

The Female Reproductive System – How Does It Work?

On your diagram of the female anatomy, label and colour the internal and external organs according to the instructions below. Vocabulary words that need to be written on the diagram have been *italicized*.

Start at the very bottom of your diagram. The opening leading up into the internal reproductive system is called the *vagina*. The *vagina* is a soft, muscular elastic tube. Its inner lining is soft and moist. During sexual arousal, the walls of the *vagina* secrete a lubricant to assist in intercourse. The *vagina* also functions as the birth canal for a baby, and allows menstrual flow to exit the body from the uterus. Colour the *vagina* dark blue.

The *uterus* is a pear shaped organ about the size of a woman's fist that stretches to house the baby, placenta and amniotic fluid during pregnancy. It is very strong, muscular and stretchable! Colour the *uterus* pink.

At the top of the *vagina* is the *cervix* which is the bottom of the *uterus*. This is slightly open in women who are not pregnant, but is plugged during pregnancy to avoid infection. When a baby is ready to be born, the *cervix* opens to a diameter of 10 cm. Colour the *cervix* purple.

The thick tissue inside the entire uterus is the *uterine lining*. If fertilization does not occur, this lining is shed every month. This is called menstruation, the process by which the uterus rids itself of its old lining, and prepares for the possibility of conception the following month. About 14 days after ovulation, the body begins to shed the uterine lining, which is made up of blood and fluid. This is commonly called a "period". Colour the *uterine lining* red.

Follow the tube out of the uterus to the right on your diagram. This is called the *fallopian tube*. The *fallopian tube* carries the egg from the *ovary* down to the *uterus*. This journey usually takes about three days. Usually, conception (joining of the sperm and egg) occurs in the *fallopian tube*. Colour both *fallopian tubes* on the diagram orange.

The finger-like structures at the end of the fallopian tube are called *fimbria*. The internal, very tiny hair like structures inside the *fallopian tube* are called *cilia*. The *cilia* help the egg move down the *fallopian tube* from the *ovary*. Outline the *fimbria* and the *cilia* in dark orange.

Two egg-shaped organs on either side of the uterus are the *ovaries*. These are the female counterparts to the male testicles. An *ovary* is about the size of an almond. When a woman is born, the ovaries already contain all the ova (eggs) she will ever produce. There are up to 400,000 ova. Unlike the testicles, *ovaries* only house eggs. They don't produce them. The ovary releases one ovum (a single egg) each month. This process is called ovulation. When the *ovary* releases the egg it travels down the fallopian tube, with help from *cilia*. If a sperm does not fertilize the egg, it will not adhere to the uterus wall. As a result, menstruation will occur. Colour each *ovary* light brown, and label your diagram on the left side.