



# Puberty Glossary

## A

**Acne:** very bad pimples and blackheads that are hard to get rid of.<sup>1</sup>

**Anus:** the opening through which stool (feces or poop) leaves the body in both males and females. It is the end of the digestive tract. It is not part of the reproductive system.

**Arousal:** the body's response to sexual thoughts, feelings, and touches.<sup>1</sup>

## B

**Bisexual:** a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to both men and women. Bisexuals are not always equally attracted to each gender.<sup>1</sup>

**Blackhead:** a pimple with a black top.<sup>1</sup>

**Bladder:** the hollow, sac-like organ inside the body that holds urine, which was produced by the kidney. It is not part of the reproductive system, but the urinary system. Both males and females have one.

## C

**Cervix:** the lower part of the uterus that 'sits' at the top of the vagina. The opening of the cervix allows semen to swim up into the uterus and fallopian tubes, allows menstrual fluid to flow out, and is the part of the body that dilates to let the baby out during birth.

**Circumcision:** a surgical procedure to remove the foreskin of the penis. No longer performed unless medically necessary (if a boy gets continuous infections) or if done for religious/cultural purposes.

**Clitoris:** a small, sensitive organ found above the urethra, near where the two inner labia meet. It is part of the vulva. When the clitoris is stimulated, or when a girl has sexual thought or feelings, it can get bigger and more sensitive. It can be pleasurable and can lead to sexual arousal and orgasm when touched.

## D

**Dermatologist:** a doctor specializing in skin.<sup>1</sup>

**Discharge:** the term for any substance that is released from anywhere on the body.<sup>1</sup>

## E

**Egg:** see 'ovum' (females) or 'sperm' (males)

**Ejaculation:** when semen comes out of the penis as a result of muscular contraction in the reproductive glands and tissues of the penis. Generally ejaculation is accompanied by a pleasurable sensation for the male. The purpose of ejaculation is to send sperm into the vagina to the cervix where it will then travel to the fallopian tubes for possible fertilization.

**Endometrium:** the spongy, blood-filled mucous membrane that lines the uterus. The endometrium thickens during the menstrual cycle to prepare for the arrival of a fertilized egg (ovum).

**Epididymis:** a small organ above each testicle which helps to mature the sperms.

**Erection:** occurs when the blood vessels in the penis fill with blood and become hard. The purpose of an erection is to allow the penis to be inserted into the vagina.

**Estrogen:** One of the two female sex hormones made by the ovaries. It causes body changes in girls during puberty. The other is called progesterone.<sup>1</sup>

## F

**Fallopian Tubes:** narrow tubes that connect the ovaries and uterus, providing a passageway for the ovum to travel from the ovary to the uterus. Fertilization of the egg occurs within the fallopian tube.

**Fertilization:** the joining of a female egg (ovum) and male sperm to form an embryo (which will grow into a baby).

**Foreskin:** the fold of skin over the head of the penis.

## G

**Gay:** A male who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people of the same sex. "Gay" can also refer to or include lesbians.<sup>1</sup>

**Gender:** your thoughts and feelings about being male or female. Gender can also be about the kinds of behaviour a society or culture defines as masculine or feminine.<sup>1</sup>

**Gender Identity:** your inner feeling that you are male, female, both, neither or somewhere in between.<sup>1</sup>

**Genitals:** the reproductive organs in both males and females. Refers to both inner and outer organs, but commonly used for the outer reproductive organs only.

**Gland:** any organ that makes a substance used in the body. Many glands make hormones.<sup>1</sup>

## **H**

**Hormones:** chemical messengers produced by different glands in the body, which give 'instructions' to other organs. The hormones responsible for the body changes during puberty are testosterone (boys) and estrogen and progesterone (girls).

**Hymen:** a ring of elastic tissue that circles around or partly covers the vaginal opening. Note: there is a myth about girls virginity related to the hymen. The myth is that girls who are virgins will bleed the first time they have sexual intercourse because the entry of the penis into the vagina will break the hymen causing it to bleed. The hymen can be torn during sports and by using tampons before a girl has sexual intercourse. Some girls are born without a hymen. Having no hymen or having a torn hymen does not mean that a girl is not a virgin.

## **I**

**Inverted Nipple:** a nipple that points in and not out.<sup>1</sup>

## **L**

**Labia:** the fold of skin that are around the vaginal and urethral openings.

**Lesbian:** a female who is emotionally and sexually attracted to other women.<sup>1</sup>

## **M**

**Masturbation:** self pleasure using the genitals. Masturbation begins often with self-discovery as a baby and child. Children can be taught sexual manners the same as they can be taught table manners. Masturbation is normal, but something to be done in private.

**Menstrual Cycle:** the female cycle that starts with menstruation and then continues as the lining of the uterus builds up and then breaks down again. It usually takes around 28 days.<sup>1</sup>

**Menstruation:** the shedding of the lining of the uterus (endometrium) each month (occurs if the ovum released from an ovary has not been fertilized). This removes from the body the blood-filled, spongy lining of the uterus (endometrium) to prepare the uterus for the beginning of the next menstrual cycle.

## N

**Nocturnal emission:** an ejaculation that occurs during sleep, also call a ‘wet dream’. This is perfectly normal and will decrease in frequency as boys become adults.

## O

**Orgasm:** an intense sensation that happens at the peak of sexual arousal for both males and females. This is sometimes called a “climax”. Males and females don’t usually reach orgasm together during intercourse. Males usually ejaculate during orgasm. Some females also release a fluid during orgasm.<sup>1</sup>

**Ova:** plural of ovum.

**Ovary:** the female ovum (egg)–producing gland. The ovaries also produce some hormones. It is an organ that resembles the shape and size of an almond. A woman has 2 ovaries. They are located internally in the abdomen just below the belly button. The ovaries contain all of the eggs from birth (about 250,000), and start releasing them once puberty starts.

**Ovulation:** the release of a mature egg (ovum) from the ovary.

**Ovum:** the egg, or the female sex (reproductive) cell produced in the ovary. An ovum is released once a month after puberty begins. Occasionally 2 or more ova are released. The ovum travels down the fallopian tube to reach the uterus. If the ovum is not fertilized in a day or so, it dissolves.

## P

**Pad:** a product that attaches to the inside of a females’ underwear to catch and absorb menstrual flow. It is also called a sanitary napkin or feminine napkin.<sup>1</sup>

**Penis:** in males, it is the sensitive, tube-shaped external organ through which the urethra carries urine or semen to the outside of the body. Urine or semen never go through at the same time. It is made of spongy material that fills up with extra blood (becomes erect) when sexually aroused. The penis continues to grow, as does the rest of the body. Size varies from person to person. There is no bone in the penis.

**Period:** the common name for the time when a female is menstruating.<sup>1</sup>

**Pituitary gland:** the small, pea-shaped organ at the base of the brain. The pituitary gland is responsible for growth, and for producing the hormones that communicate with other glands. During puberty, it causes the testes and ovaries to produce the hormones responsible for the developmental changes that occur during puberty.

**Pores:** tiny openings in the outer layer of the skin.<sup>1</sup>

**Progesterone:** one of the two female sex hormones produced by the ovaries – the other is estrogen.<sup>1</sup>

**Prostate Gland:** a gland near the bladder of males that is made of muscle and glandular tissue. The prostate adds white fluid to the sperm to create semen..

**Puberty:** the period of change and development when boys and girls start to mature and become adults. Puberty lasts several years.

**Pubic Area:** the area of the male or female body where the outer sex organs are found.<sup>1</sup>

## **R**

**Rectum:** a hollow, muscular tube through which stool passes from the bowel/large intestine to the anus to be passed outside the body.

**Reproduction:** when sexual intercourse results in a pregnancy and a new baby.<sup>1</sup>

## **S**

**Scrotum:** the soft sac of skin that holds the testicles. It is located behind the penis. The function of the scrotum is to keep the temperature of the testes stable. The testicles have to be kept at a certain temperature just below body temperature in order to produce healthy sperm. The scrotum pulls the testicles closer to the body if it is cold and lowers away from the body if it is hot.

**Semen:** the thick, whitish, and sperm-containing fluid that comes out of the urethra during ejaculation (also known as seminal fluid or ejaculate).

**Seminal Vesicles:** a pair of small glands that make and store seminal fluid. This fluid mixes with sperm and other fluid to help produce semen.

**Sexual Intercourse:** Insertion of the penis into the vagina. Do not confuse with ‘sexual activity’ which can include anal, oral, and vaginal sex.

**Sexual Orientation:** your feelings of sexual attraction toward others. Your sexual orientation could be gay or lesbian (attraction to the same gender); straight (attraction to the opposite gender); or bisexual (attraction to both genders).<sup>1</sup>

**Sperm:** the male sex (reproductive) cell produced in the testicles. The sperm fertilizes the egg (ovum) from the female to make a baby. The sperm is also the cell that decides the sex of the baby. They are very small. There is over 300 million in 5 ml of semen. Millions are made every day in the testicles. If they are not used, they are simply absorbed by the body.

**Stereotype:** a fixed form/ a person or group thought of as conforming to a fixed, conventional mental picture.

**Straight:** a person who is emotionally and sexually attracted to people of the opposite gender.<sup>1</sup>

## T

**Tampons:** a small roll of absorbent material worn inside the vagina to catch and absorb menstrual flow.<sup>1</sup>

**Testicle:** the male sex gland held in the scrotum. (Plural is ‘testes’ but ‘testicles’ is commonly used and accepted). The testes have two functions; they produce sperm (for reproduction) and produce testosterone (the male hormone) responsible for male development during puberty and throughout his life. They are on the outside of the body so they can stay cooler than body temperature for healthy sperm production. It is normal for one to hang lower. This is a very sensitive area. It is important to protect the testicles during contact sports, etc.

**Testosterone:** the male sex hormone that is made by the testicles and causes body changes in boys.

**Transgender:** People who feel that their gender identity conflicts with their sexual anatomy – that is a girl who feels like she ought to have been a boy or a boy who feels like he ought to have been a girl. People who are transgender often choose to live the role of the opposite gender.<sup>1</sup>

## U

**Urethra:** a small, narrow tube descending from the bladder that passes urine to the outside of the body. In males, the urethra also carries the semen (sperm) from the prostate to the outside of the body. The two fluids never leave the body at the same time. There are two branches to the urethra, one from the bladder and the other from the vas deferens. When the penis is ready to release semen, a valve blocks off the branch to the bladder so urine cannot escape. In females, it is the opening between the clitoris and the vagina. In females, it is not part of the reproductive system.

**Uterus:** a pear-shaped, muscular organ in the lower abdomen of the female. It is the place where a fertilized egg (ovum) attaches itself (implantation) for a fetus to develop and grow. The uterus holds and nourishes the fetus and then baby until birth. It is about the size of a fist. It is also called the womb. It is the uterus that enlarges during pregnancy, not the stomach.

## V

**Vagina:** the muscular tube that connects the uterus (cervix) to the outside of the female body. Blood from the uterus passes down the vagina during menstruation. The vagina is also the passageway through which a baby travels during birth. It is not used for urination. The opening just above the vagina, the urethra, is used for this purpose. Semen (sperm) is deposited into the vagina by the penis during sexual intercourse and will travel down the vagina, through the cervix, into the fallopian tubes where an egg (ovum) may be fertilized.

**Vas Deferens:** two small tubes on either side of the penis in the scrotum that connect testicles to the urethra. It carries the sperm from the testicles to the urethra.

**Vulva:** the external sex organs of the female (include the inner and outer labia and the clitoris). The vulva protects the entrance to the vagina and the opening to the urethra.

## W

**Wet Dream:** see 'nocturnal emission'.

### References:

1. Growing Up OK! Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection, Public Health Services. March 2009. [www.gov.ns.ca/HPP](http://www.gov.ns.ca/HPP)