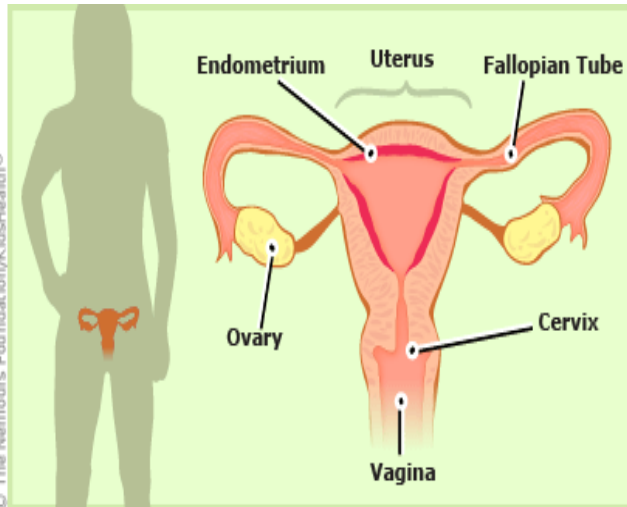


The Female Reproductive System

A female's reproductive organs are the vagina, uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries.

- The vagina is a muscular, hollow tube that extends from the vaginal opening to the uterus. The vagina's walls are lined with mucous membranes, which keep it protected and moist.
- The cervix, at the lower end of the uterus, has strong, thick walls. The opening of the cervix is very small (no wider than a straw). During childbirth, the cervix can expand to allow a baby to pass.
- When a woman isn't pregnant, the uterus is only about 3 inches long and 2 inches wide.
- At the upper corners of the uterus, the two fallopian tubes connect the uterus to the ovaries, but are not completely attached.
- The ovaries are two oval-shaped organs that produce, store, and release eggs into the fallopian tubes. They also produce female sex hormones such as estrogen and progesterone.

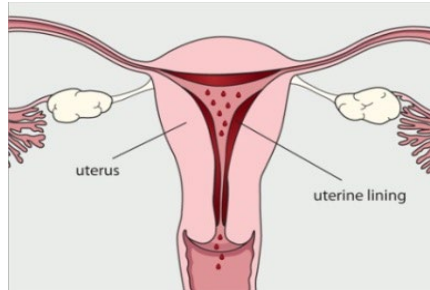


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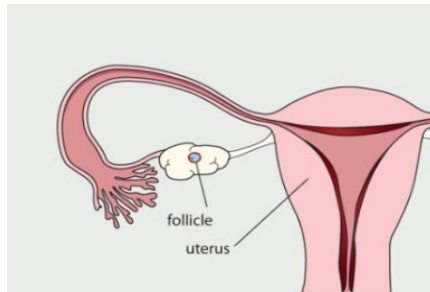
The Menstrual Cycle

Once a woman reaches puberty, an egg is released once a month (ovulation) and her period begins.

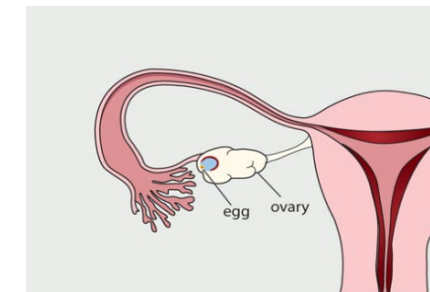
- **Day 1** of the menstrual cycle starts with the first day of a woman's period. Bleeding, or menstruation, usually lasts about 5 – 7 days.



- **Day 7** bleeding has usually stopped. A follicle on the ovary that contains an egg begins to develop. The uterus lining starts to thicken, waiting for a fertilized egg.

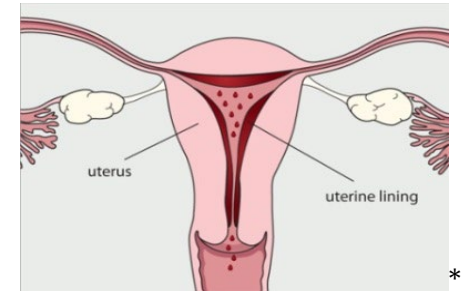


- **Day 14** an egg is released from the ovary and travels to the uterus through the fallopian tube over the next few days.



If a woman has unprotected sex between days 8 – 19 and a sperm unites with the egg in the fallopian tube, the fertilized egg will then continue down the fallopian tube and attach to the lining of the uterus, starting pregnancy.

- **Day 25** if the egg is not fertilized, hormone levels start to drop. Within a few days, the egg and the lining of the uterus are shed and bleeding begins. This usually happens about two weeks after ovulation.



- The average menstrual cycle lasts 28 days, but can vary from 21 to 35 days.
- It can take up to 2 years from her first period for a girl's body to develop a regular menstrual cycle.
- The amount of time before ovulation occurs is different in every woman and can even be different from month to month in the same woman, varying from 13 to 20 days long. Learning about this part of the cycle is important because it is when ovulation and pregnancy can occur.

How does pregnancy happen?

If a woman has unprotected sex during ovulation, typically between day 8 and 19 of the menstrual cycle, the sperm from the male can fertilize the egg and begin a pregnancy. Once sperm are released, they can live up to five days!

**Images reprinted from womenshealth.gov, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, (accessed May 8, 2014)*