



Patient education: Chlamydia and gonorrhea (The Basics)

[Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate](#)

What are chlamydia and gonorrhea?

Chlamydia and gonorrhea are 2 different infections that you can catch during sex. They cause similar symptoms.

These infections can affect the:

- Sex organs ([figure 1](#) and [figure 2](#))
- Urethra (the tube that carries urine out of the body)
- Throat
- Rectum or anus (especially in men who have sex with men)

Infections that you can catch during sex are called "sexually transmitted infections."

What are the symptoms of chlamydia and gonorrhea?

Often these infections cause no symptoms. But when they do, the symptoms are different for men than for women.

- In **women**, the symptoms of both infections include:
 - Vaginal discharge or itching
 - Abnormal vaginal bleeding or spotting
 - Belly pain
 - Pain during sex
 - Burning or pain during urination
- In **men**, the symptoms of both infections include:
 - Burning or pain during urination

- Discharge from the penis
- Pain, swelling, or tenderness of the testicles

In men who have sex with men, both infections can also cause rectal pain, discharge, and bleeding.

Are there tests for chlamydia and gonorrhea?

Yes. Your doctor or nurse can test you for these infections using a:

- Urine sample
- Sample from inside the vagina, if you are a woman

Your doctor or nurse might also take a sample from your throat or rectum, if those areas might be infected.

Should I see a doctor or nurse?

Yes, you should see a doctor or nurse if you have any of the symptoms listed above. You should also see a doctor or nurse if any of your sexual partners have been diagnosed with either infection. Even if you have no symptoms, you could be infected.

Your doctor might want to test you for sexually transmitted infections now and in the future.

How are chlamydia and gonorrhea treated?

The main treatment for both infections is antibiotics:

- The antibiotics for gonorrhea come in a single shot.
- The antibiotic for chlamydia comes in a pill. Treatment might involve taking a single pill, or it might involve taking medicine for a whole week. No matter what, make sure you take all the pills your doctor or nurse prescribes. Otherwise the infection might come back.

If you have chlamydia or gonorrhea, you should tell the person you last had sex with, and anyone you have had sex with in the past 2 to 3 months. They might also be infected (even if they have no symptoms) and need treatment.

Many people with chlamydia or gonorrhea get the infection again after treatment. After getting treated, you should get tested again a few months later, even if you have no symptoms.

What happens if I don't get treated?

Leaving chlamydia or gonorrhea untreated can cause long-term problems for both men and women. In women it can lead to a problem called "pelvic inflammatory disease," or "PID." PID can cause pain and make it hard to get pregnant later. In all people, leaving gonorrhea untreated can lead to joint infections and arthritis. It can also increase the risk of becoming infected with HIV.

What if I want to get pregnant?

If you think you might have chlamydia or gonorrhea, it's important to get tested and treated before trying to get pregnant. If you don't get treatment, the infection can cause problems with the pregnancy. You could also pass the infection on to your baby during delivery. Babies who get infected often have a problem called "conjunctivitis," which is when their eyes are swollen and red and ooze liquid. They can have other problems, too.

In the United States, most newborn babies get antibiotic ointment put into their eyes soon after birth. This helps prevent infection with gonorrhea, but not chlamydia.

Can chlamydia and gonorrhea prevented?

You can reduce your chances of getting chlamydia or gonorrhea by:

- Using a latex condom every time you have sex
 - Avoiding sex when you or your partner has any symptoms that could be caused by an infection (such as itching, discharge, or pain with urination)
 - Not having sex
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More on this topic

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[Patient education: Anogenital warts \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: HIV/AIDS \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Trichomoniasis \(The Basics\)](#)

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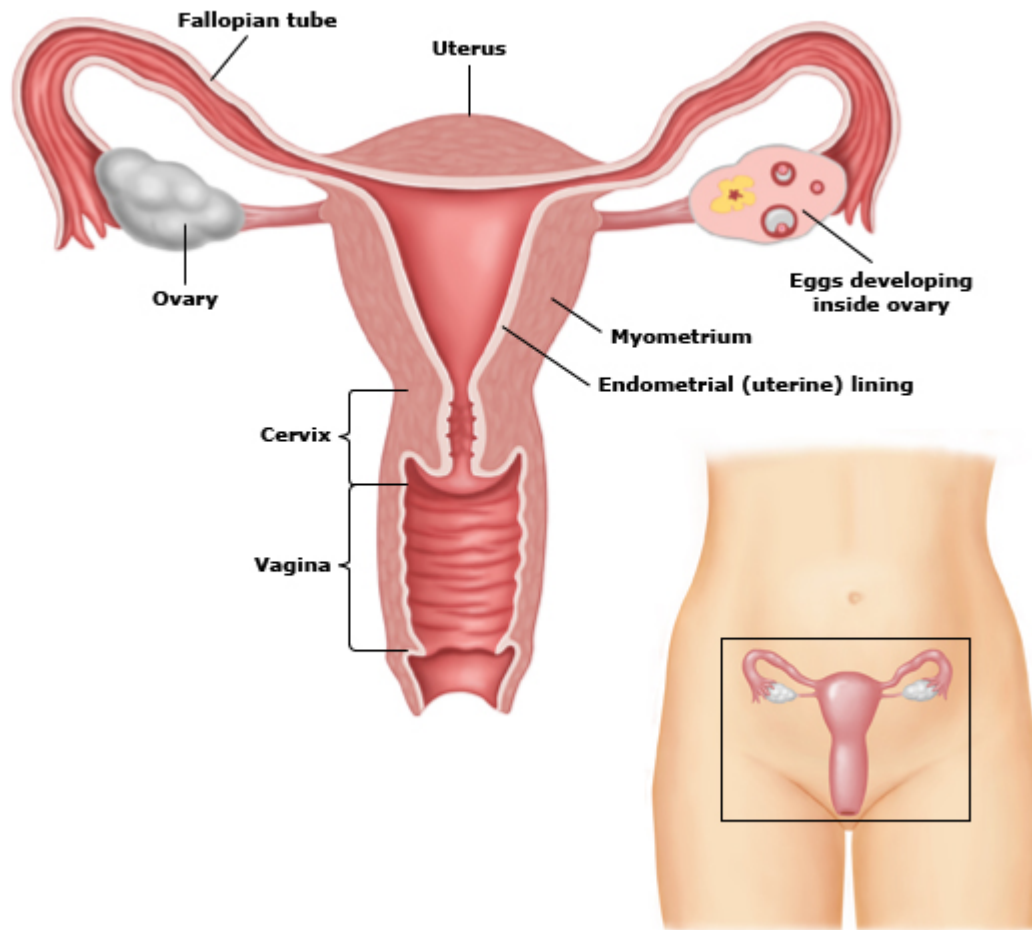
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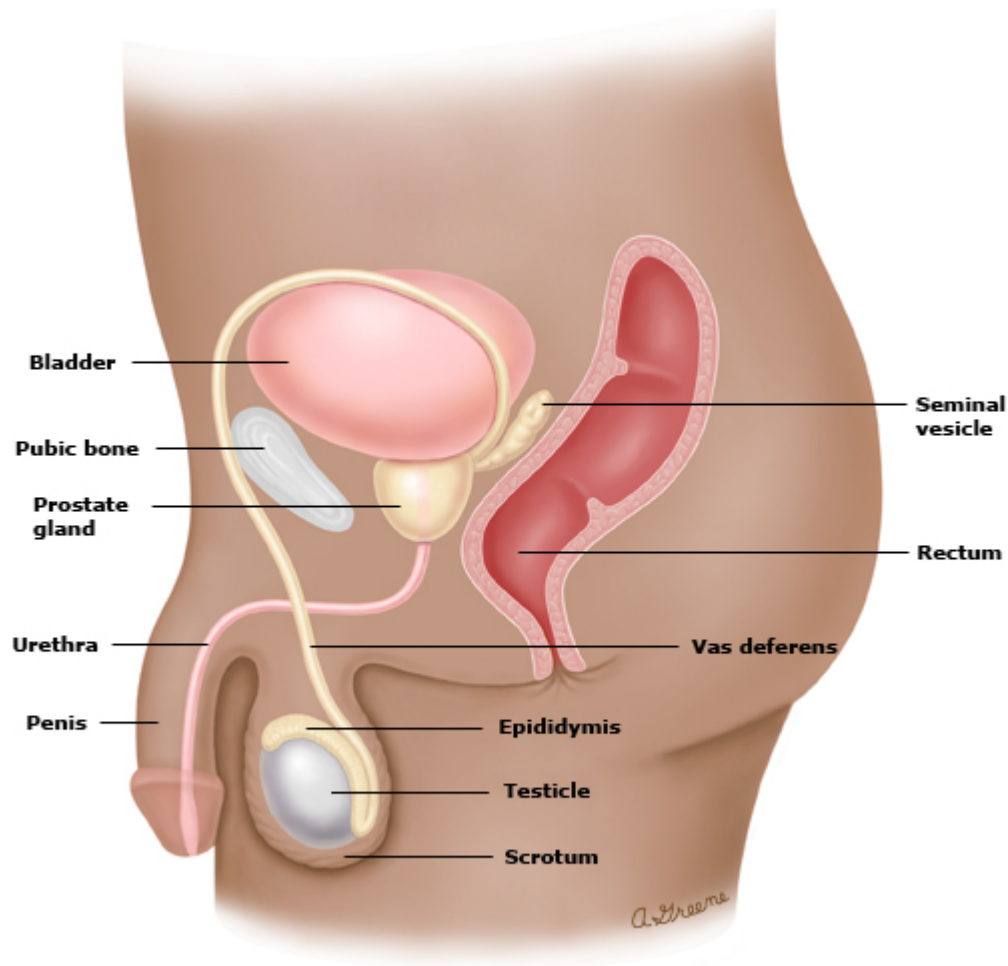
Female reproductive anatomy



These are the internal organs that make up the female reproductive system.

Graphic 80271 Version 6.0

Male reproductive anatomy



This drawing shows the male reproductive (sex) organs.

Graphic 68075 Version 7.0

