

# Sexual Reproduction

Pregnancy begins when a female's egg is fertilized by a male's sperm to form an embryo. Fertilization occurs through sexual intercourse.

During puberty, the body becomes sexually mature and able to reproduce. Fertility, the ability to reproduce, begins in females with the start of menstruation and stops with the end of menstruation, called menopause (around ages 45 to 55). Males become fertile at puberty and are usually fertile for the rest of their lives.

All female reproductive organs are on the inside of the body except for the vulva. Usually an egg (a female sex cell) is released from one ovary each month and travels through the fallopian tube toward the uterus. If the egg meets a sperm and unites with it, the egg is fertilized and then attaches itself to the wall of the uterus, where it develops into a baby. If an egg is not fertilized, it leaves the body through the vagina with blood and other fluids during the menstrual cycle.

Male reproductive organs are located both inside and outside of the body. Male sex cells called sperm are produced in the testicles, or testes. Sperm leave each testicle and travel to the epididymis, where they are stored. They then pass through the vas deferens to the seminal vesicle and the prostate gland where they combine with seminal fluid to form semen. Semen exits the body through the urethra, a tube that runs through the penis.

Sexual intercourse occurs when the penis becomes erect and is inserted in the female's vagina. Semen is released during ejaculation into the woman's vagina. Sperm enter the uterus through the cervix and travel upward to the fallopian tubes, where a sperm might fertilize an egg if one is present.

*Determine whether the statements below are true or false. Write T or F in each blank.*

1. \_\_\_\_ Male sex cells are called sperm and are produced in the seminal vesicle.
2. \_\_\_\_ A fertilized egg passes through one of the fallopian tubes and then travels out of the body with blood and other fluids.
3. \_\_\_\_ Fertilization occurs through sexual intercourse.
4. \_\_\_\_ Sperm are stored in the epididymis and exit the body through the urethra.



# Pregnancy and Childbirth

Pregnancy is the period from conception until birth. In humans, this period usually lasts approximately nine months. During pregnancy a baby grows inside its mother's uterus. Pregnancy is divided into three trimesters, or three-month periods. During the first trimester, pregnant women may notice that they are very tired or have morning sickness (nausea that can occur anytime during the day). Later in the pregnancy, expectant mothers may experience discomforts such as heartburn, swollen ankles, leg cramps, or backaches. These symptoms are often due to the growing baby pushing on the mother's internal organs. The symptoms disappear soon after delivery of the child.



Expectant mothers should receive proper prenatal care. This includes seeing a physician regularly, eating a nutritious diet that includes folic acid (which may prevent certain spinal birth defects) and iron (which helps the baby develop new cells). Pregnant mothers are expected to gain roughly 20 to 30 pounds during pregnancy. Much of this weight gain occurs during the last 20 weeks of pregnancy. Pregnant mothers should not smoke tobacco, drink alcohol, or take any drugs except those prescribed by a physician. Most doctors agree that exercise during pregnancy is fine as long as it is not too strenuous.

After a mother's fortieth week of pregnancy, a baby weighs about seven pounds and is said to be at full term. If a baby is born before 37 weeks, the baby is premature. The more premature a baby is, the greater the chance that it will have developmental problems. A baby that is born before 24 weeks of pregnancy is not likely to survive.

Childbirth, or labor, is the process by which the baby moves from the uterus to the outside world. Childbirth has several stages. During the first stage of labor the uterus contracts (tenses and relaxes) irregularly, and the cervix (neck of the uterus) thins out and dilates (opens) gradually. This stage may last for hours. After the cervix is fully dilated (about 4"), the second stage of labor begins. Contractions become stronger until the baby is pushed out of the woman's body. The delivery of the placenta is the third stage of labor. The placenta is the organ that helps provide the baby with food and oxygen during the pregnancy.

1. List some of the changes pregnancy can cause in the mother's body.

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2. What should a pregnant woman do to take care of her baby before it's born?

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3. Describe what happens during each stage of labor.

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## Sexually Transmitted Diseases

A sexually transmitted disease (STD) is a disease that is spread primarily through sexual activity. The most common STDs in the United States are acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), chlamydia, gonorrhea, genital herpes, and syphilis.

AIDS is a fatal disease caused by a virus called HIV. AIDS destroys the body's immune system, making an infected person unable to fight off infection. AIDS is now one of the leading causes of death in people 25 to 44 years of age. There is no cure for AIDS; however, drugs can ease the symptoms. It can take years for a person who is HIV-positive to develop symptoms of an AIDS-related disease. HIV can be acquired through contact with the semen, vaginal fluids, or blood of a person who is HIV-positive.

Each year about four million people in the United States contract chlamydia, the nation's most common STD. Gonorrhea and syphilis are also common STDs. These three diseases, which are caused by bacteria, can be cured when a person receives early treatment with drugs. However, if left untreated, these illnesses can become life threatening.

Genital herpes, like AIDS, is an STD caused by a virus. There is no cure for genital herpes. Symptoms may go away only to recur months or years later. However, drugs can reduce symptoms.

Since the symptoms of many STDs do not appear for weeks or even years after infection, a person carrying an STD can infect many people without even knowing it. The best way to protect oneself from STDs is to abstain from sex. One can also limit sexual contact to one uninfected partner who has no other sexual partners. The risk of acquiring STDs can be reduced by using condoms during sexual activity.

*Determine whether the statements below are true or false. Write T or F in each blank. Rewrite each false statement to make it true.*

1. \_\_\_\_ When a person has sex, he or she is exposed to the possible STDs of all of the other person's previous sex partners.

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2. \_\_\_\_ Condoms eliminate the risk of acquiring a sexually transmitted disease.

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3. \_\_\_\_ A person who has an STD will have obvious symptoms.

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4. What is the best method of preventing STDs?

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