

11

Let us safeguard reproductive health

All animals reproduce. The human reproductive systems are designed to reproduce and thus ensure the survival of the species.

In grade 7 we learnt about the respiratory, cardiovascular and urinary system. We also discussed the outline of the male and female reproductive system, secondary sexual characteristics and challenges faced by adolescents.

In this lesson we will learn about the structure and function of the male and female reproductive systems.

Male reproductive system

The male reproductive system consists of two testes which produce sperm contained in the scrotum, the prostate gland which produces secretions, ductus deferens, seminal tubes and the penis. The male reproductive system is open to the exterior through the urinary tract.

In a boy sperm production commences during adolescence. The sperm is the paternal cell which takes part in fertilization.

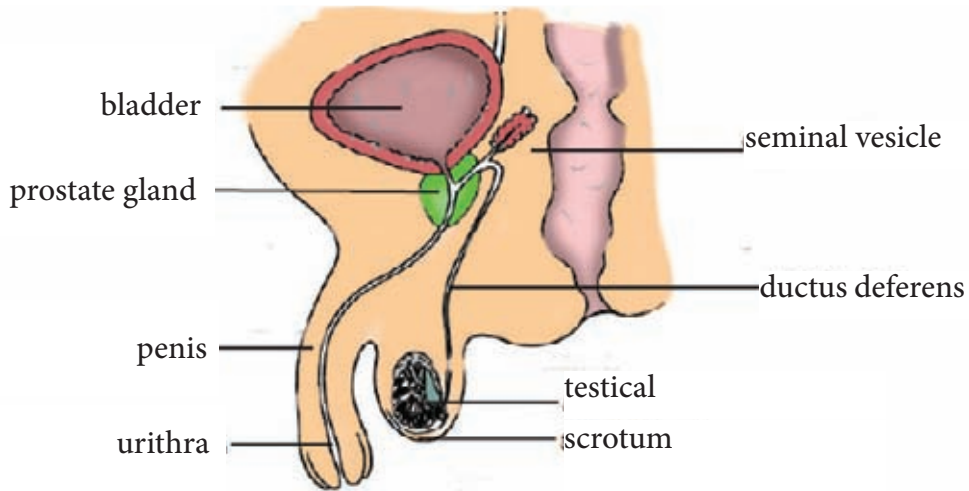


Figure 11.1-Male reproductive system

Female reproductive system

The female reproductive organs are situated in the pelvis. It consists of two ovaries, two fallopian tubes which open into the uterus, the uterus which is a muscular organ, the uterine cervix and the vagina.

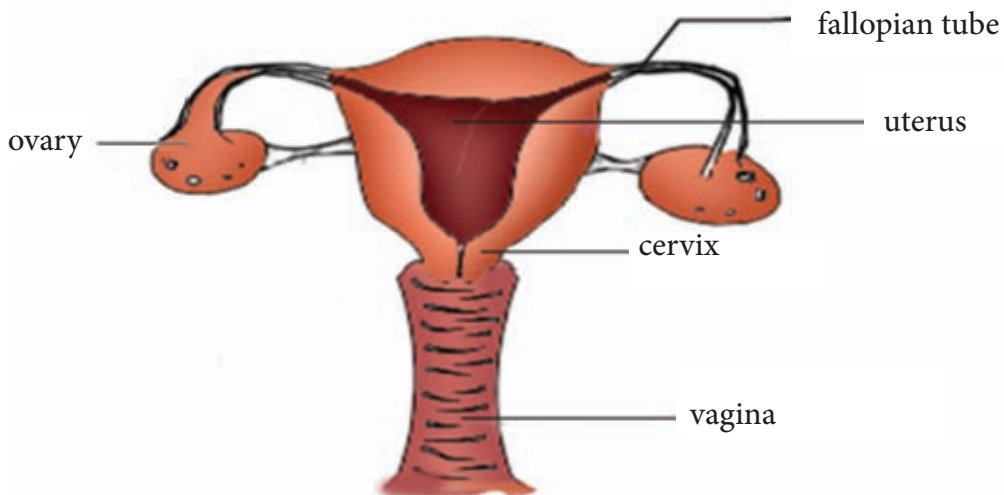


Figure 11.2-Female reproductive system

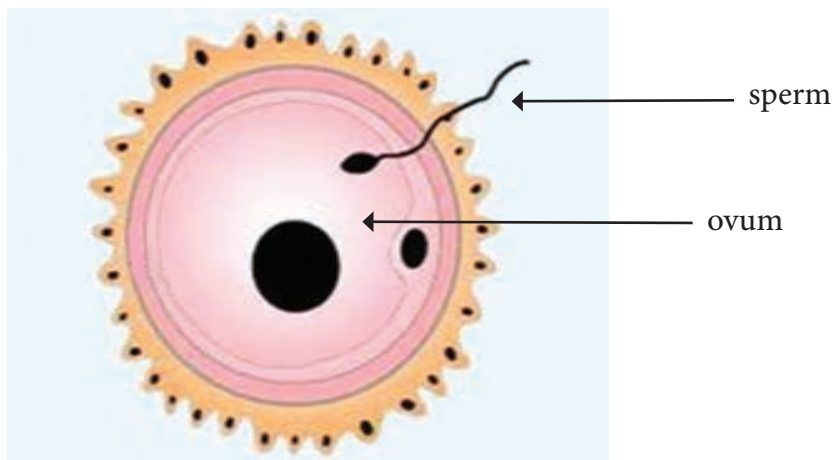
The menstrual cycle

The ovaries release ova after a girl attains menarche. This process is known as ovulation. The ovum enters the fallopian tube. The ovum is the maternal cell which takes part in fertilization. Ovulation is an automatic process. If the ovum is fertilized the uterine walls become thick enabling the fertilized ovum to implant in the uterine wall. If the ovum is not fertilized the uterine lining (endometrium) is shed about 14 days after ovulation. The remnants of the uterine lining and some blood is expelled through the vagina. This process known as menstruation lasts about 2-6 days.

The term menarche is used to describe the onset of menstruation in a female. After attaining menarche the ovaries will release an ovum every 28 days. Ovulation will occur alternatively from the left and right ovaries each month. The release of the ovum, changes in the uterine wall and menstruation which occur every 28 days, if there is no fertilization, is known as the menstrual cycle. In a female ovulation stops by the age of 45-55 years. This is known as menopause.

Fertilization

After ovulation the ovum travels along the fallopian tube. The sperms in the seminal fluid, which enters the vagina during sexual intercourse, enter the uterus through the uterine cervix. The sperms travel through and fertilize the ovum in the fallopian tube.



Figur 11.3-Fertilization

The fertilized ovum travels through the fallopian tube into the uterus. In the meantime changes take place in the uterine wall to facilitate the nutrition of the developing embryo.

The embryo is implanted in the endometrium (the inner lining of the uterine wall). The embryo gradually grows and develops into a foetus. The foetus receives nutrition and oxygen from the mother through the umbilical cord and it excretes waste products into the mother's blood. The foetus develops in the mother's uterus for approximately 9 months.

Reproductive health

Reproductive health is the maintenance of physical, psychological and social health necessary for successful reproduction. It is our responsibility to maintain good reproductive health.

Barriers to reproductive health

1. Sexual harassment and abuse
2. Teenage pregnancies
3. Unplanned pregnancies
4. Sexually transmitted diseases

1. Sexual harassment and abuse

We will learn in detail about harassment and abuse in chapter 17. Sexual harassment and abuse have a negative impact on reproductive health.

Sexual harassment is defined as forcing a person to engage in a sexual activity which results in physical or mental distress.

Unwelcomed touching of the body, unwelcomed hugging and kissing, forceful engagement in sexual activity and sexual intercourse with a child less than 16 years of age with or without consent are examples of sexual abuse.

Forcing someone to appear in films, photographs and publications which depict sexual content or forcing someone to watch such contents are examples of sexual harassment.

A stranger or someone you know such as friends or relatives may try to influence you to engage in such activities. You must ensure your safety by refusing to participate in such activity even though the person may become displeased or annoyed with you.

Please keep in mind that people who are really kind to you and love you would never try to prey on you for activities such as these.



Activity

Divide into groups and discuss how you would ensure your safety in the following situations.

1. When you are alone at home
2. If you go out to watch a festival and can't find your parents in the crowd
3. Going home alone after school activity in dark

Issues created by sexual harassment and sexual abuse

- Unplanned pregnancies
- Contracting sexually transmitted diseases
- Mental trauma
- Disruption to education
- Social stigma

2. Teenage pregnancies

The adolescent body is still growing. The reproductive system is able to support a pregnancy safely after the age of 20 years. Psychological and social maturity required to bring up a child may take even longer. If a pregnancy occurs during teenage years the foetus will not receive

adequate nutrition because the mother requires nutrition for her growth as well. Therefore the growth of both the mother and the foetus will be affected.

Teenage mothers can develop problems during child birth because their reproductive system is not developed adequately to support a pregnancy. The teenage mother does not have adequate psychological or social skills or financial support to take care of a baby. Social stigma may also result in stress. The girl's education too will be disrupted.

Therefore both males and females have to be old enough to be physically, psychologically and socially mature to become successful parents. Therefore you must take adequate precautions to prevent sexual abuse. If you are subjected to sexual harassment or abuse inform an adult and seek appropriate medical advice.

3. Unplanned pregnancies

Giving birth frequently with inadequate gaps in between can affect the physical and mental health, as well as the nutritional status of the mother and child. Looking after a child requires economic and social readiness. Conception without planning can affect the well being of the family and may result in abortions, maternal ill health and even death.

4. Sexually transmitted disease

Sexually transmitted diseases are acquired through sexual activity. Gonorrhoea, syphilis, herpes simplex, genital warts and HIV/AIDS are examples of sexually transmitted diseases.

Negative impact of sexually transmitted diseases

- Itching, pain, pus and other secretions and ulcers of the genital organs
- Damage to the heart and nervous system including the brain
- Transmission of the sexually transmitted disease from an infected mother to the foetus which can result in abortions, still birth and deformities
- Transmission of infective agents from the infected mother to the foetus during child birth which can result in blindness in the child
- Psychological stress
- Social stigma
- Disruption to education



Figur 11.4 - negative impact on children due to STD

Factors which help maintain reproductive health

1. Adequate knowledge
2. Healthy behaviours
3. Following social norms

Adequate knowledge

Knowledge of the following help maintain good reproductive health.

- Structure of the reproductive system
- Function of the reproductive system

- Age related changes in the reproductive system
- Nutritional requirement during adolescents, early adulthood and pregnancy
- Sexually transmitted diseases
- Healthy behaviours which help to maintain reproductive health
- Skills to protect against sexual harassment and abuse

Healthy behaviours

Following behaviours help maintain reproductive health.

- Maintaining personal cleanliness
- Using cotton underwears
- Not engaging in sexual activity before marriage
- Engaging in sexual activity only with your spouse
- Adequate treatment of diseases related to the reproductive system

Following social norms

Sri Lanka has a long cultural heritage. These include social norms which help maintain reproductive health. Following are some examples of these social norms.

- Respecting and caring about members of the opposite sex
- Not using books, videos, films which contain pornographic material
- Recognising the importance of motherhood and fatherhood and maintaining the dignity of these roles
- Maintaining mutual understanding, trust, respect and love between husband and wife

Summary

The male and female reproductive system is designed to reproduce and ensure the survival of the species

The ovum from the mother is fertilised by the sperm from the father which results in formation of a new life.

The fertilized ovum travels down the fallopian tube and implants in the endometrium (lining) of the uterus.

If no fertilisation takes place the uterine lining is shed through the vagina. This is known as menstruation. These changes in the female reproductive system are known as the menstrual cycle. The duration of the menstrual cycle is 28 days.

Sexual harassment and abuse, teenage pregnancies, unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases affect the reproductive health adversely.

Adequate knowledge, healthy behaviours and following social norms help to maintain good reproductive health.

Exercise

1. What are the female and male cells which are involved in fertilisation?
2. What is fertilisation?
3. Explain what happens during the 28 day menstrual cycle.
4. What are the negative impacts of sexual harassment and abuse?
5. Write five healthy behaviors that help to maintain good reproductive health
6. why teenage pregnancies are bad?