

Sexuality and Puberty

What happens during puberty?

When [puberty](#) starts, your brain sends signals to certain parts of the body to start growing and changing. These signals are called [hormones](#). Hormones make your body change and start looking more like an adult's (read [Your Changing Body: Puberty in Girls](#)). Hormones can also cause emotional changes.

What emotional changes happen during puberty?

During your teen years, hormones can cause you to have strong feelings, including sexual feelings. You may have these feelings for someone of the same gender or a different gender.

Thinking about sex or just wanting to hear or read about sex is normal. It's normal to want to be held and touched by others.

Expressing Sexual Feelings

How are sexual feelings expressed?

There are many ways to express sexuality. [Sexual intercourse](#) (vaginal sex) is one way.

Others include [masturbation](#) , oral sex, and anal sex.

What is masturbation?

Touching or rubbing your own [genitals](#) (such as the [clitoris](#) , [vagina](#) , or [penis](#)) can give you pleasure. This is known as masturbation. It can help you learn what kind of touch makes you feel good. Masturbation can let you enjoy your sexuality without having sex.

Touching a partner's genitals or other parts of the body can provide sexual pleasure. Touching will not cause pregnancy and is less likely to cause a [sexually transmitted infection \(STI\)](#) than other sexual activities (read [How to Prevent Sexually Transmitted Infections](#)).

What is oral sex?

Oral sex is when one partner's mouth comes into contact with the other partner's genitals. This can provide sexual pleasure and lead to orgasm. Some teens believe oral sex is not really sex because it does not cause pregnancy. But it can spread STIs. Using a condom or a [dental dam](#) during oral sex can help protect you against STIs.

What happens during vaginal sex?

During vaginal sex, also called sexual intercourse, the hard (erect) penis goes into the vagina and moves in and out. This can lead to [orgasm](#) . (Orgasm can also happen during masturbation, oral sex, or anal sex.)

During vaginal sex, when the male partner has an orgasm, the penis spurts [semen](#) , which contains millions of [sperm](#) , into the vagina. The sperm can swim up into the [uterus](#) and then a [fallopian tube](#) , where sperm can fertilize an [egg](#) . This can lead to pregnancy. Vaginal sex can also spread STIs.

What can I do if I want to have vaginal sex but I do not want to get pregnant?

If you have vaginal sex and do not want to get pregnant, use a reliable birth control method every time. Birth control can reduce the chance of pregnancy occurring. Read [Birth Control](#) to learn about the different options. Some are better at preventing pregnancy than others.

What is anal sex?

Another form of sex is anal sex, in which the penis is placed into the other partner's [anus](#). This form of sex can greatly increase the risk of getting an STI, including [human immunodeficiency virus \(HIV\)](#). Anal sex can cause tiny tears in the [rectum](#) and anus. The germs that cause an STI may enter the body through these tears. Using a condom during anal sex can help protect you against STIs.

How can I protect myself and my partner from STIs during sex?

Condoms and dental dams can protect against STIs. Even if you are taking birth control pills or using any other form of birth control to prevent pregnancy, you still need to use a condom or dental dam to protect against STIs.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

What is sexual orientation?

Sexual orientation is a person's emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people:

- "Lesbian" means you are a female who is attracted to other females.
- "Gay" means you are attracted to people of the same gender.
- "Bisexual" means you are attracted to people of more than one gender.
- "Straight" means you are attracted to people who are not your gender.

Many teens think about their sexual orientation during puberty. Things you have done—holding hands with a friend of the same gender, looking at or touching each other's genitals—may make you wonder about your sexual orientation. This is normal.

Who you are attracted to is not a choice you make or something that can be changed. Read [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer \(LGBTQ\) Teens](#) to learn more.

What is gender identity?

Gender identity is your sense of your own gender. Your gender may be male, female, both male and female, neither male nor female, or something else. This identity may or may not be the same as the sex you were assigned at birth. Gender identity (who you are) is not the same thing as sexual orientation (who you are attracted to).

Most people are told they are a boy or a girl (male or female) based on the genitals they were born with. This is the sex you are assigned at birth. If someone is transgender or nonbinary, that male or female label does not match their gender identity.

Some people may feel that they belong to neither gender or to both genders. People who feel this way are sometimes called gender nonbinary, gender fluid, or genderqueer.

Read [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer \(LGBTQ\) Teens](#) to learn more.

What if I feel confused, lonely, or depressed?

Some people may not be accepted by their families and friends based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. This may lead to feeling lonely, scared, or depressed.

Some people may even consider suicide. If you feel confused or unhappy, or if you are being bullied or mistreated, talk with an adult you can trust. If you cannot talk with your parents, ask a teacher, doctor, or school counselor for help.

You can also read [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer \(LGBTQ\) Teens](#) to find a list of resources that may help, including anonymous hotlines and peer support.

Deciding About Sex

When deciding whether to have sex, what are some things to consider?

Ask yourself what your feelings are about sex. Are you really ready for sex? If you are dating, do you know how the other person feels about sex? Make up your own mind about the right time for you. Do not have sex just because

- you think everyone else is
- you think it will make you more popular
- you are talked into it
- you are afraid the other person will break up with you if you do not
- you feel that it will make you more grown-up

What if I decide to wait and someone tries to pressure me into sex?

If you're not ready to have sex, say so, and stick to your decision. It can help to think about what you would say if someone pressures you to have sex. The following examples can work:

- "If you love me, you will have sex with me."
Answer: "If you really love me, you will not pressure me."
- "You are the only one I will ever love."
Answer: "Good, then we will have lots of time later."
- "If you don't want to have sex with me, I will find someone who will."
Answer: "That's your choice. My choice is to not have sex."

Sexual Violence and Safety

What is rape?

Rape is any genital, oral, or anal penetration without consent. Most victims know the person who raped them. It may be someone they are dating. It may be a friend of the same age or an adult. The offender might use physical force or threats. Often alcohol or drugs are used before rape. No matter who the offender is, rape is a crime.

What are some things I can do to help protect myself against rape?

Although rape is never the victim's fault, it makes sense to take precautions to protect yourself. Avoid situations that might put you at risk of unwanted sex. Avoid walking alone. Limit alcohol and drug use. Never leave a drink unattended. Always go to parties with a friend and check in on each other. Never leave without your friend and never leave with a stranger.

What is intimate partner violence?

This type of violence can happen between couples in relationships. It is also called domestic violence. It can involve physical violence, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse. Even threats of violence are considered intimate partner violence. If you are in an

abusive relationship, it is important to seek help. Tell an adult—a parent, teacher, doctor, or counselor. Read [Intimate Partner Violence](#) to learn more.

What are some things I can do to stay safe online?

The internet is a helpful resource, but it can also be unsafe. You may be exposed to unwanted sexual material or be harassed. You may meet people online who want to talk about sex or meet you.

Never give out personal information (like your name, address, phone number, or school). Use a fake name for usernames. Keep your profiles private so that only people you know can see your information.

Never agree to meet someone in person that you met on the internet. Be aware that adults can pose as teenagers online. Do not respond to any message or email that makes you feel uncomfortable. Report these messages to parents, guardians, or other authorities.

Glossary

Anus: The opening of the digestive tract through which bowel movements leave the body.

Clitoris: A female sex organ found near the opening of the vagina.

Dental Dam: A thin piece of latex or polyurethane used between the mouth and the vagina or anus during oral sex. Using a dental dam can help protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Egg: The female reproductive cell made in and released from the ovaries. Also called the ovum.

Fallopian Tube: Tubes through which an egg travels from the ovary to the uterus.

Genitals: The sexual or reproductive organs.

Hormones: Substances made in the body by cells or organs that control the function of cells or organs.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV): A virus that attacks certain cells of the body's immune system. If left untreated, HIV can cause acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

Masturbation: Self-stimulation of the genitals.

Orgasm: The feelings of physical pleasure that can happen during sexual activity.

Penis: The male sex organ.

Puberty: The stage of life when the reproductive organs start to function and other sex features develop.

Rectum: The last part of the digestive tract.

Semen: The fluid made by male sex glands that contains sperm.

Sexual Intercourse: The act of the penis of the male entering the vagina of the female. Also called "having sex" or "making love."

Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI): An infection that is spread by sexual contact.

Sperm: A cell made in the male testicles that can fertilize a female egg.

Uterus: A muscular organ in the female pelvis. During pregnancy, this organ holds and nourishes the fetus. Also called the womb.

Vagina: A tube-like structure surrounded by muscles. The vagina leads from the uterus to the outside of the body.

If you have further questions, contact your ob-gyn.

Don't have an ob-gyn? [Learn how to find a doctor near you.](#)

FAQ042

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