

# My Body's Fantastic Journey

**Natalie Psaila**



# **My Body's Fantastic Journey**

Natalie Psaila

*Il-Vjaġġ Fantastiku tal-Ġisem Tiegħi / My Body's Fantastic Journey*

First published 2022

Copyright © Natalie Psaila

ISBN: 978-9918-0-0177-4

## **Acknowledgments**

I'd like to thank Isabel Stabile for being a significant and solid source of support through my work on this book. I wouldn't have known where to start without her help. Angele Deguara and Cristina Mintoff have pitched in to make sure that the Maltese version is accurate, and for that I'm grateful. Last but not least, I'm thankful for my husband, Ian, who supports me and cheers me on in all my multiple projects. I wouldn't be able to do much without him.

## **About the Author**

Natalie Psaila MD, MMCFD, MRCP (Int) has two young children and is a medical doctor specialised in Family Medicine. She takes a keen interest in promoting reproductive health and is an activist for women's rights. Natalie is closely involved in the training of Malta's future family doctors.

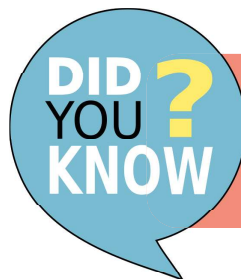
# CONTENTS

1. My amazing body	4
2. Taking care of myself and others	6
3. Feeling safe in my body	8
4. Consent and respect	10
5. Feeling attracted	12
6. A changing body	14
7. Puberty in boys	16
8. Puberty in girls	18
9. The female reproductive cycle	20
10. Sexual intercourse	22
11. The sexual experience	24
12. Fertilisation and pregnancy	26
13. Creating your future	28
14. Contraception	30
15. Condoms	32
16. The contraceptive pill	34
17. Fit-and-forget devices	36
18. Morning-after pill (MAP)	38
19. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)	40
20. Where to get help	42

# My Amazing Body

**Our body lets us do all kinds of things. We can swim races in the sea or dance to music. We can also sniff a cake baking in the oven, strum a guitar and draw a sketch of a favourite TV character.**

The body lets us feel pleasure and pain to help us learn what's good or harmful for us. When our body changes and grows so quickly, it can be difficult to know how to stay safe. Andy and Stef will show us different ways to feel comfortable in our bodies.



**There are 206 bones and over 600 muscles in the body!**

*This book will discuss biology and to this end, it will refer to children with penises as “boys” and children with vaginas as “girls” for ease of reference. However, the author acknowledges there are more genders than these two stereotypes and whichever gender the child identifies with, they are very precious beings.*



# Taking care of myself and others

**Our body does so much for us, it demands our utmost respect. It deserves to be kept clean and neat with at least a shower a day, nails clipped regularly and hair washed frequently.**

Other ways you can take care of your body are by:

- Eating healthy food and drinking plenty of water
- Sleeping for at least eight hours a day
- Wearing comfortable clothes that fit you
- Exercising
- Having enough rest and practising activities you enjoy doing

As we take care of ourselves, so should we care for each other. People need each other to lead fulfilled lives. It's why it's always fun to share lunch with friends or to go on hikes together.



## ! IMPORTANT !

**If you notice a friend who is struggling with taking care of their needs, it's good to reach out and see how you can help. You might also need to speak to a trusted adult or the school counsellor to find ways to support your classmate.**



# Feeling safe in my body

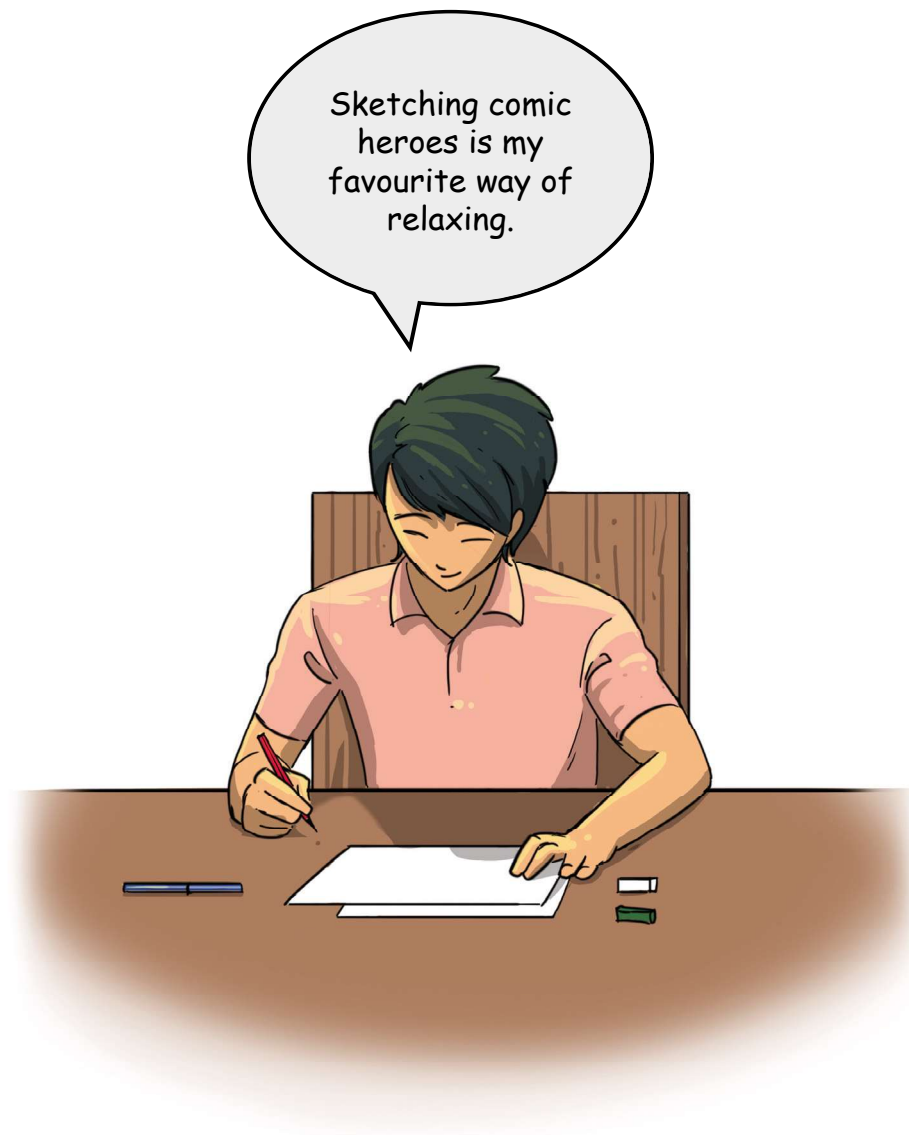
**You're going through enough changes to last you a lifetime. Literally!**

Puberty can happen quite fast and it can almost be disorientating. However, your body is cleverly passing through a stage that helps prepare you for adulthood.

When it gets a bit too much, it's good to keep in mind some basic concepts:

- Everyone experiences puberty similarly, yet so differently
- Whatever shape or size, your body is awesome
- Your body deserves your love and care because it helps you experience life in such great ways

Remember, it's always ok to take some time to yourself to do the things you enjoy doing, like listening to your favourite music or simply lying on your bed reading a book. Practising self-care is a good way to reconnect with your body.



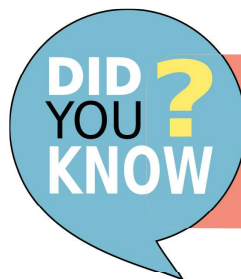
# Consent and respect

**Your body is your own. It belongs to no one else, but you. You get to say what you do with it and what happens to it. Sometimes we feel like hugging or kissing someone, sometimes we don't.**

If someone asks for a kiss but you don't feel like giving one at the moment, it's completely ok to say "no". The other person should be able to respect you and your body, and to accept your answer. Equally, it's important to listen to what others are telling you and respect their wishes.

Within relationships, couples tend to progress from one intimate action to another. They might start with kissing and hugging, go on to touching various parts of the body, and finally, they might move on to having sex. It's important to realise that some people might accept being kissed and even getting naked, but they might want to stop at that. They might refuse to go on any further and have sex.

It's ok to say "no" at whichever stage you wish – whether at the beginning or in the middle of a making out session.



**A person cannot give consent if they're drunk, sleeping or unconscious due to any reason.**



## IMPORTANT

**Sending photos of yourself nude or semi-nude can be very dangerous. Once the photo leaves your phone, you have little control over it and it can be sent to other people. It can even be posted on the internet. It's very difficult to stop circulation of images. You are not obliged to send nudes to people who ask for them.**

# Feeling attracted

**Sex is part of human life. It's natural that once puberty starts, you'll start feeling attracted to someone special.**

Young people tend to get “crushes” on each other. You might find yourself daydreaming about another young person. Some find it difficult to speak to their crushes, but once they do, they might choose to go out on dates with them! This is all very normal behaviour.

It's also normal for boys to like girls or other boys, or for girls to like boys or other girls. Some people don't mind whether the other person is a boy or a girl as long as they like them. We are all unique and special no matter where our attractions lie.

During this process, it's very important to be respectful towards yourself, your peers and the person you like.



Sometimes, interest in another person is not reciprocated. That's also ok. It just means you'll need to find someone else who's also interested in you. The best way to make friends is to show a genuine interest in others and ask questions. Remember, it's always ok to take some time to yourself to do the things you enjoy doing, like listening to your favourite music or simply lying on your bed reading a book. Practising self-care is a good way to reconnect with your body.

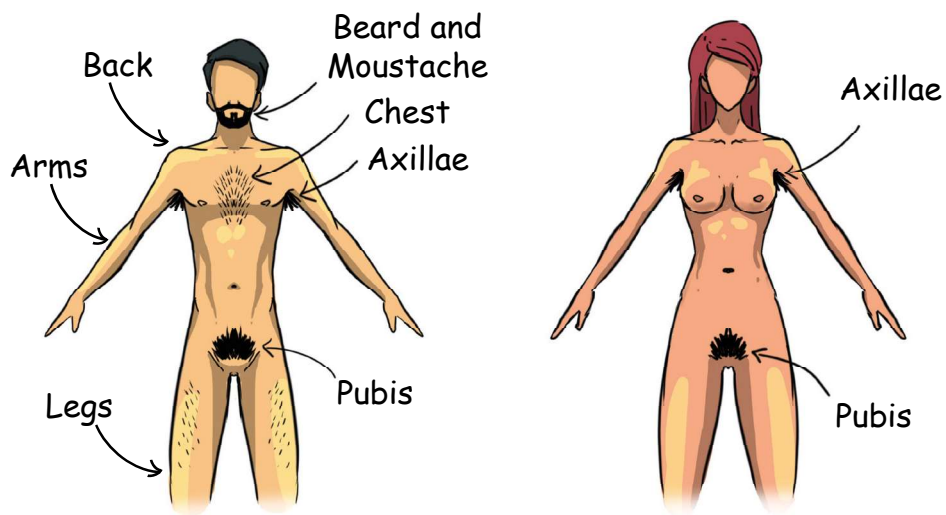
# A changing body



**It can feel great growing taller. You'll notice your feet going up a size or two and you might suddenly need to swap all your clothes for bigger ones. Congratulations! You're going through puberty! However, these aren't the only transformations you'll see.**

You might notice that your sweat starts smelling differently. That's completely normal. The hormones in your body are responsible for that.

**Start looking out for new hair in these places:**



Do you feel happiness or frustration more intensely? No worries! That's your brain learning how to experience emotions in a more complex manner. It means you're well on your way to becoming an individual capable of feeling life to its fullest.

However, mood swings can be exhausting. It's good to keep in mind that you're not on your own in this journey. It can be helpful to discuss what you're going through with your friends, a parent or a trusted grown-up.

**DID  
YOU  
KNOW**

Some people notice these changes later than others, but most will have started puberty by the time they're 14. Puberty usually lasts four years until it is complete.



# Puberty in boys

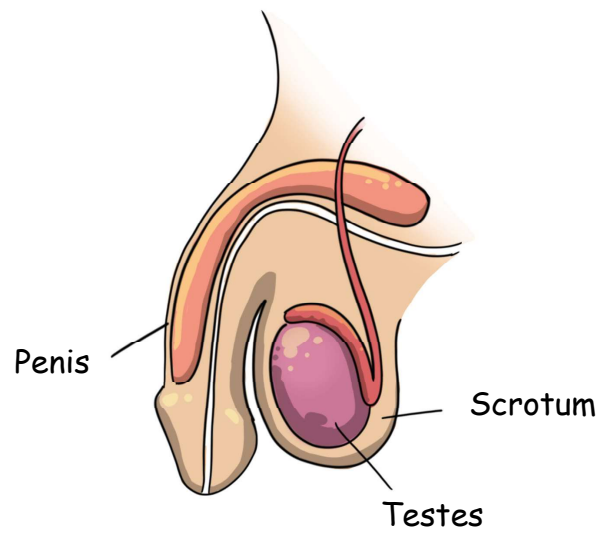
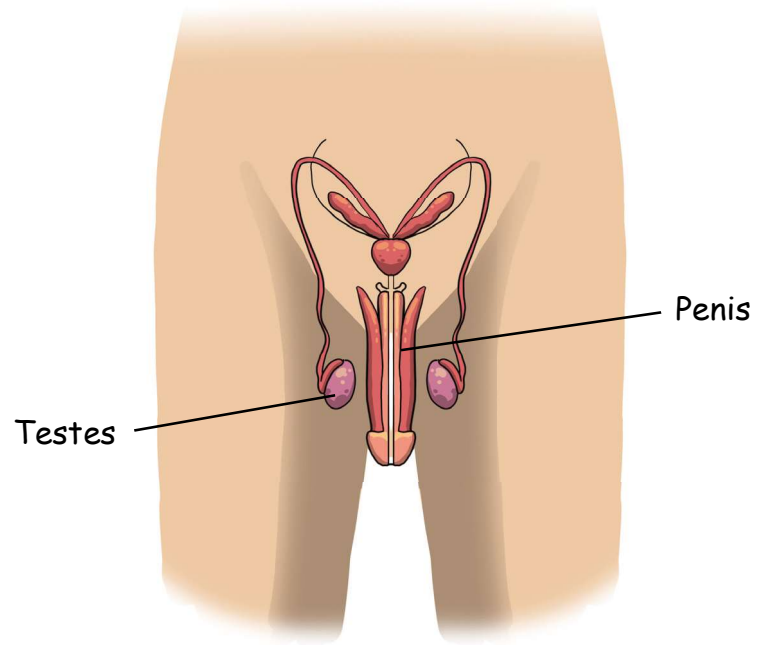
**Boys go through some special changes. Testosterone, a hormone, plays a big part here.**

Expect to see hair sprouting in new places like your moustache and beard area, armpits and pubic area. You might also notice more hair over the chest, back, arms and legs. Some children get a lot, others less. Whatever amount of hair you get is normal. Some boys will need to shave their faces, while others might have to wait a few more years before needing to shave.

The voice “breaks” at around 12-14. You’ll notice your voice getting hoarse for a few weeks, until it changes into a deeper tone.

The scrotum (the testes sac) becomes darker, while the penis and testes grow in size. All change in size is normal.

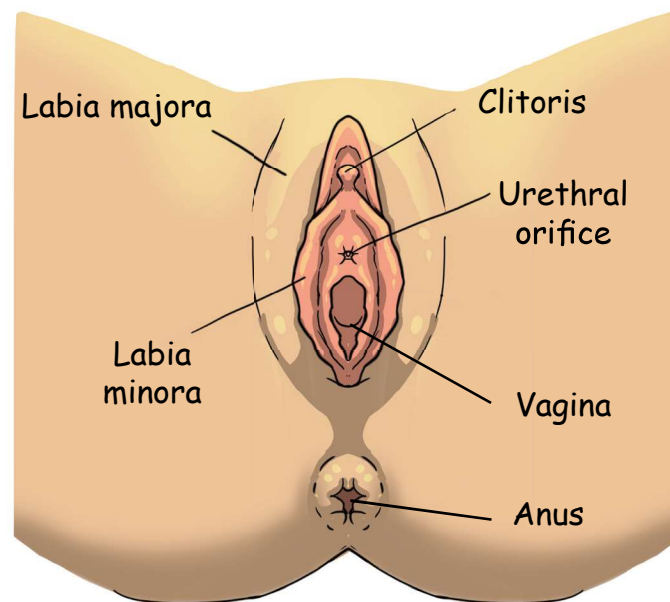
It’s very common for boys to start having “wet dreams” a year or so after puberty starts. These are involuntary ejaculations during sleep. Waking up with morning erections is also quite normal.



# Puberty in girls

There are plenty of changes for girls too. Their breasts start growing over the next couple of years. There's no right time to start shopping for bras. Keep your comfort in mind. Some opt for bralettes or sports bras, others decide to hold off wearing bras for a while longer, yet others never get round to wearing one. Ask an adult you trust to help you find an option that suits your needs.

During this time, your hips will start widening and it's normal to put on some weight. Some will get a curvier shape than others but all sorts are completely normal.



The labia majora and labia minora will change appearance during puberty. Remember that there's no correct way your genitalia should look.

Girls will get their first periods during puberty. Vaginal bleeding is usually heavier in the beginning and becomes lighter towards the end.

By the time they're 16, almost everyone gets their first period. This might take some getting used to, however, it's good to keep in mind that periods are a natural way your body is saying it's got this puberty thing under control.

Periods are not dirty, but you'll need to take a few extra steps to help yourself feel dry and comfortable. Some people choose to use sanitary pads, tampons or menstrual cups. Make sure you change pads and tampons or empty cups at least every four hours. Speak to an adult you trust to help you choose menstrual products and how to use them.



**Keeping in tampons for a long period of time might make you very sick. You can consider setting an alarm to remind you to change. It's fine to keep one overnight, as long as you change first thing in the morning.**

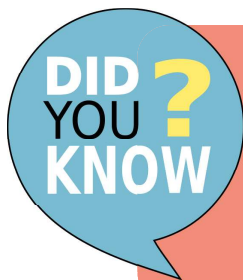
# The female reproductive cycle

**Once girls get their first period, their body prepares for pregnancy every month.**

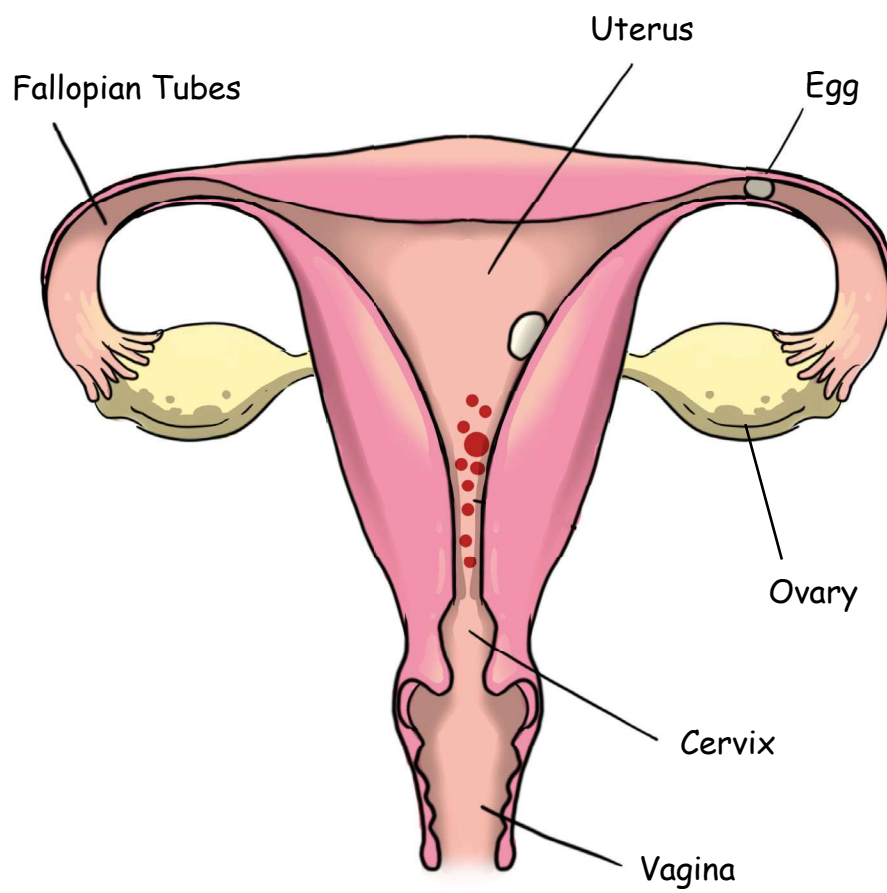
A new cycle starts on the first day of the period. Periods last anywhere from three to seven days. During this time, a small egg on one of the ovaries begins growing until it detaches. This stage is called “ovulation”.

The egg travels along the Fallopian tube into the uterus. Meanwhile, the uterine lining grows thicker to act as a cushion in case there's a pregnancy.

If the egg reaches the uterus without meeting a sperm, the uterine lining breaks down. This results in blood through the vagina – a period. The cycle then starts all over again.



Periods come every approximately 28 days. However, it's good to note that normal cycles can take 21-40 days. Some women are very regular, others are less so, especially in the first few years.



# Sexual intercourse

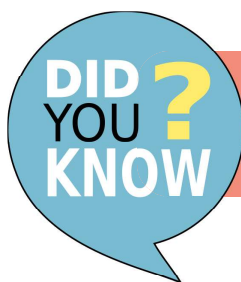
**Intercourse, or sex, traditionally happens between a man and a woman. However, sex between a man and another man, or a woman and another woman is also possible. The kind of sex that people have depends on their preference of partner. In this chapter, we'll focus on heterosexual relationships (man-woman relationships).**

Couples usually start with foreplay – a stage where there's kissing and caressing of each other's bodies. This helps the man and woman get in the mood.



The man will notice his penis grow in length and get thicker, while the woman's vagina secretes some fluids to help with lubrication. When the couple feels ready, the man inserts his penis inside the woman's vagina, until eventually he ejaculates a fluid called semen, which contains sperm.

Many people find sex to be pleasurable. However, it's ok to stop the process or ask your partner to change something if you feel uncomfortable.



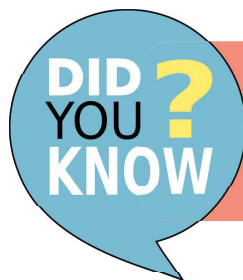
In Malta, the age of consent for intercourse is 16 years.



# The sexual experience

**When the genitalia (a person's sexual organs) are stimulated, the brain and nerves in the body work together and reach a satisfying result – an orgasm. During orgasm, men ejaculate semen, while women experience contractions of their sexual organs.**

Sometimes, the aim of intercourse is to reach orgasm, although some have sex simply for the enjoyment of the intimacy it brings, without looking for a climax. Both experiences are normal.



**Masturbation poses no medical problems, but rather, can help with relaxation.**

Having sex is not the only way a person can have an orgasm. A person can pleasure themselves by stimulating their own genitalia. This is called masturbation. Many people practise masturbation and it's a safe way to explore one's body while meeting sexual needs.



## IMPORTANT

**While normal, masturbation should only be practised in private. It is illegal to masturbate in public.**

# Fertilisation and pregnancy

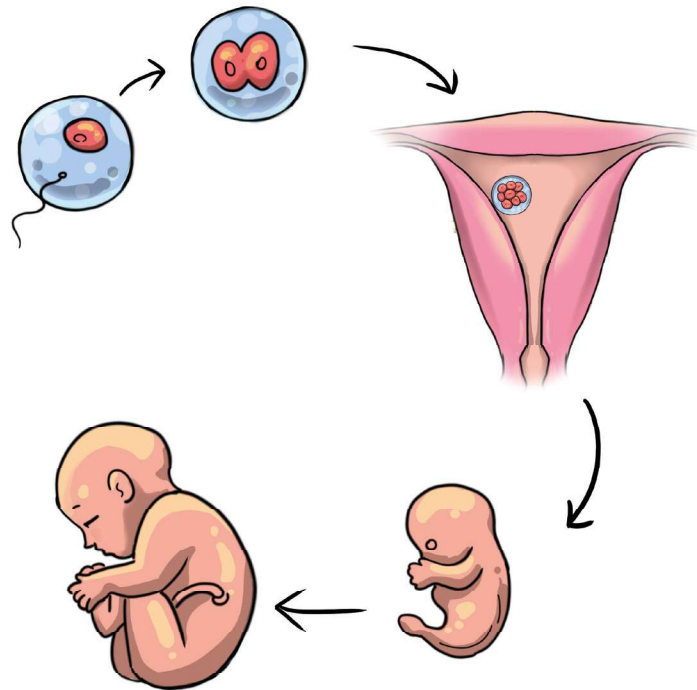
**During fertilisation, an egg meets a sperm and the two join together to form a fertilised egg. This happens if a woman happens to have sex during ovulation – when the egg leaves the ovary. Soon after fertilisation, the egg starts dividing rapidly to form more and more cells until it becomes a ball of cells.**

A fertilised egg sends signals that it is ready to get embedded (stick) in the uterine walls – a stage called implantation. This means there's no shedding of the lining and the woman does not get a period. Missing a period, when one is expected, is one of the earliest signs of pregnancy.

The ball of cells becomes organised into sections – some cells become the embryo, others form the amniotic sac (a bag of fluid that surrounds the embryo), while others become the placenta which is responsible for passing nutrients from the mother to the embryo.

Various parts of the embryo become specialised into organs. Some cells start pulsating and will become the heart.

Other cells form a tube, which later develops into the brain and the spinal cord. And so on. Two months into the pregnancy, the embryo becomes a fetus.



The fetus grows and grows, until at 40 weeks (nine months), it is ready to be born.

### DID YOU KNOW

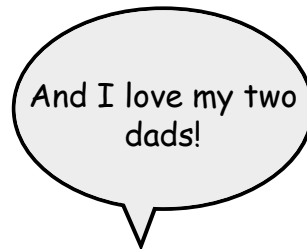
A pregnancy test is done with the woman's first morning urine. It can be taken after the first day of a missed period. Some digital tests are more sensitive and can be done even a couple of days before a missed period. Always speak to a doctor if you think you might be pregnant.

# Creating your future

**Families are wonderful units and come in all sorts of forms and sizes. They are a source of love, support and care.**

Most of us grow in a family and probably in the one we were born in. However that doesn't mean it's the only kind of family that counts. Can you see how many kinds of different families you can think of? Here are two to get you started: two women and an adopted little boy, a grandmother and her niece.

When people grow up, many will want to have a family of their own. They will usually find someone they like and maybe even have kids of their own. It's good to keep in mind that it should be completely up to you to decide when to form a new family and when to have kids. Contraception will help you control when you have your own kids.



# Contraception

**Pregnancy does not happen every time a man and a woman have sex. However, as we've seen, during ovulation, there is a higher likelihood of pregnancy.**

Some people avoid having sex when they suspect the woman is during ovulation, but very often, it can be difficult to say when ovulation is happening. There are ways of making sure that the woman doesn't get pregnant, even if she's ovulating.

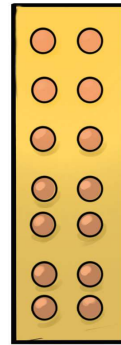
Contraception is a way of preventing a pregnancy. Some types of contraception are more effective than others. We'll be looking at the most common and effective methods, and we'll also see how they should be used to make sure you have a very good chance of preventing a pregnancy.



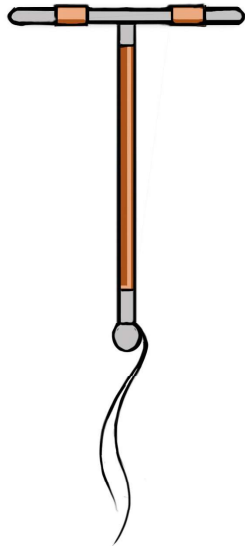
**Condoms are the only contraceptive that besides preventing a pregnancy also protect you from getting sick with a sexually transmitted infection (STI).**



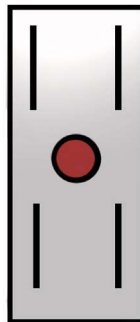
Condom



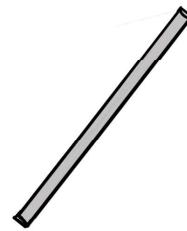
Contraceptive Pill



IUD



Morning-after Pill



Contraceptive  
Implant



# Condoms

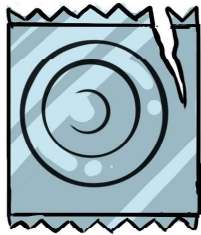
**Condoms can be made of latex or silicone and come packed individually. They can be bought in packs of around 10 condoms or even as singles.**

Condoms are very effective in preventing pregnancy, as long as they are worn properly. Since they are the only contraceptive to protect against STIs, it is advisable that a condom is still used even if the woman is using other contraceptives. Condoms are used by boys and men and they come in different sizes. You can buy them in pharmacies and supermarkets.

Using a condom has no effect on how pleasurable sex feels for the man or woman. One must keep in mind that a condom is made of a thin sheet of latex that should have a snug fit.

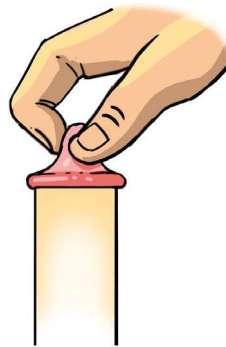


## HOW TO PUT ON A CONDOM



1. Open the pack carefully, making sure the condom does not get torn

2. Pinch the tip of the condom.



3. Place the condom over the erect penis and roll the sides down. Keep pinching the tip during this step.

4. There should always be a little gap at the tip of the condom to catch the fluid that will come out.

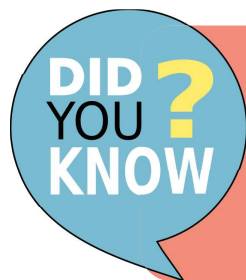
It's equally important to take special care when removing a condom. Make sure that the condom is removed slowly without spilling the contents. If sperm makes contact with the woman, there is risk of pregnancy and infection.

# The contraceptive pill

**The pill (in short) is taken by a girl or woman every day at the same time. It contains either one or two hormones that stop ovulation, and so, pregnancy is not possible.**

Sometimes, the pill is prescribed by the doctor for medical reasons, such as acne, painful periods or irregular periods.

The pill can only be bought with a prescription because there are certain conditions that can increase the risk of side effects and complications. You can get a prescription from your GP, walk-in clinics at the health centre, or a gynaecologist.



If you miss a pill, you must take it as soon as you remember, even if it means taking two together. You'll need to use a condom if the missed pill is taken more than six hours late.

The pill is safe to take,  
even in teenage years.

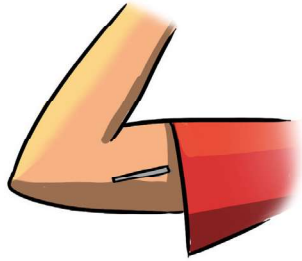


# Fit-and-forget devices

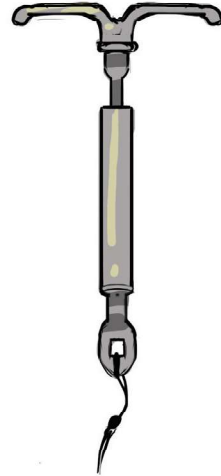
**Long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs) are also called fit-and-forget devices because they are literally that. The girl or woman is fitted in with a small piece of plastic that works to prevent a pregnancy for at least three years. Once the device is inserted, the girl or woman can forget about it until it expires and it's time to change it.**

There are two main types:

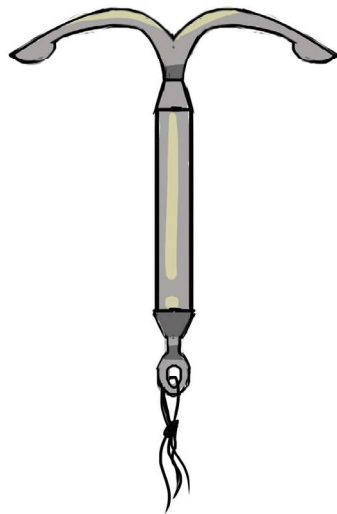
- **Intrauterine**, or those that are inserted in the uterus. These can either contain a contraceptive hormone, or a metal that prevents pregnancy, like copper
- **Implant**. This is in the shape of a small toothpick that is inserted in the inner arm, just under the skin. It also contains a contraceptive hormone



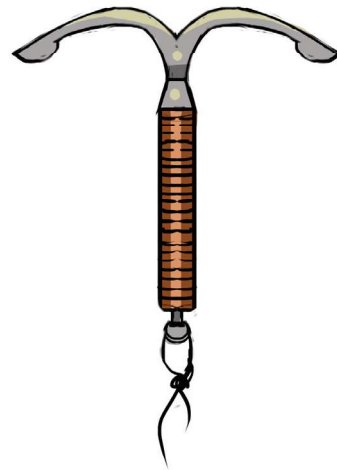
Hormonal implant (3 years)



Mini-IUS  
(3 years)



IUS  
(6 years)



Copper coil - an IUD  
(10 years)

# Morning-after pill

**Accidents happen, and thank goodness for the morning-after pill, also known as MAP. Some scenarios where the MAP can be useful include a torn condom, a spill from a used condom, or missing a pill from a contraceptive pill pack.**

If a couple has had sex and something happens to make their chosen contraception fail, the woman can take the MAP up to three to five days after intercourse. The sooner the woman takes the MAP, the better chance it has of working to prevent pregnancy.

The MAP delays ovulation from happening and so prevents pregnancy. However, if the woman has already had her ovulation in that current cycle, or fertilisation has already occurred, the MAP has no influence on pregnancy.



**If you ever go through a rape (intercourse without consent), you must take the following steps as quickly as possible: tell a trusted friend or relative, take the MAP, go to hospital and report to the police.**

Aha!  
So that's  
why the MAP is  
also called emergency  
contraception. It can  
be used as necessary in  
emergencies! It's quite a  
nifty idea.



**DID  
YOU ?  
KNOW**

You can get the MAP from most pharmacies. You don't need a prescription from a doctor but the pharmacist may ask you a few questions in private. This site shows which pharmacies in Malta stock the MAP: <https://www.pharmacy.com.mt/morning-after-pill/>



# Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

**Some viruses and bacteria can be transferred from one person to another through sex and cause an infection, called sexually transmitted infections, or STIs in short.**

These are some symptoms that people can notice if they have an STI:

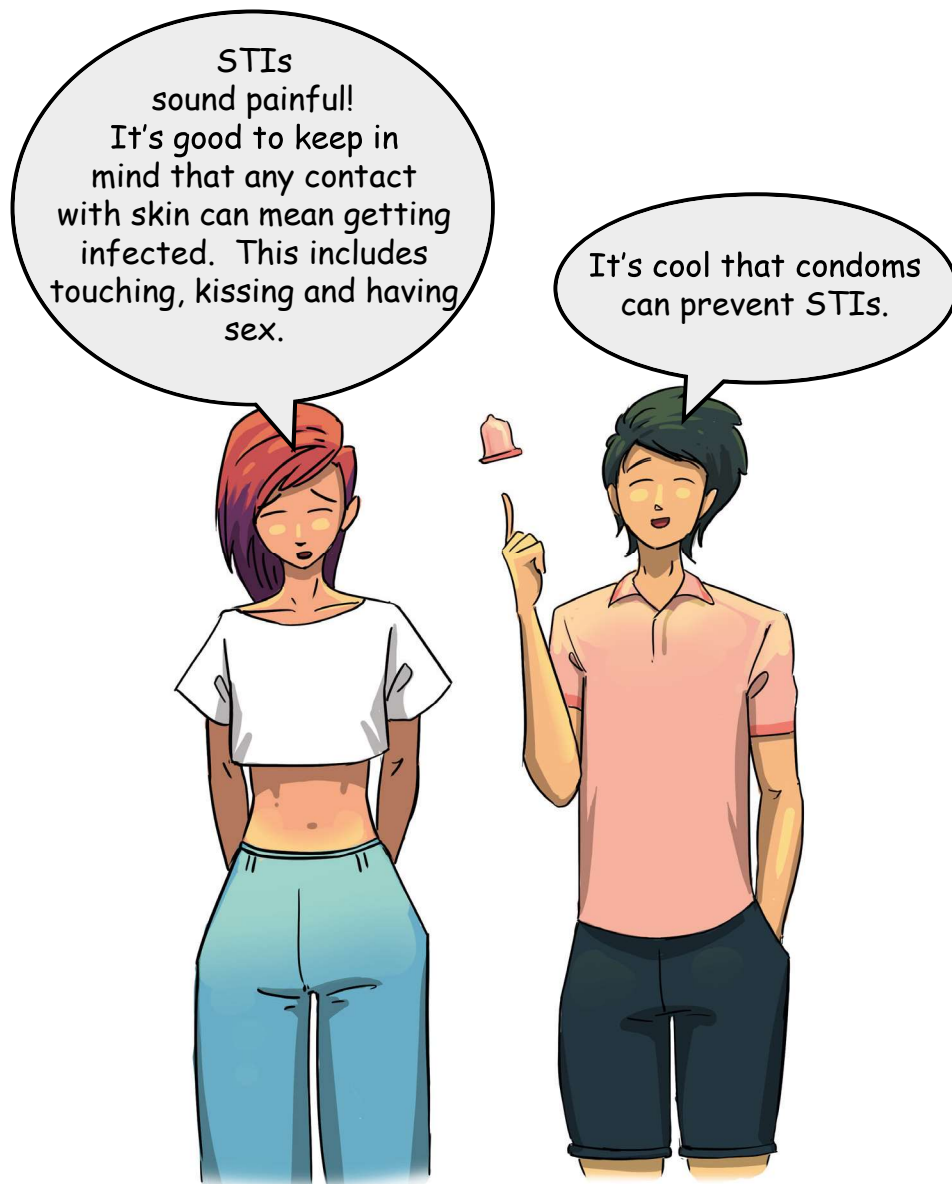
- **Men:** redness and itching of the penile head, discharge, sores or growths (warts) around the genital area, and pain on passing urine
- **Women:** redness or itching of the vulva, discharge, sores or warts around the genitalia, abdominal pain, and pain on passing urine

There are STIs that can be treated completely like *Chlamydia* or *Gonorrhoea*. However, there are others that do not heal as easily, and may be lifelong, like HIV, hepatitis, herpes and *Syphilis*.



**Remember to use a condom to protect you from STIs!**

If you think you have an STI, you can get treated for free at the Genito-urinary (GU) Clinic at Mater Dei Hospital. All testing is done anonymously and anyone can call for an appointment to be seen by a doctor there.



# Where to get help

- **Doctors for Choice Malta**

20341712  
contact@doctorsforchoice.mt  
<https://www.doctorsforchoice.mt/>  
PO Box 15, University of Malta, Msida

- **Family Planning Advisory Service (FPAS)  
– a pro-choice helpline**

27780037  
contact@fpas.mt  
<https://www.fpas.mt/>

- **GU Clinic**

2545 7491  
2545 7494  
[https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/MDH/  
Pages/MDH-Genitourinary-Clinic.aspx](https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/MDH/Pages/MDH-Genitourinary-Clinic.aspx)

- **Health Centres**

21231231

<https://deputyprimeminister.gov.mt/en/phc/Pages/Health-Centres/Overview.aspx>

- **Police**

21224001

[https://pulizija.gov.mt/en/Contact-Us/Pages/Contact\\_Us.aspx](https://pulizija.gov.mt/en/Contact-Us/Pages/Contact_Us.aspx)

- **Emergency services**

(Ambulance, Police, Fire engine)

112

- **MGRM**

32, Parish Street, Mosta

2143 0009

9925 5559

[mgrm@maltagayrights.org](mailto:mgrm@maltagayrights.org)

<http://maltagayrights.org/>