**Reproductive System Information**

Ever wonder how the universe could allow the existence of someone as annoying as your bratty little brother or sister? The answer lies in reproduction. If people — like your parents (ew!) — didn't reproduce, families would die out and the human race would cease to exist.

**Reproduction**

All living things reproduce. Reproduction — the process by which organisms make more organisms like themselves — is one of the things that set living things apart from nonliving matter. But even though the reproductive system is essential to keeping a species alive, unlike other body systems, it's not essential to keeping an individual alive.

In the human reproductive process, two kinds of **sex cells**, or **gametes**, are involved. The male gamete, or **sperm**, and the female gamete, the **egg** or **ovum**, meet in the female's reproductive system to create a new individual. Both the male and female reproductive systems are essential for reproduction.

**What Is the Female Reproductive System?**

A female's internal reproductive organs include the uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries. Unlike the male, the human female has a reproductive system located entirely in the pelvis (that's the lowest part of the abdomen).

The uterus is shaped like an upside-down pear, with a thick lining and muscular walls — in fact, the uterus contains some of the strongest muscles in the female body. These muscles are able to expand and contract to accommodate a growing fetus and then help push the baby out during labor. When a woman isn't pregnant, the uterus is only about 3 inches (7.5 centimeters) long and 2 inches (5 centimeters) wide.

At the upper corners of the uterus, the **fallopian** tubes connect the uterus to the **ovaries**. The ovaries are two oval-shaped organs that lie to the upper right and left of the uterus. They produce, store, and release eggs into the fallopian tubes in the process called **ovulation**. Each ovary measures about 1½ to 2 inches (4 to 5 centimeters) in a grown woman.

There are two fallopian tubes, each attached to a side of the uterus. The fallopian tubes are about 4 inches (10 centimeters) long and about as wide as a piece of spaghetti. Within each tube is a tiny passageway no wider than a sewing needle. At the other end of each fallopian tube is a fringed area that looks like a funnel. This fringed area wraps around the ovary but doesn't completely attach to it. When an egg pops out of an ovary, it enters the fallopian tube. Once the egg is in the fallopian tube, tiny hairs in the tube's lining help push it down the narrow passageway toward the uterus.

When a baby girl is born, her ovaries contain hundreds of thousands of eggs, which remain inactive until [puberty](http://kidshealth.org/teen/sexual_health/changing_body/puberty.html) begins. At puberty, the pituitary gland, located in the central part of the brain, starts making hormones that stimulate the ovaries to produce female sex hormones, including estrogen.

**Diseases and Disorders**

* **Ovarian tumors** are rare, but can occur. Girls with ovarian tumors may have abdominal pain and masses that can be felt in the abdomen. Surgery may be needed to remove the tumor.
* **Ovarian cysts** are noncancerous sacs filled with fluid or semi-solid material. Although they are common and generally harmless, they can become a problem if they grow very large. Large cysts may push on surrounding organs, causing abdominal pain. In most cases, cysts will disappear on their own and treatment is unnecessary. If the cysts are painful, they may be removed by a surgeon.

**What Is the Male Reproductive System?**

Unlike the female, whose sex organs are located entirely within the pelvis, the male has reproductive organs, or **genitals**, that are both inside and outside the pelvis.

In a guy who's reached sexual maturity, the two **testicles**, or **testes**, produce and store millions of tiny sperm cells. The testicles are oval-shaped and grow to be about 2 inches (5 centimeters) in length and 1 inch (3 centimeters) in diameter. The testicles are also part of the endocrine system because they produce hormones, including **testosterone**. Testosterone is a major part of puberty in guys, and as a guy makes his way through puberty, his testicles produce more and more of it. Testosterone is the hormone that causes guys to develop deeper voices, bigger muscles, and body and facial hair, and it also stimulates the production of sperm.

Alongside the testicles are the **epididymis** and the **vas deferens**, which make up the duct system of the male reproductive organs. The vas deferens is a muscular tube that passes upward alongside the testicles and transports the sperm-containing fluid called **semen**. The epididymis is a set of coiled tubes (one for each testicle) that connects to the vas deferens.

The epididymis and the testicles hang in a pouch-like structure outside the pelvis called the **scrotum**. This bag of skin helps to regulate the temperature of testicles, which need to be kept cooler than body temperature to produce sperm.

The seminal vesicles and the prostate gland, provide fluids that lubricate the duct system and nourish the sperm. The **seminal vesicles** are sac-like structures attached to the vas deferens to the side of the bladder. The **prostate gland**, which produces some of the parts of semen is at the base of the **urethra**, just below the bladder. The urethra is the channel that carries the semen to the outside of the body. The urethra is also part of the urinary system because it is also the channel through which urine passes as it leaves the bladder and exits the body.

**Diseases and Disorders**

* **Testicular cancer.** - This is one of the most common cancers in men younger than 40. It occurs when cells in the testicle divide abnormally and form a tumor. Testicular cancer can spread to other parts of the body, but if it's detected early, the cure rate is excellent..