

# PATIENT EDUCATION



The American College of  
Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE PHYSICIANS

## Your First Gynecologic Visit

**P**art of growing up is learning to take care of your body. This means making good choices for your health, avoiding things that can hurt you, and seeing a health care professional—including an **obstetrician–gynecologist (ob-gyn)**—for routine health care. If you have never visited an ob-gyn before, you may have questions about what will happen at your first visit.

This pamphlet explains

- what to expect at your first gynecologic visit
- exams that may be done
- special concerns that may be discussed

### What to Expect

Women have special health care needs. Ob-gyns are doctors who specialize in women's health. Girls should have their first gynecologic visit between the ages of 13 years and 15 years. The first visit may be just a talk between you and your doctor. You also may have certain exams.

The first visit is a good way for you and your doctor to get to know each other. You can find out what to expect at future visits and get information about how to stay healthy. You can ask questions about your body, growing up, and sex.

It is normal to feel nervous about your first visit. It may help if you talk about it with your parents or someone else you trust. You may want to let your doctor know you are nervous. He or she can help put you at ease.

Your doctor may ask a lot of questions about you and your family. Some of them may seem personal, such as questions about your **menstrual period** or sexual activities (including vaginal, oral, or anal sex).

Your doctor needs to ask these questions to best know how to care for you. Giving honest answers to these questions is key to your care. If you are concerned about confidentiality, you and your doctor should talk about it before you answer any questions. Much of the information you share can be confidential.

### Exams

You may have certain exams at the first visit. If you choose, a nurse or family member may join you for any part of the exam. Most often, these exams are performed:

- General physical exam
- External genital exam

You usually do not need to have a **pelvic exam** at the first visit unless you are having problems, such as abnormal bleeding or pain. If you are sexually active, you may have tests for certain **sexually transmitted infections (STIs)**. Most of the tests that teens need can

be done by the doctor with a urine sample. You also may have certain vaccinations.

### General Physical Exam

During the general exam, your height, weight, and blood pressure will be checked. You also will be examined for any health problems you may have.

### External Genital Exam

In this exam, the doctor looks at the **vulva**. He or she may give you a mirror so that you can look at the vulva as well. This exam is a good way to learn about your body and the names for each part.

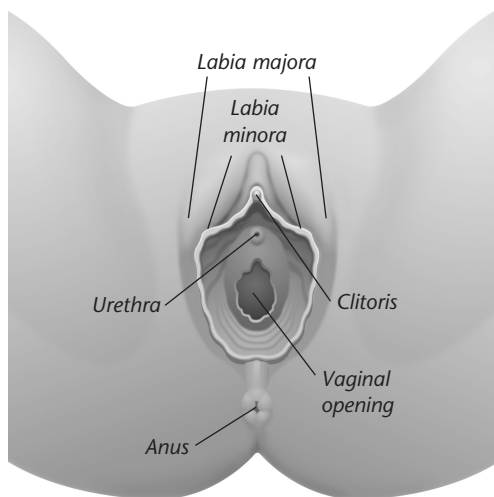
### The Pelvic Exam and Pap Test

Even though you probably will not have a pelvic exam, you should know what one is. Another test that you will have later (at age 21 years) is a **Pap test**. This test checks for abnormal changes in the **cervix** that could lead to cancer.

The pelvic exam has three parts:

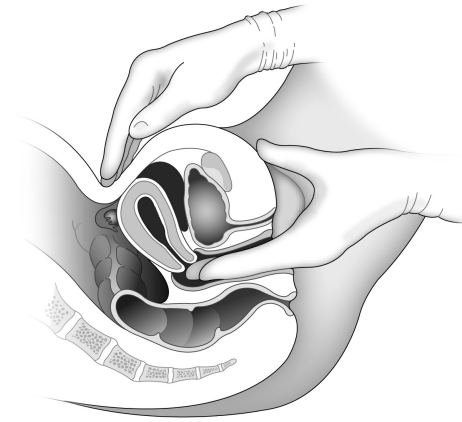
1. Looking at the vulva
2. Looking at the **vagina** and cervix with a **speculum**
3. Checking the internal organs with a gloved hand

### External Female Genitals

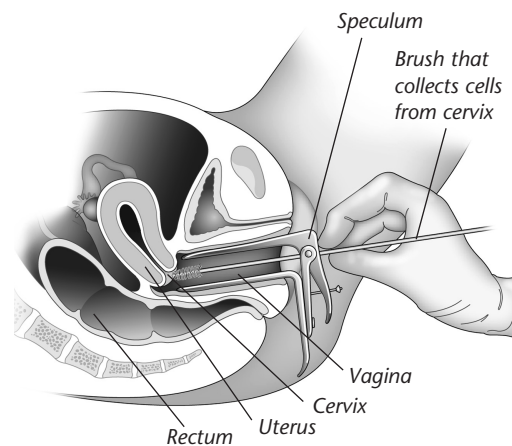


The outside of the female genital area is called the vulva. The outer folds of the vulva are called the labia majora. The inner folds are called the labia minora. The clitoris is at the top of the inner folds. For most women, the clitoris is a center of sexual pleasure. The vagina is the passageway that leads to the uterus. The urethra leads to the bladder. Urine passes from the bladder through the urethra to the outside of the body.

### Pelvic Exam



### Pap Test



The doctor will use a speculum to look at your vagina and cervix. When you have a Pap test, a sample of cells is taken from your cervix with a small brush.

To check your internal organs, the doctor will place one or two gloved, lubricated fingers into the vagina and up to the cervix. The other hand will press on the abdomen from the outside.

### Vaccinations

Vaccinations or immunizations are shots that protect against diseases caused by bacteria and viruses. Some are given on a routine basis (see box, "Vaccines You May Need," on the next page). Other vaccinations are offered to women who are at an increased risk for certain diseases. Your doctor may ask you about your medical history and suggest you receive certain vaccinations.

## Vaccines You May Need

The following vaccines are given to all young women aged 11–18 years on a routine basis:

- Tetanus–diphtheria–pertussis (Tdap)—This shot protects against tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis. You should get a Tdap shot between ages 11 years and your last tetanus–diphtheria (Td) booster (the “tetanus shot”). You should get a Td shot every 10 years after that.
- Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine—This is a series of shots to protect against the most common types of HPV that cause cancer, precancer, and genital warts. The best age for the HPV vaccine is age 11 years or 12 years, but you can get the vaccine starting at age 9 years. For those age 9–14 years, two shots are given. For those age 15 years and older, three shots are given. If you have not gotten all the shots, you do not need to “start over.” You can get the next shot that is due even if the time between them is longer than recommended.
- Meningococcal vaccine—You should have this shot between ages 11 years and 12 years and have a booster shot at age 16 years.
- Influenza (flu) vaccine—You should get a flu shot once a year.

If you have missed or delayed doses of hepatitis B virus vaccine, measles–mumps–rubella vaccine, varicella vaccine, or polio vaccine, get “catch-up” doses as recommended by your health care professional.

Special vaccines may be given to young women who are at increased risk of certain diseases:

- Hepatitis A virus vaccine (also can be given to healthy teens)
- Pneumococcal vaccine

## Special Concerns

Many young women share the same health concerns. Most of these concerns are a normal part of growing up:

- Cramps and problems with menstrual periods
- Acne
- Weight
- Sex and sexuality
- **Birth control**
- STIs
- Alcohol, drugs, and smoking
- Emotional ups and downs

Talking with your doctor about these issues is a key step to staying healthy.

Most young women enjoy good health. Health problems that arise for young women often are a result

## Staying Healthy

Making good lifestyle choices can help you to be strong and healthy for years to come:

- Maintain a healthy weight by eating a well-balanced diet and exercising often.
- Avoid smoking, drinking alcohol, and using illegal drugs.
- Seek help if you have emotional ups and downs or feel depressed.
- Use birth control if you are having sex and do not want to have a baby.
- Protect yourself from STIs by using a latex **coendom**. Know your partners and limit their number.
- Keep up with routine exams, tests, and immunizations.

of high-risk behaviors, such as having unprotected sex or using drugs. Your doctor may offer some tips on how you can help prevent these problems and stay healthy (see box, “Staying Healthy”).

## Finally...

Your first gynecologic visit is a great chance to take charge of your health. Be involved in your health care. Follow up with your doctor to find out test results. Ask questions. See your doctor on a routine basis to be sure you have all the tests you need to stay healthy.

## Glossary

**Birth Control:** Devices or medications used to prevent pregnancy.

**Cervix:** The lower, narrow end of the uterus at the top of the vagina.

**Condom:** A thin cover for the penis used during sex to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and pregnancy.

**Menstrual Period:** The monthly shedding of blood and tissue from the uterus.

**Obstetrician–Gynecologist (Ob-Gyn):** A doctor with special training and education in women’s health.

**Pap Test:** A test in which cells are taken from the cervix (or vagina) to look for signs of cancer.

**Pelvic Exam:** A physical examination of a woman’s pelvic organs.

**Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs):** Infections that are spread by sexual contact.

**Speculum:** An instrument used to hold open the walls of the vagina.

**Vagina:** A tube-like structure surrounded by muscles. The vagina leads from the uterus to the outside of the body.

**Vulva:** The external female genital area.

This information was designed as an educational aid to patients and sets forth current information and opinions related to women’s health. It is not intended as a statement of the standard of care, nor does it comprise all proper treatments or methods of care. It is not a substitute for a treating clinician’s independent professional judgment. Please check for updates at [www.acog.org](http://www.acog.org) to ensure accuracy.

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