

GETTING TO KNOW OUR BODIES

This is the beginning of a series of health articles about those areas of women's bodies that are not usually discussed openly. If we cry, we know that salty water called tears comes out of our eyes - and we wipe them dry. But we have no such simple understanding of something like menstruating - which we probably do more often. Nor do we deal with it in such a straightforward manner.

We must know how and why our bodies work the way they do. Then we'll feel differently about what goes on, and also have a better idea of what to do if something goes wrong.

In writing the following article SPEAK hopes

that all women can begin to think of their bodies with pride, and also have the words with which to talk about them - at least to other women, and hopefully to the doctor when necessary.



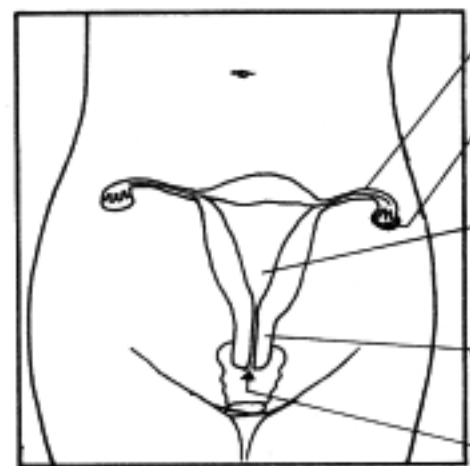
In this issue we will look briefly at the anatomy, functions and possible problems of the following areas of our bodies:-

- * The ovaries, Fallopian tubes, uterus (womb) and cervix.
- * The vulva and vagina.
- * The breasts.
- * The bladder and urethra.

Each area will then be looked at in detail over the next few issues of SPEAK.

The ovaries, fallopian tubes, uterus (womb) and cervix.

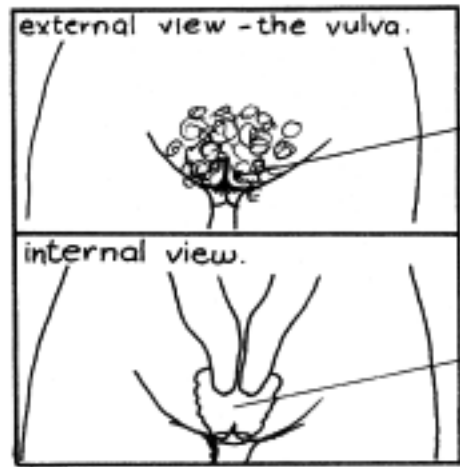
This section of our bodies is for reproductive purposes - a big job - so quite a lot of things can go wrong. Some of the things we will look at are pregnancy miscarriage, sterility, abortion, ovarian cysts, cervical cancer, menstrual problems and hysterectomy.



- fallopian-tube** - very thin tube which carries the eggs from the ovaries to the uterus.
- ovary** - produces eggs (ova), which will become fertilized if they come into contact with sperm.
- uterus** - is the area in which menstruation occurs. This is when the lining comes off each month, if there is no fertilized egg present. Babies grow in the uterus.
- cervix** - joins the uterus to the vagina. It is the cervix that forms the birth canal when giving birth. It has to open 10 cm wide during labour.
- OS** - is the hole or entrance through the cervix. The os closes up very tightly during pregnancy.

The vulva and vagina.

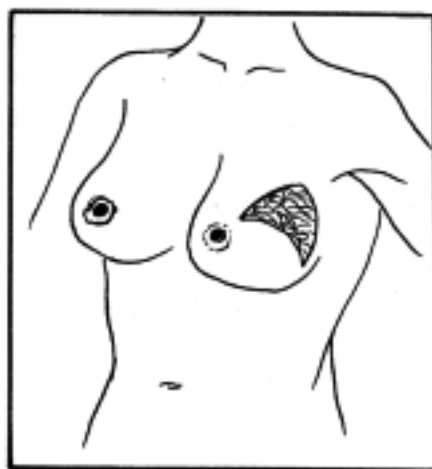
The "vulva" is the name given to the whole outer area of labia and clitoris. The vagina is inside the body. But most of us use the word vagina to describe the whole area of vulva and vagina. These areas are for the purpose of sex. We will look at the use and effects of douches and tampons, and the causes and treatment of vaginal discharge.



- labia** - the visible outer labia protect the soft, moist, inner labia, or lips, surrounding the vagina. The inner labia come together at the top, which is where the clitoris is found.
- vagina** - opening to the cervix.

The breasts.

The breasts are sexual organs in that they are sensitive to touch. They also help in reproduction by producing milk. We will look at how milk is produced, various kinds of breast lumps, engorged breasts, cracked and inverted nipples.

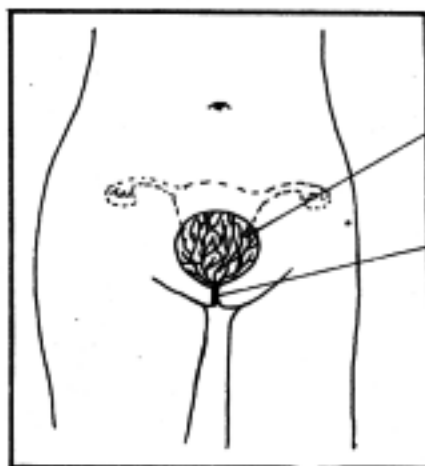


mammary tissue - produces milk for babies after the mother has given birth.

nipple + areola - for babies to suckle from, but also sexually stimulating.

The bladder and urethra.

The bladder and urethra have nothing to do with our sexual and reproductive organs other than that the urethra comes out near the vagina. They are for getting rid of waste from our bodies. Problems we will look at include loss of bladder control, infections and burning.



bladder - a very muscular organ which sits in front of the uterus.

urethra - pipe/tube to take urine from the bladder to outside our bodies.

Knowing our bodies means that we can feel less strange about them, enjoy them more, and apply simple preventions and cures ourselves for things that go wrong. We will also be in a better position to face doctors who generally treat us as though we are stupid and seldom bother to explain things to us properly.