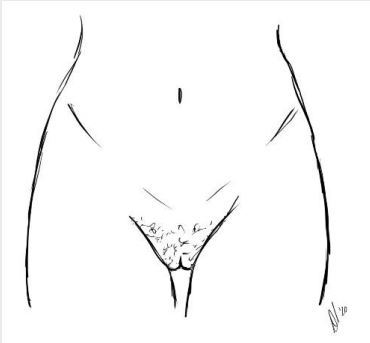


EXPLORING YOUR GENITALS

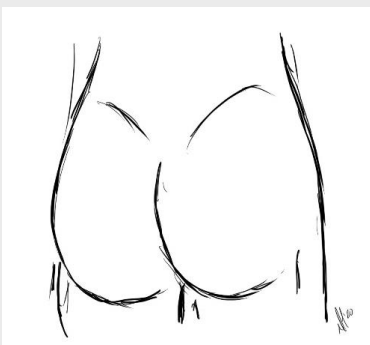
The Outside

This is your body. To begin our exploration let's start from the outside. This is your front and backside. Everybody looks different. For example, you may have pubic hair, or there may not be space between your upper thighs. The images below are sketches, not real life, so remember to always be kind to yourself.

Your front



Your backside



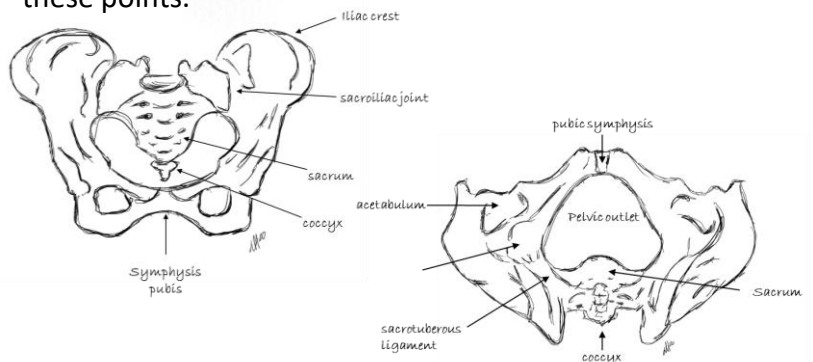
It is really important to know your own body parts. They are YOURS! In order for our brain to adequately assess whether a specific body part is healthy or in danger, it needs to know that it exists. If you don't look, touch or talk about a part of your body, the connections between your brain and that part may not be strong.

For most people, exploration of their bodies through touch and sight occurs at an early age (for both boys and girls). The female genitals are a bit more difficult to see but we investigate the parts with our hands. At some point as we age, we may stop exploring and over time, our sensation and awareness of this area lessens. This makes the healing process a bit more difficult if pain or dysfunction present themselves.

This handout will help you learn about your genitals and increase your awareness of an important part of your body. Your pelvic organs inside (bladder, uterus, rectum) will not be discussed in detail. For now we will focus on what you can touch and see.

The Bony Pelvis

To orientate yourself to your genital area, find your pubic bone (symphysis pubis), your tailbone (coccyx) and the two bony prominences you sit on top of (ischial tuberosities). Your genital region is the space between these points.

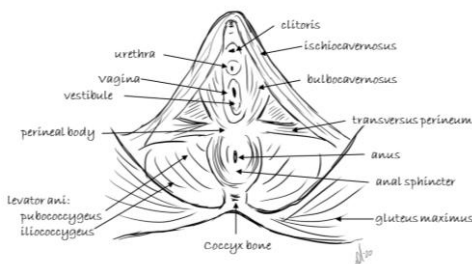


The Pelvic Floor Muscles

Underneath the genitals lay your pelvic floor muscles. You won't be able to see them but you may feel the different resistance under your fingers or possibly tenderness within them. For ease, not all muscles are mentioned.

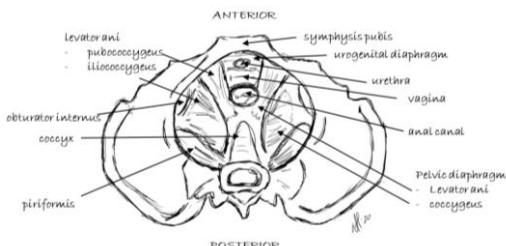
First layer

Directly under the skin you can see some circular muscles that help you to squeeze each of your entrances.



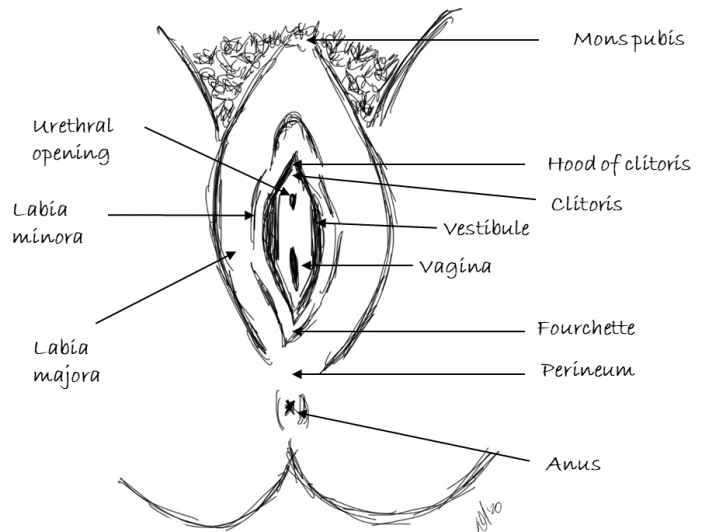
Deepest layer

Looking down from above you can see the deepest layer of muscles. When a finger is inserted into the vagina, contraction of these muscles may feel like your finger is being lifted.



The External Genital Region

This is your genital region, from the outside. Remember these are just sketches. Everyone looks different. Your labia (also known as your "lips") could be shorter, longer, and/or asymmetrical – we are all unique!



Your Homework

A good progression to follow for learning is outlined below. When you feel comfortable, have no increase in pain and feel ready to move on, progress to the next step. When the next steps involve you looking or touching, find a comfortable time and place. Lying inclined on pillows in your bed can help you feel more comfortable.

- Start by looking at the pictures on this handout
- Using a mirror, just look at your genital area without touching. Continue to use the mirror as you explore
- Note the different areas mentioned in the anatomy section
- Squeeze and lift your pelvic floor muscles, relax them and see what happens
- Cough (or have a laugh!) and see what happens
- Gently touch around the vulva think of a clock and have a gentle touch around the clock, note any pain/fear/discomfort

Lubrication

Lubrication helps decrease friction so things slide easier, which can help to decrease pain. There many different types so find one that works best for you and remember you can never use too much!

Water-based - have a tendency to dry out quicker so reapply often.

Options: Sliquid, Good clean love Sylk,

Oil-based - lasts longer but can cause condoms to break down if using for intercourse, harder to clean, stains fabric

Options: Yes, coconut oil, olive oil

Silicon-based - also last longer but more difficult to clean off.

Options: Uberlube

Remember to:

*try to stay away from perfumes, additives, preservatives and petroleum-based lubricants
*always read the label of your lubricant and check to see if they are compatible with condoms.

Pain Levels

For some people, light touch can be painful. Try to stay under a 3-4/10 (with 10 being the most pain you have ever experienced).

Willingness

Some women are not comfortable with the thought of looking or touching themselves. It is your body, be kind to yourself. Take your time. You may need to set the scene. For example, you could take a warm bath, light candles, meditate or do some breathing exercises before trying the homework section.

Work with what you feel comfortable with. There is no need to rush!

- Gently open up the labia majora (outer lips) and find your labia minora (inner lips) and openings to your vagina and urethra. Can you find your clitoris? Believe it or not, this is just a tiny portion of it, called the “glans” of the clitoris, covered in a “hood”



- You may need to use lubrication for the following progressions:
 1. Gently touch around the clock on the vestibule. Progress to just inside the vestibule/vagina
 2. Allow the finger to insert into the vagina just the distance of your fingernail
 - sweep around the clock like you are drawing a circle
 - press gently around the “numbers on the clock”
 3. Try squeezing and relaxing your pelvic floor muscles
 4. If you feel comfortable, you can insert your finger in farther (to the first or second knuckle). At this stage, the mirror won't be of help so you can put it aside. Again, pretend there is a clock. It will feel much larger to you and you may have to bend your finger inside or angle your hand differently. Try what works for you.

Now you know the basics, and a little beyond, about an important part of your body. It is a good idea to have a look and a feel every month. When you feel ready, feel free to explore more.

We would like to thank the following contributors to this information:

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