

Puberty: Glossary of terms

A

Acne – Spots or blemishes brought on by hormonal changes. Can usually be treated with creams, facial washes and ointment.

Anus – The small opening at the end of the rectum or bottom, where poo comes out.

B

Balls – see testicles.

Biological sex – a label that someone is assigned at birth. Female - XX chromosomes, has a vagina and ovaries. Male - XY chromosomes, has a penis and testes.

Bra – Underwear to support the breasts.

Breasts – These develop and grow during puberty. Sometimes one can grow bigger than the other. Breasts come in all shapes and sizes, and can be round or flat, soft or firm. Breasts produce milk after childbirth, to feed a baby.

C

Cervix – The plug at the end of the vaginal passage and the start (neck) of the uterus.

Chromosomes – In humans the sex chromosomes comprise one pair of the total of 23 pairs of chromosomes that provide all the information that make up a human. Individuals having two X chromosomes (XX) are female; individuals having one X chromosome and one Y chromosome (XY) are male. A man's sperm contains 22 chromosomes as well as either an X- or a Y-chromosome. A woman's egg contains 22 chromosomes plus an X-chromosome. The sperm that fertilises the egg determines the baby's sex. If the sperm carries an X-chromosome the baby will be XX and will become a girl. If the sperm carries a Y-chromosome the baby will be XY, a boy.

Clitoris – The clitoris is a complex structure, of which only a small portion is visible on the exterior of the body, the rest of it is behind the labia and surrounds the urethra and also the vagina. The part we can see is called the glans and is a small, soft pea-shaped bud which lies above the urinary opening and is protected by the clitoral hood. It protects the outside part of the clitoris and also provides some moisture to stop it getting sore. Very sensitive part of the body and when touched or rubbed can give sexual pleasure and orgasm.

D

Deodorant – Can help mask or prevent body odour but does not make up for daily washing, and changing and washing clothes often.

Discharge – It is normal for girls to have a slight clear or milky discharge from the vagina. This keeps the vagina healthy and can vary from day to day. Discharge can increase at ovulation (to help sperm swim up the vagina) and also during sexual arousal (to ease penetration) a thick, smelly discharge can be a sign of an infection and should be checked.

E

Ejaculation – Muscles in the base of the penis cause contractions, forcing semen to spurt out of the end of the penis. The muscle in the penis can contract between 3-15 times, ejaculating about a teaspoon of semen containing up to 300 million sperm.

Erection – An aroused, stiff/hard penis. Also known as 'having a hard on' or 'stiffie'

Emotions – Feelings we experience such as anger, joy, sorrow, loneliness, jealousy, happiness. Our feelings can change during puberty, with the release of new hormones and changes happening to our bodies and in our relations. It is normal to feel more angry and moody at times, but if we feel too bad we should seek help.

F

Fallopian tubes – 2 tubes which the ova (eggs) travel along to reach the uterus (womb).

Female Genital Mutilation – A procedure where the female genitals are deliberately cut, injured or changed, but where there's no medical reason for this to be done. It is done for cultural reasons, not religious ones, and is illegal in the UK.

Foreskin – A sleeve of skin which covers the head of the penis. With an erection, the foreskin stretches, exposing the head of the penis. Sometimes foreskins can be too tight, causing painful erections but this can be sorted out. Some people have them removed for religious, health or cultural reasons.

Friends – People we are close to or feel comfortable with and enjoy spending time with.

G

Growth – Bodies grow a lot during puberty and we have a lot of adapting to do. Areas that develop include: chests, breasts, hips and sexual organs.

Genitals – Name given to all the external sexual organs

Gender expression- how a person shows their gender by the way they act, behave, dress etc.

Gender identity – how a person feels about themselves in their head. Whether they feel they are a boy or girl or neither.

H

Hair – Body hair appears around the genitals first (pubic hair) and then grows under the arms and on the legs. Young men also grow hair on their chest and face.

Hygiene – Changes to a young person’s hormones and sweat glands, produce new body odours and sweat, which can be smelly. The best way to keep clean is to wash under arms and around the hair and genital area with soap and water regularly (ideally at least once a day) and to change pants and socks every day.

Hormone – chemical substances in the body that give messages to different parts of the body to start changing/developing during puberty.

I

Inner Lips – Also known as labia. The smaller lips that surround the entrance to the vagina and urethra (wee hole), just inside the outer lips

IVF – Where specialist doctors fertilise the egg of the woman with the sperm of the man, but outside of the body. The fertilised egg creates an embryo which is then put back inside the woman so she becomes pregnant and grows the baby inside her uterus/womb.

L

Labia – Includes both the smaller lips/folds of skin that surround the entrance to the vagina and urethra (wee hole), and the outer lips/folds of skin that surround the inner lips.

M

Masturbation – Rubbing, stroking or touching one’s own penis, clitoris, lips (labia) and vagina for pleasure, (because it feels good). It’s not bad for a person or harmful. It can help a person to learn about their body and what gives it pleasure. Also known as ‘wanking’, self-touch or self-pleasure.

Menstrual cup – Sometimes known as a Mooncup; is a small, foldable, reusable device made from silicone, rubber or plastic that collects, rather than absorbs, the menstrual blood when inserted into the vagina.

Menstruation – Another word for periods. Also known as ‘time of the month’, ‘coming on’. A loss of blood (usually monthly) as the unused ovum (egg) comes out of the vaginal opening along with the lining of the uterus. Girls who start menstruating can become pregnant, if having unprotected sexual intercourse.

Menstruation/period pads – Made up of pads of cotton wool that a girl or woman presses onto the inside of a pair of knickers to catch the blood during a period to protect her clothes.

O

Oestrogen/progestogen – The female sex hormones. During puberty, oestrogen stimulates breast development and causes the vagina, uterus (womb) and Fallopian tubes (that carry eggs to the womb) to mature. Progestogen plays a part in regulating a girl’s menstrual cycle.

Orgasm – The peak, most pleasurable or most intense part of sexual pleasure. Can happen

through masturbation or penetrative sex. Also known as 'coming' or 'climax'.

Outer Lips - Also known as labia. Outer lips/folds of skin as part of the vulva, which cover the sexual parts of a woman's or girl's body including her inner lips (also known as labia), clitoris, urethra and the entrance to the vagina.

Ova – plural of ovum (eggs)

Ovary – where the ova (eggs) are kept. There are usually two.

Ovum – the egg from a female that could potentially become a baby if it meets with a sperm.

P

Period(s) – See menstruation

Period pants - Period pants are leak-proof knickers, worn instead of a pad, a tampon or menstrual cup during a period. They usually hold around two standard tampons' worth of menstruation blood so it doesn't leak through onto the clothes. They can be worn all day and washed in a washing machine.

Puberty – Emotional and physical changes that happen in early adolescence, as the body begins to mature sexually and develop.

Penis – Also known by slang names such as 'willy', 'cock' or 'dick', this is the shaft shaped reproductive organ that hangs outside the male body. An organ that can help transport urine (wee) and sperm away from the body. When rubbed or stroked, the penis can become hard and sexually aroused, and ejaculation and orgasm can happen.

Progestogen – One of the female sex hormone that plays a part in regulating a girl's menstrual cycle.

Prostate Gland – The muscles of the prostate gland help propel semen into the urethra during ejaculation.

Pubic hair – Hair which starts to grow around the genitals during puberty.

R

Relationships – Intimate and close friendships or emotional attachments. These can take on more importance as we reach puberty. Can be of a sexual nature.

S

Sanitary pad/towel – See menstruation/period pads.

Semen – Contains sperm, the male reproductive agent, produced in their millions every day from puberty, in the testicles, and seminal fluid.

Seminal fluid – Fluid that is added to the sperm by the prostate gland to protect and provide energy for the sperm to swim.

Sex – A term used to describe someone's biological sex, or can be used to describe all the different ways two individuals can touch each other in a sexual way; that includes touching their genitals in a way that feels nice to them.

Sexual awakening – Starts during puberty, as girls' clitoris, labia and breasts and boys' penis and testicles develop.

Sexual Intercourse – Sexual contact between individuals involving penetration, especially the insertion of a man's erect penis into a woman's vagina, typically culminating in orgasm and the ejaculation of semen. If it occurs when the woman is ovulating (releasing an egg), it can lead to conception, where the sperm fertilises the egg.

Sexual orientation: who someone is attracted to, physically and emotionally attracted, e.g. a person of the opposite sex, a person of the same sex, or both (bisexual).

Sexual Reproduction – Occurs when a male sex cell (sperm) and the female sex cell (egg) join. This fusion of sex cells is called fertilisation. Sexual reproduction allows some of the genetic information from each parent to mix, producing offspring that resemble their parents, but are not identical to them. In this way, sexual reproduction leads to variety in the offspring. In humans this process may happen through sexual intercourse or IVF.

Scrotum – Sack or pouch which hold testicles. During puberty the scrotum becomes baggy, helping the testicles to hang away from the body. This helps to keep the temperature down, which allows sperm to be produced.

Smegma – A creamy substance which builds up under the foreskin. It is normal but can be smelly if left unwashed. To wash under the foreskin, pull it back gently and gradually and wash around the head of the penis with soapy water.

Sperm duct – Also known as 'vas deferens'. The job of these tubes is to carry sperm to the urethra before ejaculation.

Spots – See Acne.

Sweat – During puberty new sweat glands start to work, producing a distinct body odour. Washing every day with soap and water and changing clothes regularly becomes important.

T

Tampon – a compressed pad of cotton wool created into a plug that can be inserted into the body in the vaginal passage by the girl or woman to soak up the period blood before it leaves the body in order to protect her clothes and to allow her to go swimming during her period, if she chooses.

Testicles – Also known as 'balls', these are held in the scrotum (sack/ball bag) found below the penis, which produce millions of sperm every day.

Testosterone – The male sex hormone. During puberty, rising levels of testosterone encourage the growth of the testicles, penis, and pubic hair. The voice begins to deepen, and muscles and body hair grow. Along with these changes comes growing sexual desire.

U

Urethra – The tube which runs from the bladder to the outside of the body, either through the penis or to an opening above the entrance to the vagina. It also carries sperm to the penis.

Urinary opening – Opening of the urethra, a separate opening from the vagina (lying above it), where urine (wee) comes out.

Uterus – A fertilised egg (one that has joined a sperm) embeds itself into the lining of the uterus and grows into a baby. If this doesn't happen the lining of the uterus comes away as part of a period and renews itself for the next month.

V

Vagina – The opening of the reproductive part of the girl's body (the passage which leads to the womb). This is also the passage through which the penis enters during sexual intercourse and where tampons and Mooncups or Menstrual cups are placed during menstruation.

Voice – For boys, puberty brings changes to the voice box. Voices 'drop' and become deeper. This happens as the larynx (voice box) grows and this makes voices deeper. Voice sometimes comes out as a squeak when the muscles of the larynx go out of control for a moment. Girls may also notice a change in their voice too, as their voice box grows.

Vulva – Vulva refers to the external parts of the girl's genitals which you can see. This includes the clitoris, two sets of lips- the inner and the outer (also known as labia), the urethra (wee hole) and the entrance to the vagina.

W

Wet dreams – A nocturnal emission, informally known as a wet dream, is a spontaneous orgasm during sleep that includes ejaculation for a male, or vaginal wetness or an orgasm (or both) for a female. This is normally associated with boys during puberty but girls can experience them too and is a sign of sexual awakening. Sometimes boys will notice a wet stain in their pyjamas or on their sheets, whereas girls will notice increased vaginal wetness. However this can be tricky to identify and so it is normal for girls and women to not know whether or not they've had an orgasm in their sleep.

Womb – (See uterus).