

EXPLORING

YOUR GENITALS

The Outside

This is your body...let's start from the outside. This is your front and backside. You may look different. There may be pubic hair, there may not be space between your upper thighs! This is a drawing, not real life so be kind to yourself.

Your front



Your backside



<http://www.healthline.com/human-body-maps/female-pelvis>

It is really important

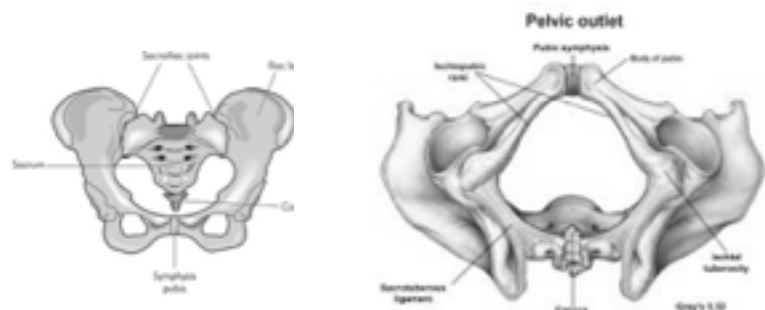
to know about your own body parts. They are YOURS! In order for our brain to adequately assess whether a specific body part is healthy or in danger, it needs to know that it exists. If you don't look, touch or talk about a part of your body, the connections between your brain and that part may not be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

The focus of this handout is to get you to learn about your genitals and increase your awareness of a very 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 you to your genital area, find your pubic bone (symphysis pubis), your tailbone (coccyx) and the two bony prominences you sit

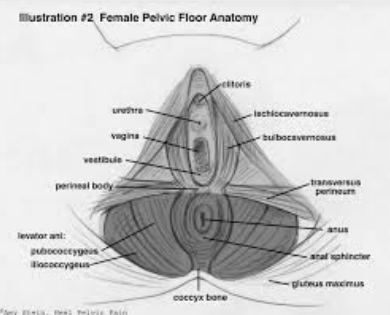


on top of (ischial tuberosities). Your genital region is the space between these points.

The Pelvic Floor Muscles

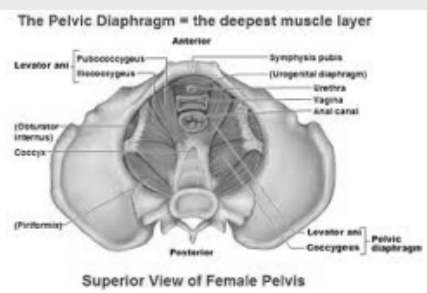
Underneath the genitals lay your pelvic floor muscles. You won't be able to see them but you may feel the different resistance under your fingers or possibly tenderness within them. For ease, not all muscles are mentioned.

First layer



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

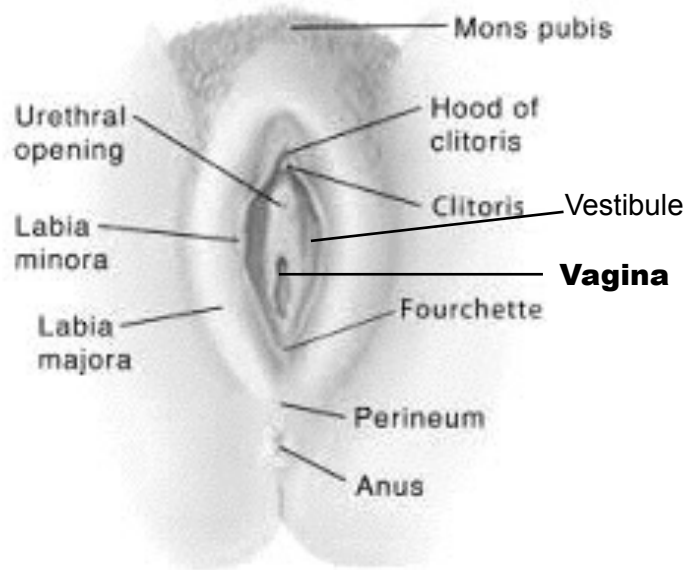
Deepest layer



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 drawings. EVERYONE looks different! Some labia (also known as your "lips") are shorter, longer, asymmetrical, etc.



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

Lubrication

Lubrication helps decrease friction so things slide easier, which can help to decrease pain. There many different types but for the purpose of this handout, try using any of the following, remembering you can never use enough!!!

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

Options- Sylk, Yes, Slippery Stuff
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, safe with condoms, more difficult to clean off

Options - Astroglide

*Try to stay away from perfumes, additives, preservatives and petroleum-based lubricants.

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 can ever imagine).

Willingness

Some women are not comfortable even with the thought of looking or touching themselves. It is your body but this process may be slow. Be kind to yourself. Take your time. Progress as slowly as you need. Some may need to set the scene - taking a warm bath, having candles, meditating, breathing - before trying the homework section. Work with what you feel comfortable with. There is no need to rush!

- 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

•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:

•Gently touch around the clock on the vestibule. Progress to just inside the vestibule/vagina

•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”

•Try squeezing and relaxing your pelvic floor muscles

•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 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.

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