

ADOLESCENCE AND CONTRACEPTION

[Push Aid Africa](#)

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PUBERTY AND CHANGES DURING ADOLESCENCE

What is Puberty?

Puberty is a period of rapid growth and sexual development in adolescents. It starts at some point between ages 8 and 14. Every adolescent experiences some physical changes, but one cannot predict exactly when those changes will come. The timing for puberty varies from one individual to another. This is influenced by heredity as well as environmental factors such as diet and exercise. The characteristics of adolescents at puberty can be grouped into primary sex characteristics and secondary sex characteristics.

Primary sex characteristics: These have to do with the reproductive organs (i.e., the uterus and ovaries in females and testes in males).

Secondary sex characteristics: These do not necessarily involve sex organs. Girls experience enlargement of breasts and boys develop facial hair and a deepened voice. In addition, both sexes experience the development of pubic and underarm hair, as well as increased development of sweat glands.

What Changes Occur in Adolescents?

During adolescence, there are some body changes that occur in the individual. These changes are caused by the development of the hormones, testosterone and estrogen, for males and females, respectively. The testes primarily release testosterone and the ovaries release estrogen. The production of these hormones increases gradually until sexual maturation is met.

For adolescent girls, they first develop nipples and pubic hair, followed by increases in height as well as enlargement of breast and hips. In addition, they experience **menarche** (i.e., the first menstrual period) usually around 12–13 years old. And they experience more growth which is usually completed by four years after **menarche**.

Below is a list of the changes that occur in adolescent girls and boys.

Adolescent Girls

- Growth spurt
- Development of breast
- Growth of pubic hair
- Menstruation begins: These periods are often irregular at first but eventually become regular.
- Broadening of hips
- Enlargement of buttocks
- As the puberty hormones increase, teens may have an increase in oily skin and sweating

- Increasing sexual urges

Adolescent Boys

- Enlargement of the testicles and scrotum
- Growth pubic hair
- Broadening of chest and shoulders
- Penis growth
- Wet dreams
- Increasing sexual urges
- Breaking of voice
- Growth spurt
- The larynx ('Adam's apple' or voice box) becomes more obvious.
- As the puberty hormones increase, teens may have an increase in oily skin and sweating

Menstruation

Menstruation, also called period, is the monthly flow of blood and tissue from the uterus which comes out through the vagina. It involves a process called the menstrual cycle. The menstrual cycle is the body's way of preparing for pregnancy every month. The menstrual cycle is controlled by hormones like estrogen and progesterone.

How menstruation occurs

Menstruation is a biological process that occurs in females. Every female has two ovaries. These ovaries produce ova (eggs). The eggs are super tiny, too small to see with the naked eye. Every month, a developed egg moves towards the uterus in order to get fertilized.

If the egg gets fertilized, the female gets pregnant and there will be no menstruation throughout the pregnancy. If fertilization does not occur, the egg get destroyed and the lining bleeds in the form of menstrual flow.

What is a menstrual circle and how is it calculated?

As mentioned earlier, menstruation involves a process that prepares the female for pregnancy. This process is called the menstrual cycle. The diagram below is a pictorial representation of the menstrual cycle.

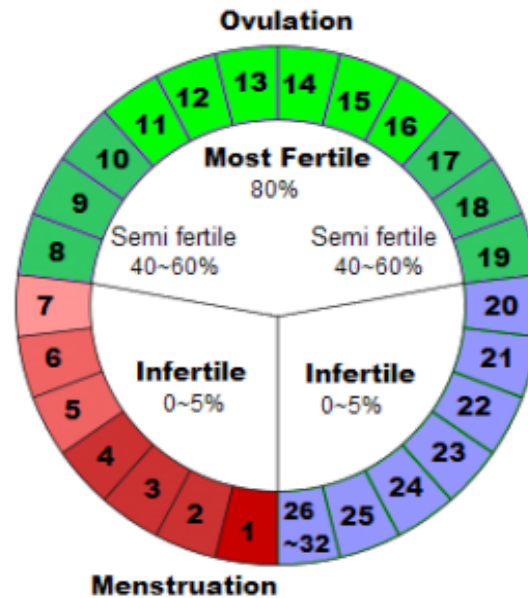


Diagram: the menstrual cycle chart

- The day a period (bleeding) starts is considered cycle day 1. It marks the beginning of a new menstrual cycle.
- Can one calculate her menstrual length? Yes! It is possible to calculate the length of a menstrual cycle. This is done by counting the number of days from day-one of one period up to, and including, the day before the next period starts.
- The count does not include the first day of the next menstrual period because that is Cycle Day 1 of the next cycle.
- The duration of the menstrual cycle varies from person to person. It is usually between 26 to 31 days.
- Ovulation occurs approximately in the middle of the cycle, i.e., duration of the cycle (minus) 14 days.

Ovulation involves the release of a mature ovum (egg) from the ovary. This usually occurs halfway through the menstrual period. With the maturation of the ova, the mucus in the vagina becomes clearer and slippery. This clear mucus serves as a nourishment to the sperms that move towards the egg.

During ovulation, females experience the following symptoms, which may vary from person to person:

- Bloating
- Spotting, or a little pain in your lower belly that may only be felt on one side
- Slight discomfort on one side of the abdomen
- An increase in sexual desire and an increased sensitivity

CONTRACEPTIVES AND CONTRACEPTION

What is Contraception?

Can pregnancy be prevented even when one has sex? Yes! This is done through a process called contraception. Thus, contraception essentially involves interference with the processes of ovulation, fertilization, and implantation in order to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

What are Contraceptives?

One question that comes to mind when we hear of contraception concerns how it is achieved. The answer to this question lies in the term, “contraceptives”.

Contraceptives include the methods, techniques, medicines, and other devices that are used to achieve contraception. In other words, using contraceptives allows us to prevent unwanted pregnancy. With contraceptives, individuals and couples can enjoy their sex lives without having to worry about an unplanned pregnancy.

Can contraceptives Protect the Individual against Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)?

It must be noted that while contraceptives prevent unwanted pregnancies, they generally do not save the individual from sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The only exceptions are male and female condoms, which prevent people from contracting STIs including Human Immuno-deficiency Virus (HIV). Some STIs can cause infertility if not managed properly.

What is family planning and why is it important?

Closely related to the concept of contraception is family planning. Family planning is when couples control the number of children they have as well as the timing and spacing of childbirth. This is done through contraception.

The following are the benefits of family planning:

- Family planning helps to avoid unintended births.
- It helps people to regulate the intervals between pregnancies/childbirths.
- Helps people control the time at which births occur concerning the ages of parents.
- Family planning allows people to determine the number of children to give birth to.

Main Types and Methods of Contraception

Now that we have understood the concepts of contraception, contraceptive, and family planning, it is important that we get to know the methods used to achieve contraception. In fact, there are various ways of achieving contraception, and these are generally classified into traditional and modern methods.

Traditional methods:

These methods of birth control include abstinence, the calendar method, and withdrawal method.

- **Abstinence:** Abstinence means choosing not to engage in sexual intercourse or the decision not to have any kind of sex such as oral, vaginal, or anal. This involves staying away from sex altogether. An individual who abstains from sex avoids pregnancy.
- **Fertility Awareness Method (Calendar method):** This method is used by individuals who have a good understanding of their menstrual cycle. Those who use this method track their menstrual cycle on a calendar. With this knowledge of their menstrual cycle, such individuals are able to predict their ovulation periods and avoid sex during ovulation.

Many couples find it inconvenient to track their ovulation and are therefore unable to use this method effectively. Relatedly, menstruation is usually irregular for younger adolescents. This makes it difficult for them to use this method. Moreover, given that this method involves unprotected sex, it does not protect people from STIs.

- **Coitus interruptus (Withdrawal Method):** This method involves avoiding the release of sperms into the vagina during sexual intercourse. This means that those who use this method withdraw the penis from the vagina before ejaculation.

A consistent use of this method can prevent unwanted pregnancies. However, ability to consistently use this method comes with a high level of commitment and control by the

male partner. Thus, a lot of couples are not able to use this method effectively, leading to unwanted pregnancies.

Relatedly, there is some chance of getting pregnant even when the male partner withdraws before ejaculation. This is because even before ejaculation, males release some fluid into the vagina, and this fluid sometimes contains sperms which can get a the female pregnant. Withdrawal also does not provide effective protection against HIV and other STIs.

- **Lactational Amenorrhea (LAM):** LAM is a form of natural birth control method. This is used in the period after birth. In this method, the mother breastfeeds the baby for up to six months. During this period of breastfeeding, the body releases some hormones that interfere with ovulation and prevent pregnancy.

Modern methods:

Aside from the traditional methods, there are other methods of contraception. These are called modern contraception methods, and they include the following:

- male and female condoms
- diaphragm and implant rods
- birth control pills
- injectable hormones
- intrauterine devices (IUD)
- emergency contraceptives
- vasectomy
- tubal ligation

Most modern methods of contraception can be classified under the following:

Non-reversible (permanent) Methods

- Male sterilization (Vasectomy)
- Female sterilization (Tubal Ligation)

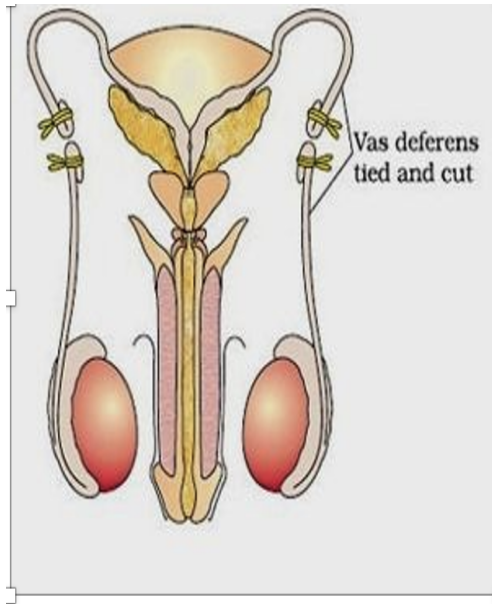


Figure 1: Diagram depicting Vasectomy

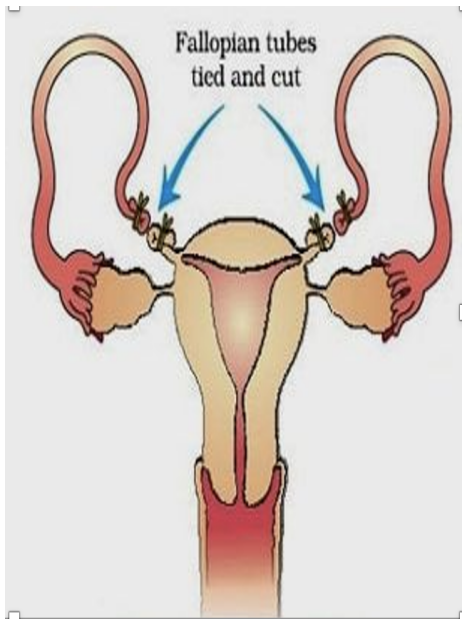
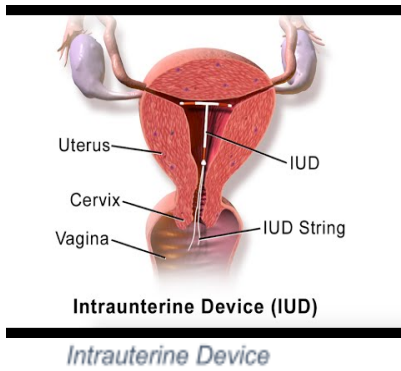


Figure 2: Diagram depicting Female Sterilization (Tubal Ligation)

Reversible Methods

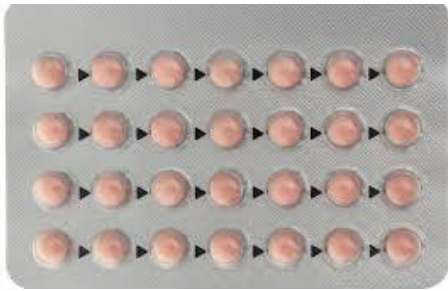
❖ Long-Acting Reversible Contraceptive (LARC) Methods
Implants e.g. Jadelle, Implanon NXT

Intrauterine Contraceptive Devices and Systems (IUD/IUS)



❖ Short-Acting Reversible (SARC) Methods

Hormonal-Oral Contraceptive pills, Injectable,



Injectable Contraceptive

Non-hormonal - Barrier methods (e.g. Condoms, Cervical caps, Diaphragms)



Female Condom



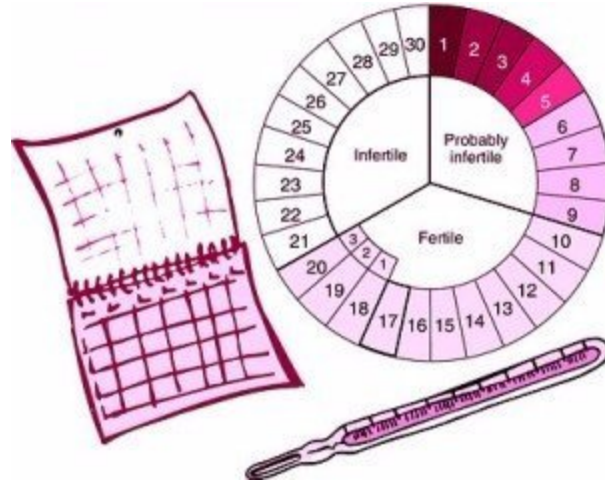


Diagram of the Menstrual Cycle

Emergency Contraceptives (Emergency Contraceptive Pills, Copper-bearing IUD)

These are contraceptives women use to prevent pregnancy after sexual intercourse. Emergency contraceptives are used when one has not used other means of contraception. It is also used when a method fails. For example, when a condom bursts during sexual intercourse, emergency contraceptives can be used to prevent pregnancy.

They are effective when used within a specified time. The method is fairly effective when used within 72 hours (3-days) after sexual intercourse. Commonly, emergency contraceptives contain a specific dose of a hormone used in many oral contraceptives. Emergency contraception can be achieved by inserting an intrauterine device (IUD) within five days of intercourse.

In some places, the method is available without a doctor's prescription.

Note: Emergency contraception is not a method of abortion. Therefore, it will not end an established pregnancy. Emergency contraceptive pills may have side effects when abused; therefore, they should not replace regular contraception.



How does one select the appropriate contraceptive method?

Now that we have learnt about the various contraception methods, it is important to know how to choose the appropriate one. Every method has its medical eligibility so it is important to consider some factors before making a choice. In choosing the method, it is important to consider one's general health, lifestyle and relationships. Young people need to seek family planning services from accredited health facilities to find the best options available to them.

Where can one Access Contraception Services?

Contraception services can be accessed in all health facilities e.g. hospitals, polyclinics, health centers, and Community-based Health Planning and Services (CHPS) centers. Male and female latex condoms, oral contraceptive pills, and emergency contraceptive pills can be accessed at non-clinical centers such as pharmacies, over-the-counter medicine sellers, community-based distributors, and youth-friendly centers.

Demonstration of Male Condom Use

- ◆ If possible, wash the hands with mild soap and water before using the condom.
- ◆ Check the expiration date
- ◆ Feel for the air bubble
- ◆ Open the condom carefully on the rough edges
- ◆ Get into a comfortable position
- ◆ Check that the condom is right side out
- ◆ Make sure the penis is fully erect.
- ◆ Place the condom on
- ◆ Pinch the entire reservoir at the tip of the condom shut to eliminate air.
- ◆ Unroll the condom all the way
- ◆ Hold onto the condom when withdrawing
- ◆ Dispose of the condom correctly: Tie the open end in a knot to prevent spillage. Wrap the used condom in tissue or paper and dispose of it in a rubbish bin. Do not put it in the flush toilet.

Myths and Misconceptions about Contraceptive

Myths and misconceptions	Information
Prolonged usage of contraceptive pills can cause complications with pregnancy	Many people wonder if many years of birth control will cause fertility problems later in life. The good news is that long-term use of birth control pills should not impact your ability to get pregnant. Sometimes, it may take some few months to return to regular ovulation, menstruation or pregnancy, but there is no evidence to suggest a permanent infertility/womb destruction can occur when used correctly. Once you discontinue a
Prolonged usage of contraceptives distorts	

menstrual cycles, i.e., when one takes too much in a year.	contraceptive, you should return to your normal cycle, and your ability to get pregnant, within a few months, averagely within 1-3 months. But this can differ from one person to another, and from one type of contraceptive to another.
It can lead to barrenness	
It can destroy your womb	
Too much use brings about complications during childbirth	Contraceptives have no labour-related complications. Labour and its severity normally differs from one person to the other.
Taking 2 pills of postinor-2 instantly the same day is more effective than following the instructions (some take it before and after sex)	Postinor-2 is a type of oral emergency contraceptive. Like many others, the instructions on how use it are clearly stated in the guide that accompanies it. When unclear, please ask the pharmacist or talk to certified service provider.
Lydia contraceptives cannot be taken more than twice a year	Lydia contraceptive is a type of oral contraceptive, and like many others, the instructions on how to take it are clearly stated in the guide that accompanies it, and is updated with new modifications. But generally, emergency contraceptives should not be taken regularly because it contains high levels of hormones. Opt for a long term method to reduce the side effects and complications.
It causes vaginal bleeding in between menstrual cycles	Like any medication, contraceptives sometimes come with normal side effects, including menstrual changes (heavier bleeding, no bleeding or light bleeding), changes in weight, headaches, dizziness, nausea, etc. These may differ from one person to the other. But generally, it disappears with time. If it persists, contact your service provider. It is very important to listen to professional advice in your choice of a contraceptive.
It causes abdominal pains even when females are off their periods.	
It does not become effective after a while when one's immune system gets used to it	The different types of contraceptives have different mechanisms of work. Some contraceptives like the IUD have immediate effect. But other ones like hormonal methods can take a few days to be effective.

CONSEQUENCES OF UNPROTECTED SEX

Unprotected sex comes with some implications. These include contraction of STIs, as well as unwanted pregnancies.

A. Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

STIs are infections that spread mainly through unprotected sexual intercourse. STIs may or may not cause some symptoms on the individual. Females are physiologically more vulnerable to some STIs than males. Some examples of STIs are as follows:

- HIV
- Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)
- syphilis
- Gonorrhea
- Chlamydia
- Trichomoniasis
- and Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV)

STIs are spread from person to person through infected body fluids such as blood, vaginal fluids or semen. Some of them can also be transmitted through contact with infected skin or mucus membrane such as sores in the mouth. Engaging in unprotected vaginal, oral, and anal sexual intercourse exposes an individual to STIs.

Some common STIs and their symptoms

Type	Symptoms
Human Papilloma Virus (HPV),	Itching and genital wart
Genital Wart	Small, fleshy, grainy bumps. Flesh-colored, white, pink, or tan. Rough to the touch. Sprinkled with small black pinpoint, clotted blood vessels.

<p>Syphilis</p>	<p>Groin: painless ulcers, sores, vaginal discharge, or wart-like growths on the genitals</p> <p>Skin: rashes, small bump, or ulcers</p> <p>Also common: fatigue, itching, mouth ulcer, rash on the palms and soles, rectal lining inflammation, sore throat, swollen lymph nodes, or weight loss</p>
<p>Gonorrhea,</p>	<p>Pain areas: in the lower abdomen, pelvic, testicle, or vagina</p> <p>Pain circumstances: can occur during sexual intercourse or urination</p> <p>Groin: abnormal vaginal discharge or discharge from the penis</p> <p>Also common: fever, frequent urge to urinate, irregular menstruation, pus, sore throat, and painful urination</p>
<p>HIV/AIDs</p>	<p>Chills, fever. Enlarged glands, sweating profusely especially at night, unintentional weight loss.</p> <p>The women affected with HIV are more prone to candida and other reproductive tract infections.</p>
<p>Chlamydia,</p>	<p>Many who have Chlamydia may not develop symptoms but can still infect others through sexual intercourse. However, some of the symptoms may include genital pain and discharge from the vagina or penis.</p> <p>Pain during sex, abnormal vaginal discharge(may be yellowish and have a strong smell, pus or a watery/milky discharge from penis, swollen or tender testicles</p>
<p>Trichomoniasis</p>	<p>Pain areas: in the abdomen</p> <p>Pain circumstances: can occur during sexual intercourse or urination</p>

	Groin: cervix inflammation, vaginal discharge, vaginal inflammation, vaginal irritation, vaginal itching, vaginal odor, or vulvar inflammation
Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV).	Pain areas: in the penis or vagina Pain circumstances: can occur during urination Also common: genital sores, sensation of pins and needles or skin rash

B. Unintended pregnancy

An unintended pregnancy is a pregnancy that is either unwanted. Examples are pregnancies that occurred when no children or no more children were desired. Others include mistimed pregnancies (i.e., pregnancy that occurred earlier than desired).

Adolescent/Teenage Pregnancies

This is a term used to describe pregnancies that occur in girls younger than nineteen years. A large proportion of teenage pregnancies are unwanted or unplanned and out of wedlock. Teenage pregnancy obstructs the education and career development of young girls.

Effects of teenage pregnancy

- Babies born may be underweight and premature
- High incidence of pregnancy complications including pre-eclampsia and anemia.
- Prolonged labor resulting from the size of the pelvic girdle often leading to cesarean section.
- Obstetric fistula
- Maternal death
- School dropout
- The poverty and lack of stability can perpetuate a vicious cycle where children of teenage parents can also become teenage parents.

Options available to Pregnant Adolescents

- **Comprehensive Abortion Care (CAC).** This is a procedure performed on a person who wants to terminate an unintended pregnancy. The procedure is performed by a certified service provider. It involved taking the client through Pre abortion counseling and Post-abortion counseling.
- **Giving the baby out for Adoption.** This method is used by individuals who do not want abortion. Here, the female carries the baby throughout the period of pregnancy and gives birth. After childbirth, the baby is given out for adoption. Adoption is a process whereby a person assumes the parenting of another, usually a child, from that person's biological or legal parent or parents.
- **Foster Parenting:** This method is also used by minors and people who do not want to abort the pregnancy. They give birth to the baby and gives it out to foster parents. Foster homes are usually a ward, group home (residential child care community, treatment center, etc.), or private home of a state-certified caregiver. The placement of the child is normally arranged through the government or a social service agency. The institution, group home, or foster parent is compensated for expenses unless with a family member.
- **Extended family care and support:** This is where the extended family (aunties, uncles, and grandparents) assume parenting roles and support teenage mothers.
- **Return to school after delivery:** Here, a teenage mother is encouraged to go back to school or engage in skills development to attain her life goals after delivery.

