

Virginity Guide

What is Virginity?

Female virginity is traditionally defined as the state of a woman who has not engaged in penis-vagina sexual intercourse. Female virginity cannot be measured or proven from a physical examination or test. A medical professional, friend, partner, or family member cannot “see” a woman’s virginity. Female virginity is NOT a tangible entity. In this guide, we seek to dispel the myth of “physical virginity” and to provide women with the knowledge and practical tools to overcome patriarchal constraints. This material offers some strategies, providing women with the resources to take control over their own bodies and their own lives.

Imposed Virginity Testing (IVT) is a basic violation of human rights. It occurs when an examiner performs a gynecologic examination in which he/she looks at the vaginal opening for an “intact” hymen.

Human rights violation:

Imposed virginity testing is a forced, invasive, and degrading physical examination. It is a violation of women’s human rights that breaches articles from internationally recognized declarations, covenants, and conventions. It is thus a violation of **Article 5 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights** which states, “*No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment*”.

A forced virginity test is a direct and arbitrary attack on a woman’s honor and thus a violation of Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states, “*No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks*”.

Additionally, the results of a virginity test are commonly given to a fiancé, husband, or woman’s family. This disclosure of patient information breaches the ethical standard of confidentiality that a medical doctor is expected to uphold. And violates clauses that apply to virginity testing from The World Medical Association’s International Code of Medical Ethics: “*A Physician shall be dedicated to providing competent medical service in full professional and moral independence, with compassion and respect for human dignity.*”

What is a hymen?

A hymen is a thin fold (or folds) of mucous tissue located 1-2 centimeters inside the vaginal opening that surrounds or may even completely cover the opening.

Its color is slightly pink but it can also look whitish. When a girl enters puberty and starts to produce the hormone oestrogen, this can cause the hymen to thicken and increase in width. There is not one type of hymen; they come in many different shapes and forms.

Variations in shape of the hymen







Type	Description	Diagrammatic representation
Annular (circumferential)	The circumference of the vaginal opening is completely surrounded by the hymen	
Crescentic (lunar)	A hymen which is deficient at 12 o'clock and is attached at 11 o'clock and 1 o'clock	
Septate	A hymen that has bands of tissue creating two or more openings	
Cribriform	A hymen with multiple openings (sieve-like)	
Imperforate (occluded)	A hymen without an opening.	
Microperforate	A hymen with a small opening	

Image source:

http://www.dundee.ac.uk/forensicmedicine/Crimes_against_Women_and_Children/D10-Anatomy.pdf

Additionally, although it is very rare, a girl may be born entirely without a hymen.

Virginity Testing

If the hymen is interpreted to be “intact”, then the woman “passes” the virginity test and it is believed that she has not ever engaged in penis-vagina sex. If the hymen is interpreted to be “broken” or “torn”, where only the hymenal remnants are found, then the woman “fails” the test and it is believed that she has already engaged in sexual relations with a man.

What can cause tears in the hymen?

The first time that a woman has penis-vagina sexual intercourse, it is possible that the penetration of the penis into the vaginal opening may partially or completely rupture the hymenal tissue. This may cause the woman to feel some discomfort and some bleeding may occur. However, *less than half* of women bleed the first time that they have intercourse¹. Importantly, there are actually ***other activities that can cause tears in the hymen***. Participating in sports like cycling, horseback riding, or gymnastics can cause hymenal tears. There are also other things that may cause the hymen to tear: the insertion of a tampon, the insertion of a speculum during a gynecological exam, the insertion of fingers, and masturbation. Therefore, whether or not a woman’s hymen is “intact” cannot be physical proof of whether or not she has engaged in penis-vagina sex.

Also when a woman had vaginal intercourse the hymen can still be intact (it can stretch)!!

There are two main ways that women may use to simulate an intact hymen, if their hymen has already been stretched or torn from penetrative sexual intercourse, rigorous physical activity, tampon usage, or masturbation.

1- **Hymen reconstruction surgery**, also known as hymenoplasty or hymenorrrhaphy, is a surgical procedure that reconstructs the hymenal remnants. In this surgical operation the remnants of the hymenal ring are stitched back together. A couple of stiches are put in place on each side of the hymenal remnants. The stitches will dissolve and will not be detectable. It is a very simply procedure that only requires a local anesthetic. The goal is for bleeding to occur when a penis penetrates the vagina.

However, the results of this operation can vary because there is no guarantee that bleeding will occur upon penetration. It is also possible that the stitches may

¹http://www.scarleteen.com/article/body/my_corona_the_anatomy_formerly_known_as_the_hymen_the_myths_that_surround_it

fall out as soon as the operation is over because it is difficult for stitches to hold in tissue that is soft and elastic. Therefore, some hymen reconstruction surgery also includes the insertion of a gelatin-capsule that will release a blood-like substance during intercourse to simulate bleeding.

If 1 doctor performs a hymen reconstruction and another doctor performs a virginity test a month later (after the stitches resolved) this doctor will not be able to see that the hymen was reconstructed.

Artificial Hymens

The artificial hymen is a small plastic insert that releases fake blood upon penetration. It is also commonly known as a “chinese hymen” or “fake hymen”. They can be purchased in select stores and on the internet. (link to the internet side website) The artificial hymen oozes a liquid that looks like blood when a penis penetrates it. The artificial hymen is completely safe to use. It is non-toxic and has no adverse side effects.



Image source: <http://hymenshop.com/>

The Hymen Shop provides instructions on how to use this product:

- The artificial hymen must be placed inside the vagina not more than 15-20 minutes before sexual intercourse. Inserting the artificial hymen longer than 20 minutes prior to intercourse may result in the artificial hymen losing its form or dissolving inside the vagina.

- 1) Wash both hands thoroughly with soap and water.
- 2) Open the aluminum package and completely unfold the artificial hymen, and then carefully place it inside the vagina using your index finger. If the

- vagina is dry, dip the artificial hymen in water and then put it into the vagina as quickly as possible, using your index finger.
- 3) After sexual intercourse, clean away the artificial blood from the genital region. Some of the artificial hymen will dissolve inside the vagina and will not fall out after intercourse.

Using these methods to recreate a woman's virginal status can be seen as empowering for women, but at the same time reinforcing the patriarchal system of oppression. These methods give her an opportunity to take control of her own body, enjoy premarital sex and at the same time save her future relationship despite the fact that familial and societal institutions attempt to ultimately control these two things.

From another perspective, the artificial crafting of a woman's virginity is something that perpetuates the system that demands this expectation. Hymen reconstruction surgery is not a medically necessary intervention, but rather one that is performed on social grounds as are most cosmetic operation. Therefore, some physicians may refuse to do this surgery because they may see it as promoting a woman's deception of her partner. The International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) Ethics Committee has specific guidelines that pertain to this issue. The guidelines state that that a practitioner who objects to do a procedure must still perform the procedure if they are able when a referral is not possible because they "**must give priority to their patients' lives, health and well-being**".²

² <http://www.figo.org/files/figo-corp/Ethical%20Issues%20-%20English.pdf>