Where does the penis go during intercourse? [1]

Dear Alice,

My new girlfriend and I had sex for the first time this weekend. Later in the evening, she was curious about something... "Where is that thing going???" she asked. She mentioned that full insertion was painful and she wanted to know what I was hitting, and "how far does it go?" Being admittedly a bit rusty on my knowledge of the anatomy of the female body, I told her that I thought it went no further than the "uvula" (whatever that is), but that I would do a little research, maybe see what I could get off the Net and get back to her.

?Need Directions

Answer

Dear Need Directions,

Since first times don't come with an instruction manual (e.g. insert peg A into slot B), sexual mechanics can be exciting or just plain confusing. Brushing up on your anatomy and physiology may impress your girlfriend and pave the way for more pleasurable experiences in the future.

When you mentioned the uvula, perhaps you meant the vulva, or outer female genitals. These visible parts include:

- The inner and outer labia (the lips surrounding the vagina)
- The tip of the clitoris
- The clitoral hood or covering
- The opening of the urethra (where pee comes out)
- The opening of the vagina

During vaginal intercourse, the penis goes into the vagina. The vaginal walls are made of soft tissue that molds around a penis, fingers, tampons, or other object placed there. The length of the vagina varies, but it's not "endless." The vagina stops at the cervix, a button-shaped entrance to the uterus (womb). Your penis may be "hitting" the cervix, which could be the source of your girlfriend's discomfort.

Sex can be uncomfortable, especially during the first few go arounds, but it doesn't have to be painful. Have you thought about slowing down or shifting gears? Would sex be more fun, and less confusing, if you spend some time getting to know the ins and outs of each others' bodies
first? When you and your girlfriend feel ready for take two, ample foreplay and lubrication will go a long way towards a more enjoyable sexual experience. For example, when your girlfriend is really turned on, her vagina will stretch out and you won't "bump into" her cervix. For more ways to minimize sexual discomfort and maximize pleasure, check out the response to Painful penetration in the Go Ask Alice! archives.

If you or your girlfriend are still curious, you can talk with a health care provider about your anatomy quandaries. Other good sources of information include a women's health provider, a human sexuality text in your local bookstore, and Planned Parenthood.

As you and your girlfriend start exploring sex, you may have questions about how your bodies work. A good foundation in anatomy will give you a better idea of what you're, um, getting into.

Alice!
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Medical Services (Morningside)
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