

Are we in vulva territory? ^[1]

(1) Dear Alice,

What is the vulva?

— knowledge-searching person

(2) Alice,

Could you please settle an argument for me? Does the vulva in women consist of everything between the pubic mound to the rectum, or is the vagina separate? I thought that the vulva consisted of everything and my sister says that the urethra and vagina aren't included. Thanks

Answer

Dear knowledge-searching person and Reader,

To navigate the planet, humans have studied the stars, invented compasses, drawn maps, and sent GPS satellites into space. But when it comes to charting a voyage around the vulva, many people have missed the boat. Knowing what makes up the vulva and how it works are key parts of cultivating its pleasure — with and without a partner.

The vulva consists of all of the external (or visible) female genitalia from the mons pubis (a.k.a. the pubic mound) to, but not including, the anus. Many people mistakenly call the vulva the vagina. The vagina is actually the internal passage that leads from the external genitals (vulva) to the cervix of the uterus. The urethra, despite the fact that it is located mid-vulva (with the clitoris to the north and the vaginal opening to the south), is *not* included as part of the vulva, since it is part of the excretory system, not the genitals. The vulva, from north (belly side) to south (back side), includes:

- **The mons pubis (a.k.a. mons veneris or "mountains of venus"):** the rounded, soft, fatty pad of tissue covering the pubic mound on which pubic hair starts to grow during puberty.
- **The labia (lips):** folds of skin that serve as the eastern and western boundaries of the vulva, framing the vaginal opening. The outer set of lips (labia majora) is often covered with pubic hair, while the inner set of lips (labia minora) is hairless, sometimes, but not always,

concealed beneath their outer sisters.

- **The clitoris** [2]: the nerve and pleasure center (or "joy button") of a woman located at the upper joining of the labia, this mighty lil' pearl is made of erectile tissue similar in composition to the penis. It becomes engorged with blood and erect during arousal. The clitoris is where the most of the intensity of sensations is usually felt, building toward orgasm.
- **The vaginal opening (or orifice)**: and the area surrounding the vaginal opening (called *the vestibule*) are also considered parts of the vulva, although the vaginal canal itself, which leads from the vaginal opening back to the cervix, is not.

Although the clitoris is where most of the action is at for many women, all parts of the vulva are potential erogenous zones and are worth exploring. Human navigational achievements aside, there is always more to be discovered when it comes to bodies, especially since the exact landscape varies from person to person.

So, to summarize, the vagina and urethra are not considered part of the vulva. Hope this clears things up and happy exploring!

Alice!

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