

FACILITATOR RESOURCE

FEMALE AND MALE SEXUAL/REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEMS

This resource provides background information for facilitators. We recommend that you read and digest this information so you can feel comfortable with the content when you are working with participants in their small groups. You will not need to present this specific information in this format to participants.

FEMALE SYSTEM

External Parts and Functions

- **Vulva:** The whole of the female external genitalia is called the vulva. The vulva includes all of the following external parts except the anus.
- **Labia majora and labia minora:** Outer and inner folds of skin and fatty tissue on either side of the vagina; provide protection to the clitoris and the urethral and vaginal openings; referred to as vaginal lips.
- **Clitoris:** A highly sensitive structure located above the urethral opening at the point where the inner labia (lips) meet; the only function of the clitoris is for sexual pleasure; most women need clitoral stimulation to reach orgasm.
- **Urethral opening:** A small opening above the vagina where urine leaves the body.
- **Vaginal opening:** Located between the urethral opening and the anus; usually covered by a thin membrane (hymen) prior to first experience of intercourse; outlet for the menstrual flow.
- **Anus (not a part of the reproductive system):** The opening through which bowel movements or feces leave the body. It is also an erogenous zone. Bacteria from the anus can be very harmful for the vagina and lead to infection. Partners should take care not to transfer the penis, fingers, or an object from the anus to vagina.

Internal Parts and Functions

- **Bladder (not a part of the reproductive system):** A sac-like structure in the pelvic region; responsible for storing urine.
- **Urethra:** A tube through which urine passes from the bladder to the outside of the body.
- **Vagina:** Passageway extending from the uterus to the outside of the body; canal through which a baby passes during delivery; passageway for the menstrual flow to the outside; place where intercourse occurs. Capable of expanding during intercourse and childbirth. Lubricates during sexual arousal; the vagina lubricates or gets wet when a woman is sexually excited.
- **Cervix:** The opening into the uterus; protrudes into the uppermost part of the vagina. This opening is very small—only as wide as a piece of spaghetti. This is what has to dilate or open wider when a woman is about to deliver a baby.
- **Hymen:** A thin membrane that partially covers the opening to the vagina in most young girls—sometimes called a “cherry.” Some girls are born without a hymen and others may stretch or break their hymen during vigorous physical activity. Absence of a hymen does not mean a woman is not a virgin.

- **Uterus:** A pear shaped, muscular organ located in the pelvic region; beginning at puberty, the lining of the uterus sheds every month during menstruation; the fetus develops in the uterus during pregnancy.
- **Fallopian tubes:** Passageways for the egg from the ovary to the uterus; place where fertilization or conception occurs.
- **Ovaries:** Almond shaped structures located in the female pelvic region; each under the finger-like endings of the fallopian tubes; contain 300,000 to 500,000 immature egg cells at birth; produce female sex hormones, estrogen, and progesterone; begin release of ripe eggs at time of puberty.
- **Ovum or egg:** About the size of a pinhead; if not fertilized, it dissolves and is absorbed. Usually, one ovum is released monthly; if more than one egg is released, twins or multiple births may result.
- **Menstruation:** The monthly shedding of the lining of the uterus which forms to nurture a fertilized egg. If an egg is not fertilized, the lining is not needed so it leaves the body through the vagina. Menstruation generally begins between the ages of 9 and 17, and ends at menopause, usually when a woman is 45 to 55 years of age.

Reproductive Process

- **Ovulation:** Once a month, an ovary releases a mature egg, which then becomes available for fertilization. This occurs approximately 14 days before the next menstrual period begins which is about the middle of the cycle for women with an average 28-day cycle. The most fertile period for many women is at the halfway point between her two periods. However, it is possible for a woman to ovulate earlier or later due to illness or stress or if her cycle is particularly long or short.
- **Fertilization:** The union of an egg with a sperm in the Fallopian tube; sperm are capable of fertilizing an egg up to seven days after intercourse.

Female Sexual Response

A woman's body goes through certain predictable stages when she gets sexually excited. Many of these responses are the same in both men and women:

- **Excitement:** Nipples become erect; clitoris and labia get larger as they become engorged with blood; vagina lubricates; breathing and heart rate increase.
- **Plateau:** Excitement builds until it gets to its highest point, then it triggers a reflex called orgasm.
- **Orgasm:** The rhythmic contractions of the outer portion of the vagina. Not all women are aware of these contractions. Unlike men, women are capable of moving from one orgasm to another (multiple orgasms) if the sexual stimulation continues, but not all women have multiple orgasms. Some women report having ejaculations during orgasm when fluid (not containing sperm) spurts out of the urethral and/or vaginal openings; not all women experience ejaculation, either. Although there isn't agreement in the field about the reality of female ejaculation, the important thing is to validate a woman's experience with orgasm so she understands the wide range of normal. Female orgasm is very individual; each woman's experience is different and unique. And, not all women have orgasms every time they have sex. Generally, orgasm is pleasurable and includes a sense of release of sexual tension caused by excitement.
- **Resolution:** The genitals and entire body return to an unstimulated state: breathing and heart rate slow down, nipples and genitals decrease in size, and the body relaxes.

MALE SYSTEM

External Parts and Functions

- **Penis:** The male organ for sexual intercourse and for urination. The average length of a flaccid penis is 3.9 inches, with a girth of 3.7 inches. The average length of an erect penis is 5.9 inches with a girth of 4.9 inches. Typically, the smaller the penis when flaccid, the more it grows when erect. Larger penises don't usually get all that much bigger when erect.
- **Circumcision:** The removal of the foreskin, which covers the head (glands) of the penis; a procedure usually performed during the first 10 days of life for religious and/or personal reasons; aids in the removal of smegma, a normal, cheesy secretion from the penis that can accumulate under the foreskin; does not affect sexual functioning.
- **Erection:** The process by which the penis fills with blood and becomes hard in response to thoughts, fantasies, temperature, touch, or sexual stimulation.
- **Scrotum:** The wrinkly skin pouch located behind the penis; holds and provides protection to the testicles; maintains temperature necessary for the production and survival of sperm.
- **Testes:** Two round glands that descend into the scrotum following birth; produce and store sperm from puberty throughout life; they produce testosterone, the male sex hormone.
- **Anus (not a part of the reproductive system):** The opening for the expulsion of feces from the body; also an erogenous zone.

Internal Parts and Functions

- **Vas deferens (sperm tube):** Passageway for sperm; one leads from each testicle to join with the urethra.
- **Seminal vesicles:** Two sac-like structures lying behind the bladder; they secrete a thick fluid that forms part of the semen.
- **Prostate gland:** A gland located in the male pelvis; secretes a thick, milky fluid that forms part of the semen.
- **Cowper's gland:** Two pea-sized glands that secrete a clear, sticky fluid that is released from the penis soon after erection; this fluid may contain sperm; it neutralizes the acid in the urethra, making the passage safe for sperm.
- **Urethra:** The tube through which urine passes from the bladder to the outside of the body; closed to urine during ejaculation.
- **Sperm:** The male tadpole shaped sex cells; too small to be seen without a microscope; movement aided by lashing their tails; production begins usually between the ages of 12 and 14; 200 to 500 million cells released per ejaculation; may survive five days in the Fallopian tubes, but rarely cause fertilization after 72 hours.
- **Ejaculation:** The release of semen from the penis; usually accompanied by orgasm. Fun Facts: Orgasm lasts an average of 4 seconds. Average number of ejaculatory spurts: 3-10; average speed of ejaculation: 25 miles per hour.
- **Semen:** The sperm-containing fluid that spurts out of the penis at the time of ejaculation; the fluids that later mix with sperm are produced and stored in the seminal vesicles and prostate gland. Fun

Facts: Semen contains 5 calories per teaspoon and is high in protein.

- **Nocturnal emissions (wet dreams):** Erection of the penis and subsequent ejaculation during sleep; nature's way of releasing excess sperm from the testicles; sometimes triggered by sexual dreams and fantasies; occurs most frequently in young males who do not engage in masturbation or sexual intercourse.

Male Sexual Response

A man's body also goes through predictable stages when he gets sexually excited:

- **Excitement:** Nipples become erect; penis, testicles, and other body parts swell as they become engorged with blood; penis becomes erect; scrotum and testicles contract and move up closer to the body; muscle tension increases; breathing and heart rate increase.
- **Plateau:** Excitement builds until it gets to its highest point, then it triggers a reflex called orgasm.
- **Orgasm:** Ejaculation happens in two phases; first, glands containing fluids contract and deposit their fluids into the urethra; men feel these contractions which are like a signal saying, "I'm about to come." The second phase occurs when the fluids are propelled out of the urethra by strong rhythmic contractions; involuntary muscle contractions and spasms may occur in various parts of the body. The pleasurable sensations of orgasm usually accompany ejaculation but sometimes men can experience the peak pleasure of orgasm without ejaculation and vice versa.
- **Resolution:** The genitals and entire body return to an unstimulated state: breathing and heart rate slow down, nipples and genitals decrease in size, and the body relaxes; for most men, a period of rest, called the refractory period, is necessary for them to be able to get another erection and go on and have another ejaculation. The length of this period varies according the man's age, how exciting the situation is, and the amount of time since his last ejaculation. Young men have short refractory periods and can often get erect again very quickly. As men age, the refractory period gets longer. It's important for men to understand that they will experience changes like this as they get older.