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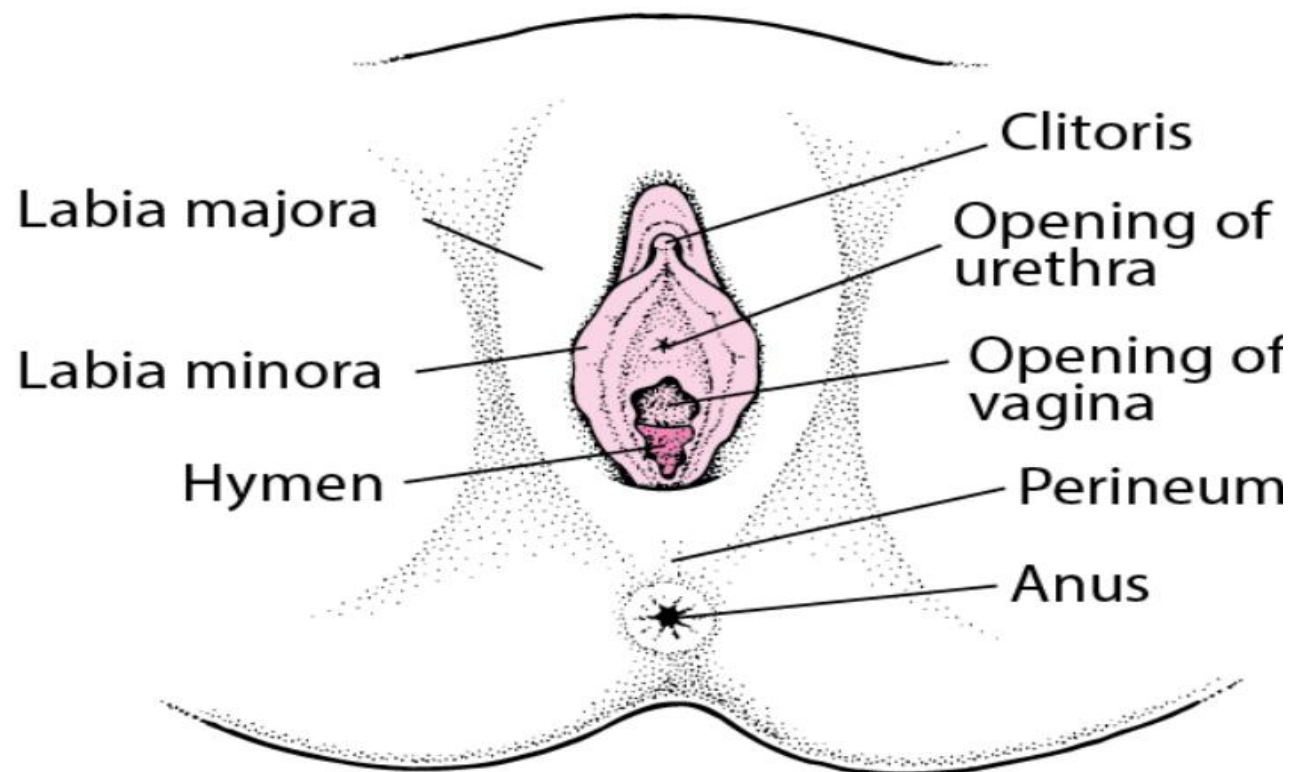
ANA 212

ANATOMY

**QUESTION: DISCUSS WITH THE AID OF DIAGRAMS THE FEMALE EXTERNAL GENITALIA**

**Introduction**

The external genitalia are the accessory structures of the female reproductive system that are external to the vagina. They are also referred to as the vulva or pudendum. The external genitalia include the labia majora, mons pubis, labia minora, clitoris, and Bartholin glands within the vestibule.



**The mons pubis** is a rounded mound of fatty tissue that covers the pubic bone. During puberty, it becomes covered with hair. The mons pubis contains oil-secreting (sebaceous) glands that release substances that are involved in sexual attraction (pheromones).

**The labia majora** (literally, large lips) are relatively large, fleshy folds of tissue that enclose and protect the other external genital organs. They are comparable to the scrotum in males. The labia majora contain sweat and sebaceous glands, which produce lubricating secretions. During puberty, hair appears on the labia majora.

**The labia minora** (literally, small lips) can be very small or up to 2 inches wide. The labia minora lie just inside the labia majora and surround the openings to the vagina and urethra. A rich supply of blood vessels gives the labia minora a pink color. During sexual stimulation, these blood vessels become engorged with blood, causing the labia minora to swell and become more sensitive to stimulation. The area between the opening of the vagina and the anus, below the labia majora, is called the perineum. It varies in length from almost 1 to more than 2 inches (2 to 5 centimeters).

**The hymen** is a thin membrane found at the entrance to the vaginal orifice. Often, this membrane is perforated before the onset of menstruation, allowing flow of menses. The hymen varies greatly in shape.

**The clitoris**, located between the labia minora at their upper end, is a small protrusion that corresponds to the penis in the male. The clitoris, like the penis, is very sensitive to sexual stimulation and can become erect. Stimulating the clitoris can result in an orgasm.

The labia majora and the perineum are covered with skin similar to that on the rest of the body. In contrast, the labia minora are lined with a mucous membrane, whose surface is kept moist by fluid secreted by specialized cells.

The opening to the vagina is called the introitus. The vaginal opening is the entryway for the penis during sexual intercourse and the exit for blood during menstruation and for the baby

during birth. When stimulated, Bartholin glands (located beside the vaginal opening) secrete a thick fluid that supplies lubrication for intercourse.

The opening to the urethra, which carries urine from the bladder to the outside, is located above and in front of the vaginal opening.

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