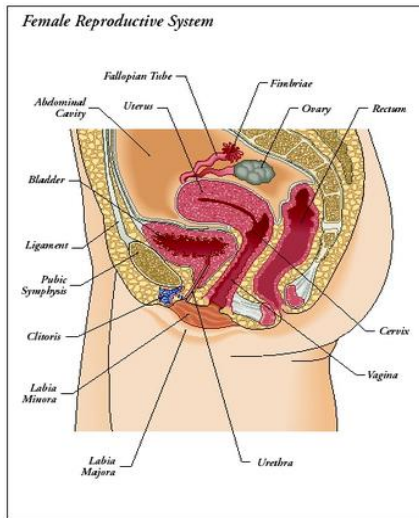
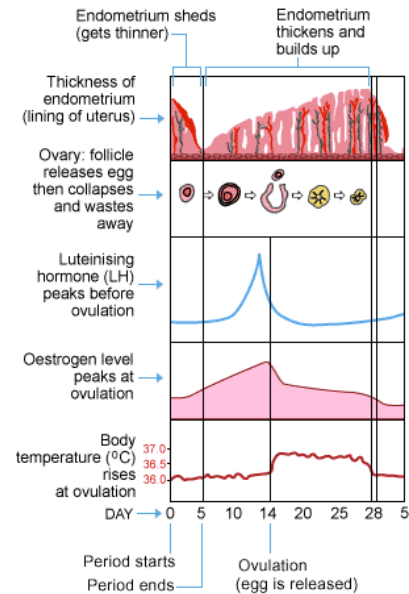


FEMALE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

The female reproductive system consists of those structures within the female body that are designed to create and nourish new life. The system includes the ovaries, fallopian tubes, uterus, cervix, and vagina.



www.faqs.org/health/images/uchr_02_img0146.jpg



www.mydr.org/au

The Menstrual Cycle

The menstrual cycle is the entire cycle of egg release from the ovary through the travel down the Fallopian tubes into the uterus where, if it has not been fertilized, it is released along with the thickened blood lining the uterus, which has built up over the 25-35 days since the last cycle to nourish the possible pregnancy.

Sexual Intercourse

Vaginal sexual intercourse is the primary way in which a woman becomes pregnant. Sexual intercourse happens when the erect penis is inserted into the vaginal canal. By pulling the penis in and out of the canal, friction is created which leads to the male orgasm including ejaculation of seminal fluid containing sperm.

The Clitoris

The clitoris is the primary organ of sexual excitement for most women. With 8000 nerve endings (nearly 2x that of the head of the penis) it is the most sensitive portion of the woman's body. It is found at the top of the vulva above the urethra and under the clitoral hood. When engorged the clitoris can be anywhere from the size of a chocolate chip to the size of a thumb.

Fertilization of the egg and Pregnancy

Fertilization occurs when the sperm and the egg meet. That's not a guarantee of pregnancy, though. Pregnancy occurs when the zygote attaches to the uterine wall

What is pregnancy?

Pregnancy is the term used to describe when a woman has a growing fetus inside of her. In most cases, the fetus grows in the uterus.

Human pregnancy lasts about 40 weeks or just more than 9 months, from the start of the last menstrual period to childbirth.

The primary sign of pregnancy is missing one or more consecutive menstrual periods. However, because many women experience menstrual irregularities that may cause missed periods, women who miss a period should see their health care provider to find out whether they are pregnant or whether there is another health problem.

Others signs and symptoms of pregnancy may include:

- Nausea or vomiting, morning sickness
- Sore breasts or nipples
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Food cravings or aversions
- Mood swings
- Frequent urination

A pregnancy test is the best way to determine if you are pregnant. Home pregnancy test kits are available over-the-counter and are considered highly accurate. A health care provider can also do a pregnancy test.

Labor and Delivery of the Fetus

Experts don't fully understand what triggers the onset of labor, and there's no way to predict exactly when it will start. A woman's body actually starts "preparing" for labor up to a month before she gives birth. Here are some things that may happen in the weeks or days before labor starts:

- The baby "drops"
- There is an increase in Braxton Hicks contractions.
- The cervix starts to ripen: soften and thin out
- Loss of mucus plug or visibility of "bloody show."
- Amniotic sac ruptures aka the water breaks.¹

Labor can last anywhere from 30 minutes to several days. Each woman is different and by working with her midwife or obstetrician she can stay at home for the entire birth or she can choose to stay home for the majority of the labor and go to the birthing center or hospital as she gets closer to delivery.

For more information:

www.pregnancy.com

www.ourbodiesourselves.org

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/pregnancy.html>

¹ http://www.babycenter.com/0_signs-of-labor_181.bc