas of the body like lips, vulva, and so on

N

neovagina – new surgically created vagina

nipples – the pointy ends on breasts or chests

nocturnal emissions – wet dreams, or when the penis practices ejaculating during the night; usually

the time when boys or people with penises start doing their own laundry

O

orgasm – a feeling that comes as a result of pleasure which can lead to ejaculation, intense muscle contractions, and feeling good (usually as a result of stimulation of the genitals)

ovaries – small sex organs that contain eggs and release hormones; blamed for mood swings

ovulate – to release an egg from an ovary

ovulation – the time when an egg is released from the ovary

P

pack-and-play – a prosthetic penis that can be used as both a packer, and for sexual activity

packer – an object used to create a bulge in the underwear, or the appearance of having a penis

pad – something used on underwear to keep away period stains

pansexual – attracted to many or all genders or sexes

penis – a shaft of flesh that makes up the reproductive organ of people assigned boy at birth, as well as those who have a penis constructed

phalloplasty – construction or reconstruction of a penis

pituitary gland – part of the brain that makes hormones and is the size of a pea; releases first hormones that start puberty

polyamorous – having more than one person in a relationship with you (non-monogamous); might be called an open relationship

porn – media (videos or pictures) that shows sexual activity or people in naked poses (short for pornography)

post-traumatic stress disorder – a mental disorder that can happen as a result of trauma

premenstrual syndrome or PMS – occurs up to two weeks before a menstrual period; may be severe in some bodies; blamed for any emotions displayed by women

prostaglandins – hormone like substances that do a bunch of cool stuff (and uncool stuff)

prostate gland – an organ in the reproductive system of many people with penises and testicles

puberty blockers – medicines used to stop puberty from starting or continuing

Q

queer – someone who is gay or not straight; may be used by many

people in different ways; used to be an insult

questioning – someone who is still exploring their gender or orientation

R

receptive partner – someone who is being penetrated or entered by a penis; sometimes known as the “bottom”

refractory period – the time needed for a penis to rest between ejaculation and starting penetration again

S

sadomasochism – the practice of giving or receiving pain, but in a pleasurable way like spanking or tickling; sometimes referred to S & M

scrotum – the bag or sac that usually holds the testicles

secondary sex characteristics – the features that appear during puberty that are masculine or feminine

SEIM – sexually explicit internet material (also known as porn); shows sexual activities

seminal vesicles – part of the reproductive system that adds fluid to semen

sexting – sending texts, pictures, or emails that are sexually explicit

sexual assault – any sexual act done without consent, from intercourse to inappropriate touching

sexually transmitted infections – infections that are passed through sexual activity, either in fluids or by skin-to-skin contact

sexual orientation – the direction of sexual interest; describing who you are attracted to

sexual violence – violence that relates to sex, gender, or orientation

shaft – another name for the penis, or for a long tube

smegma – the collection of cells and fluids under the foreskin or vulva

speculum – tool used to open vagina so health care providers can see inside as well as the cervix; often used during Pap tests

squirting – releasing extra fluids during orgasm from the urethra or pee hole in people with vulvas and clitorises

stand-to-pee – a prosthetic penis or device used to pee while standing up; used by both cis gender and trans folks

T

taint – the area between the genitals and the anus (short for it ain't genitals and it ain't bum)

tampon – a cotton and/or rayon tube inserted into the vagina to collect

period fluids (also helpful for nosebleeds)

testicles – the reproductive organs that create sperm and testosterone, and hurt when they get hit; may be linked to the colour blue

transgender – someone whose gender identity does not match what they were assigned or called at birth

transition – the journey of changing one's external gender or gender expression, which may include clothing, name, pronouns, hair, genitals, and so on

Two-Spirit – a term used by people who are Indigenous to describe their orientation or gender

tubal ligation – surgery to cut the fallopian tubes so they can no longer allow eggs to the uterus

tunica albuginea – surrounds much of the inner workings of the penis; this is the part that can tear when you "break" your penis

U

urethra – tube leading from the bladder that carries pee

uterus – the womb or organ in people who have ovaries

V

vagina – the tube leading from the uterus to the outside of the body

vaginoplasty – surgery to create a vagina

vaginismus – muscle spasms that prevent penetration of a vagina

vas deferens – the tube leading away from the epididymis

vasectomy – procedure to cut the vas deferens so sperm cannot leave the testicles

vulva – the external reproductive system of someone with a uterus and vagina

vulvodynia – pain in the vulva region

X

X-rated – a term for something that is sexual in nature

Z

zygote – a fertilized egg before it divides and becomes an embryo

Answers to Check Your Knowledge

1. If the person has already said no, respect that.
2. No one has to have sex for any reason. Everyone can respect a no.
3. It is never your fault if someone assaults you even if you
-----.
4. It is never your fault if someone assaults you even if you
-----.
5. Yes. Unfortunately.
6. Nope. They may be too uncomfortable to say no.
7. Yes.
8. No. While assault by strangers hiding in the bushes does happen, the reality is that most people are assaulted by people they know.
9. You always have to ask for consent. Every time.
10. Yes, it is.
11. True.
12. Nope. If they do ----- you don't have to have sex with them.
13. True. Body language is an important part of consent.
14. If you are under 18, your boss or employer is in a position of authority over you. It is not legal for them to ask you for sexual favours. If you are over 18, it's not ethical of them to put you in such an awkward position.
15. Yes.

Resources

This isn't the only puberty book, or the sole resource on sexuality. There are lots of great resources out there for further reading and curiosity. These are some of our favourites, as well as those that helped inform our resource.

Books

- *All The Way: Sex for the First Time.* By Kim Martyn
- *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens Speak Out.* By Susan Kuklin
- *Cycle Savvy: The Smart Teen's Guide to the Mysteries of Her Body.* By Toni Weschler
- *Doing It Right: Making Smart, Safe, and Satisfying Choices About Sex.* By Bronwen Pardes
- *Guide to Getting It On: A Book About the Wonders of Sex.* By Paul Joannides
- *Human Sexuality in a World of Diversity (Second Edition).* By Rathus, Nevid, Fichner-Rathus, Herold, McKenzie
- *Let's Talk About S-E-X: A Guide for Kids 9 to 12 and Their Parents.* By Sam Gitchel and Lorri Foster
- *Our Bodies, Ourselves.* By The Boston Women's Health Collective
- *The Vagina Bible.* By Dr. Jen Gunter.

Numbers

- Kids Help Phone. 1-800-668-6868
- Mobile Crisis Line Nova Scotia. 1-888-429-8167
- Trans Help Line. 1-877-330-6366.

Websites

- Aboriginal Sexual Health. http://aboriginalsexualhealth.ca/index_e.aspx
- Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity. <http://ccgsd-ccdgs.org/>
- Everyday Feminism. <https://everydayfeminism.com/>
- Go Ask Alice! <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/>
- Halifax Sexual Health Centre. <http://Hshc.ca>
- Native Youth Sexual Health Network. <http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/>
- Scarleteen. <http://www.scarleteen.com/>
- Sex and U. <https://www.sexandu.ca/>
- Sexual Health Nova Scotia. <http://www.shns.ca>
- Sex, Etc. <https://sexetc.org/>
- South Shore Sexual Health. <http://www.southshoresexualhealth.com>
- That's Not Cool. <https://thatsnotcool.com/>
- The Youth Project. <https://youthproject.ns.ca/>

YouTubers

Dr. Lindsey Doe (Sexplanations)

South Shore Sexual Health

TicToks

@nicolealiciamd

@drjenniferlincoln

@dr.stacy.t

@sexualhealthmatters

Contact Us

Please let us know if you have any feedback for future versions of this book. We'd love to hear from you so we can keep improving it. This survival guide is meant to be inclusive, which can only happen if we promise to do better each time.

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Evaluation

We would love to have your feedback as well as any words of wisdom you can share with future readers!

Please fill this out and drop it off/mail it/scan and email it.

What did you like about this book?

What would you improve about this book?

Do you have any wisdom or stories to share with future readers?

Are there any topics you'd like covered that weren't in this book?

Uncensored

We're gosh dang tired of puberty books that are pink for girls and blue for boys. So we made our own.

This resource covers puberty and growing up in a gender diverse way so that everyone can learn about *their* unique bodies as well as those around them.

Frank and sex positive, there is nothing we won't discuss. Sexting. Pornography. Discharge.

We guarantee everyone will learn something from this resource, whether they're 14, 44, or 94.

