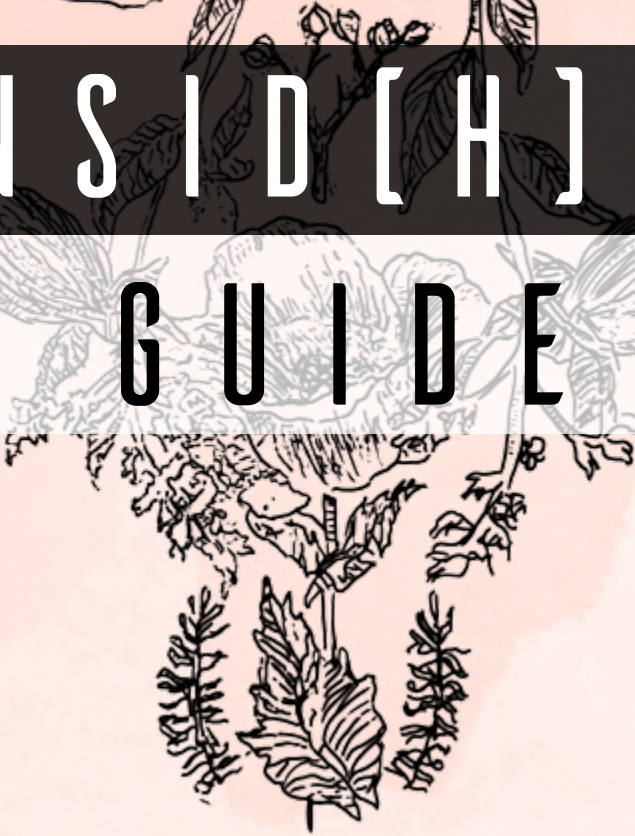




INSID[H]ER GUIDE



ABOUT

THE CAMPAIGN

Insid(h)er Talk is a female health campaign focusing on female reproductive health.

Targeted at females aged 18-24, Insid(h)er Talk aims to empower women to take greater ownership of their reproductive health by:

- Increasing their level of knowledge of the female reproductive system
- Understanding the diseases they are susceptible to
- Knowing how they can safeguard their reproductive health

THE TEAM

Insid(h)er Talk is an initiative by four undergraduate students from the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, Nanyang Technological University.

It is proudly supported by Singapore Cancer Society (SCS), MSD Pharma (Singapore) and powered by the National Youth Council and Young ChangeMakers.

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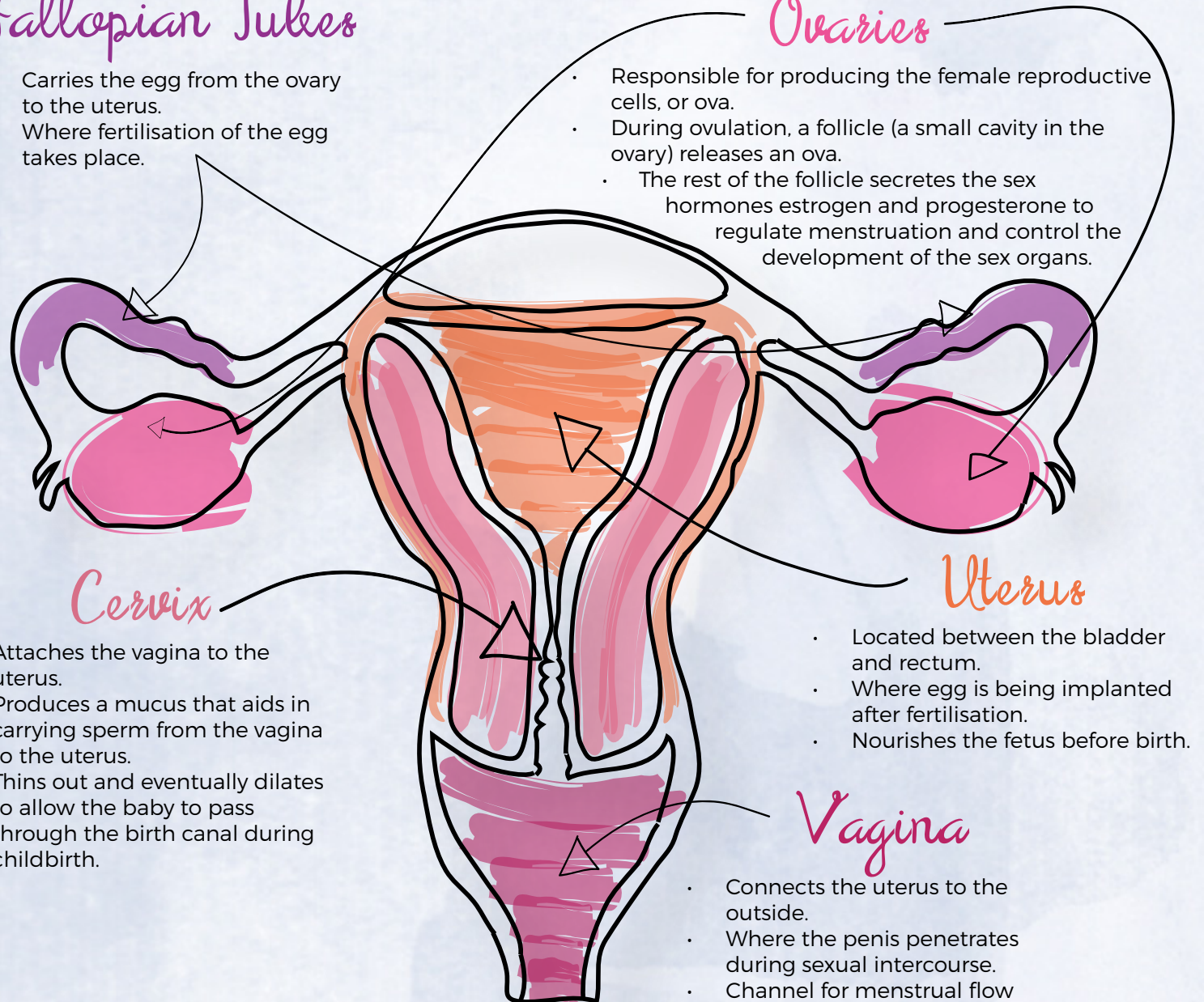
YOUR REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

Fallopian Tubes

- Carries the egg from the ovary to the uterus.
- Where fertilisation of the egg takes place.

Ovaries

- Responsible for producing the female reproductive cells, or ova.
- During ovulation, a follicle (a small cavity in the ovary) releases an ova.
- The rest of the follicle secretes the sex hormones estrogen and progesterone to regulate menstruation and control the development of the sex organs.



Cervix

- Attaches the vagina to the uterus.
- Produces a mucus that aids in carrying sperm from the vagina to the uterus.
- Thins out and eventually dilates to allow the baby to pass through the birth canal during childbirth.

Uterus

- Located between the bladder and rectum.
- Where egg is being implanted after fertilisation.
- Nourishes the fetus before birth.

Vagina

- Connects the uterus to the outside.
- Where the penis penetrates during sexual intercourse.
- Channel for menstrual flow from the uterus.

HPV INFECTIONS

What is HPV?

HPV, or Human Papillomavirus, is a virus that can infect many parts of the body. HPV infections are common among both men and women, but up to 90% of cases can go away without treatment.

HPV infections can be transmitted through genital skin-to-skin contact during sexual activity, sharing contaminated sex toys, and very rarely, during delivery from the infected mother to the baby. However, HPV cannot be passed by sitting on toilet seats or touching door knobs.

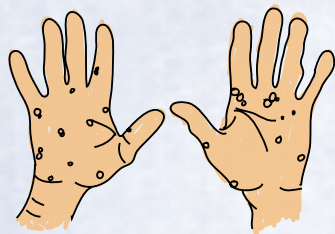
DID YOU KNOW?

- A study of 900 women in Singapore in 2014 showed that 1 in 10 healthy women are infected with HPV, and the infection was found to be most common among those between 20 and 24.
- Female patients aged 9-26 can use up to \$400 per Medisave account per year under the Medisave400 scheme to pay for HPV vaccination which costs about \$450 - \$600. Ask your local GP about the subsidies available to you.

Source: Singapore General Hospital

How can you tell?

HPV infections often occur without any signs or symptoms. Occasionally, genital warts or warts in other parts of the body may appear and could be a sign of a HPV infection.



In 90% of the infection cases, the virus clears by itself and the cells return to normal. However, in some cases, the infection can persist and cause the cells to grow abnormally. Some of these abnormal cells may develop into cervical cancer.

There are more than 100 sub-types of HPV, out of which 30-40 can infect the genital area, and cause genital warts in both men and women, cervical cancer in women, and anal or penile cancer in men.

Specifically, HPV sub-types 16 & 18 cause about 70% cervical cancer cases, while HPV sub-types 6 & 11 cause about 90% genital warts cases.

HPV VACCINATIONS

Am I at risk?



Anyone who is sexually active is at risk of HPV - any kind of intimate genital contact may transmit the virus, not only through intercourse.

It is also important to note that condoms **may not fully protect** you against HPV as they do not cover all genital skin and if they are used incorrectly.

You are at higher risk of contracting HPV infections if you:

- ☐ Have multiple sexual partners
- ☐ Engage in sexual activity with a partner who has had multiple partners
- ☐ Have a weakened immune system
- ☐ Smoke

What can I do?

The first actionable step you can take to protect yourself is to go for the HPV vaccination at any polyclinic or GP clinic. The vaccination can prevent specific types of HPV infection which could lead to cervical cancer. The vaccination is most effective when given before the start of sexual activity, where HPV exposure occurs.



The vaccine is recommended for females aged 9 - 26. Do note that it is not foolproof against all types of HPV, as the vaccine does not protect against all cancer-causing HPV sub-types. It is also **not a substitute** for routine Pap smear screening, which is still your best protection against cervical cancer.

The vaccine may not be suitable for those with severe allergic reactions to components in the vaccine, pregnant women, and those above the age of 26. Thus, it is essential that you consult your doctor to find out if you are suitable for the vaccination.

CERVICAL CANCER

What is Cervical Cancer?

Cervical cancer, also known as cervix uteri cancer, is the cancer of the cervix. It is the 10th most common cancer among women in Singapore.

The millions of cells which make up the cervix may undergo changes without your knowledge, and these changes could further develop into cervical cancer.

The most common cause of cervical cancer is infection of the cervix with HPV.

Am I at risk?

You are at higher risk of developing cervical cancer if you:

- ☐ Have had sexual intercourse and/or are sexually active
- ☐ Have had multiple sexual partners
- ☐ Have had a history of sexually transmitted illnesses such as genital warts or HPV infections
- ☐ Are HIV positive
- ☐ Have a weak immune system
- ☐ Smoke

How can you tell?

The most common symptoms of cervical cancer are:

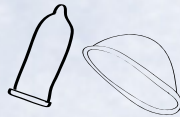
- Vaginal bleeding after sexual intercourse
- Watery, bloody, foul-smelling vaginal discharge
- Irregular bleeding between periods or after menopause
- Lower abdominal pain or pain during intercourse

Pre-cancerous and early cancer of the cervix often have no symptoms and are usually detected through routine vaginal examinations and Pap smears.

What can I do?

To prevent the onset of cervical cancer, you can:

- Minimise early sexual activity and the number of sexual partners
- Use a diaphragm or condom during sexual intercourse
- Go for a Pap smear regularly
- Get the HPV vaccination



What is a Pap smear?

A Pap smear is a procedure done to test for cervical cancer or precancerous stages of cervical cancer in women. It involves collecting cells from your cervix and vagina, and sending the cell sample to the laboratory to be examined for abnormal cells that may grow into cancer.

When should I have a Pap smear?

As a general guideline, the Screening Test Review Committee of the Academy of Medicine Singapore recommends that all women who have ever had sexual intercourse undergo screening for cervical cancer from the age of 25 - 69 years.

After the age of 69, a woman does not have to continue screening if her Pap smear at 69 is negative and she has had 2 previous negative smears within the last 10 years.

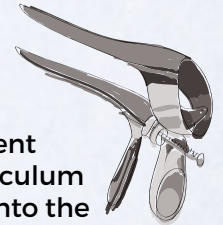
It is best to consult your doctor to decide when it's time for you to go for your Pap smear.

PAP SMEARS

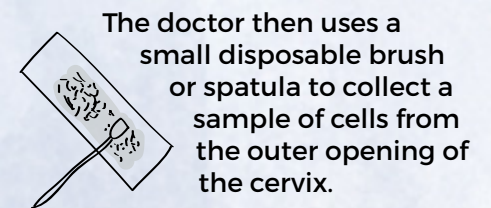
What happens during a Pap smear?



During the procedure, the woman being examined lies down on her back with her knees up and apart.

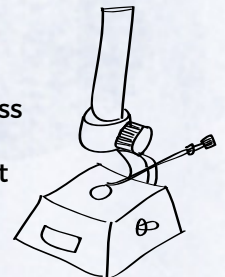


An instrument called a speculum is inserted into the vagina to expose the cervix.



The doctor then uses a small disposable brush or spatula to collect a sample of cells from the outer opening of the cervix.

This sample is then smeared onto a glass slide or put into a container to be sent to the laboratory for further examination.



PAP SMEARS

Is the Pap smear 100% accurate?

A Pap smear is a safe way to screen for cervical cancer, but it is not foolproof. It can have false positive and false negative results.

- False positive: Shows cancer when cancer is not present
- False negative: Test incorrectly reported as normal when cancer or pre-cancer abnormality is present

This can happen because of the following factors:

- Inadequate collection of cells
- A small number of abnormal cells
- Blood or inflammatory cells obscuring the abnormal cells

Thus, it is important to have a Pap smear done regularly for accurate results.

How often do I need to go for a Pap smear?

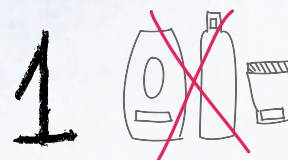
General guideline: Every 3 years once sexually active.

If you have certain risk factors, your doctor may recommend that you go for Pap smears more frequently. They include:

- A diagnosis of cervical cancer or Pap smear result that showed pre-cancerous cells
- HIV infection
- Weakened immune system due to organ transplant, chemotherapy, or chronic corticosteroid use
- Exposure to diethylstilbestrol (DES) before birth

PAP SMEARS

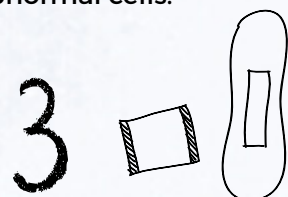
How do I prepare for a Pap smear?



Avoid intercourse, douching, or using any vaginal medicines or spermicidal foams, creams, or jellies for two days before a Pap smear, as these may wash away or obscure abnormal cells.



Wear a two-piece outfit for your pap smear appointment.



Bring along a pantyliner or thin sanitary pad as light bleeding or spotting may occur after a Pap smear.



Schedule your Pap smear appointment two weeks after the start of your menstrual period, up to about a week before the next one is due. This is the best time of the cycle to have a pap smear where the clearest, cleanest sample of cervical cells can be obtained.

Where can I go for a Pap smear?



The Singapore Cancer Society offers free Pap smear screenings to female Singaporeans and Permanent Residents aged 25 and above.

You can find out more on their website: www.singaporecancersociety.org.sg or sign up at tinyurl.com/papsmearsignup.

Alternatively, you can also visit your local doctor or polyclinic to book your Pap smear appointment.

POLYCYSTIC OVARY SYNDROME

What is PCOS?

Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) is the most common hormonal disorder in women of reproductive age, affecting about **10%** of women in this age group.

'Polycystic' means 'many cysts' – women with this condition have several cysts in their ovaries, although there are also cases without cysts present.

It is a condition in which a woman's levels of sex hormones, estrogen and progesterone, are out of balance. This hormonal imbalance prevents their ovaries from releasing an egg every month, thus resulting in the characteristic polycystic appearance of the ovaries.

PCOS might increase the risk of having uterine cancer. The risk of uterine cancer is three times as high for women with PCOS as it is for other women.

How can you tell?

Some of the signs of PCOS include:

- Infrequent or absent periods
- Difficulty in conception (Infertility and miscarriage)
- Acne
- Increase in production of male hormones
- Male pattern hair growth, i.e. excess body hair
- Scalp hair loss
- Rapid weight gain and obesity
- High blood pressure
- Elevated insulin levels and diabetes
- Slightly enlarged ovaries containing at least ten cysts 2-8mm in diameter

The doctor confirms the diagnosis of PCOS through a hormonal blood test and a pelvic ultrasound scan.

POLYCYSTIC OVARY SYNDROME

Am I at risk?

While the exact cause of PCOS is unknown, it is often associated with abnormal hormone levels.

You may be at higher risk of contracting PCOS if you:

- ☐ **Are resistant to insulin**
 - Causes the body to produce extra insulin in order to compensate for the body's resistance to the effects of insulin.
 - High levels of insulin will cause the ovaries to produce excessive testosterone, preventing normal ovulation from taking place.
- ☐ **Have a hormonal imbalance**

These include:

 - Raised levels of testosterone
 - Raised levels of luteinising hormone (LH)
 - Low levels of sex hormone-binding globulin (SHBG)
 - Raised levels of prolactin
- ☐ **Have a family member of relative who has PCOS**

There may be a genetic link to PCOS, but specific genes associated with the condition have yet to be identified.

What can I do?



As PCOS is largely genetically linked, it is advisable to maintain a healthy weight and lifestyle habits.



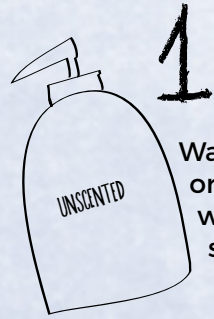
Weight reduction has been shown to effectively reduce the severity of the symptoms of PCOS, since obesity is independently associated with hyperinsulinemia.



You should speak to your doctor to find out more about your family's medical history, and to get an accurate diagnosis.

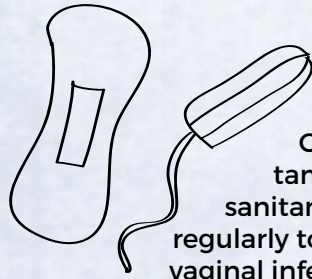


WAYS TO CARE



1

Wash your external organs regularly with unscented soap and water

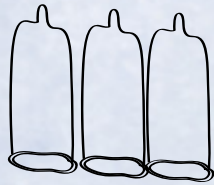


2

Change tampons/sanitary pads regularly to avoid vaginal infections

Practice safe sex

3



4

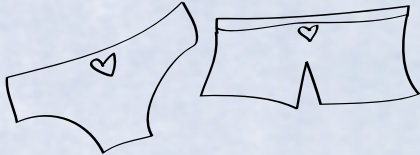
Maintain a healthy body weight and Body Mass Index (BMI)



Weighing too little produces insufficient estrogen, and weighing too much produces too much. This is a factor in PCOS.

5

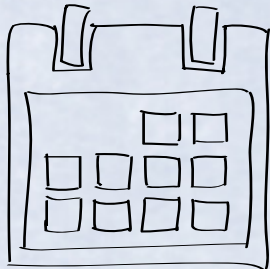
Change into a fresh pair of underwear every day



$BMI = \frac{\text{Weight (kg)}}{(\text{Height (m)} \times \text{Height (m)})}$

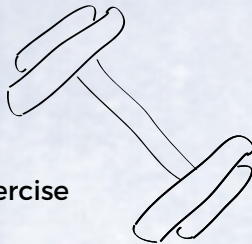
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Track your monthly cycle to check for abnormalities

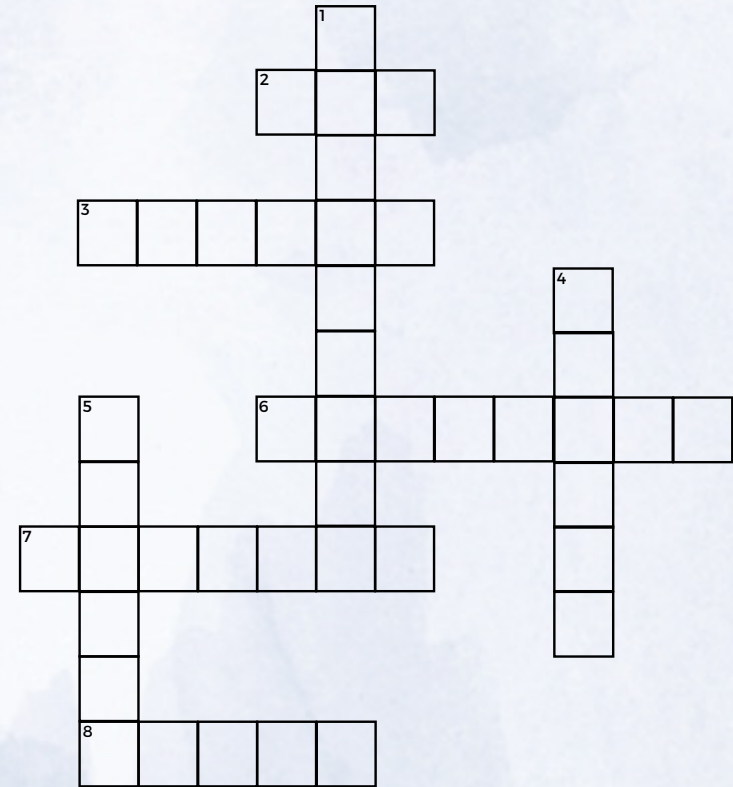


7

Regular exercise and stress management



CROSSWORD



Across

2. This test is used to detect abnormal cells in the cervix/vagina that could become cancerous.
3. A hormonal blood test and ___ ultrasound scan are ways to diagnose PCOS.
6. Polycystic Ovary Syndrome is a type of ___ disorder.
7. If left untreated and is persisting, HPV infections can develop into ___ warts.
8. Women who ___ could have higher risk of having cervical cancer.

Down

1. HPV stands for Human ___ virus
4. HPV infections can develop into cervical, penile, or anal ___.
5. This is where the egg is implanted after fertilisation.

NOTES

There are many other gynaecological diseases which you could be susceptible to. If you notice any abnormalities, always approach your doctor for a diagnosis.

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