

The NORMALITY OR OTHERWISE OF THE LABIA MINORA



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Much like the breasts the labia minora can be a variety of shape and sizes. Nevertheless there appears to be a pervading impression that they should be small and of equal length. Comments in magazines and some academic texts have suggested that this impression arises from viewing 'soft' pornographic photographs or videos. The truth or otherwise of this opinion has not been established. Since women infrequently compare their external genitalia one has to wonder where this impression has arisen. Understanding of the anatomical relationships of the various components of the external genitalia is poor.

Generally, women who report that their external genitalia look different to others have come to this conclusion because they have had the opportunity to make a direct comparison. Typically this may be in the shower or changing room whilst at school but for some this may not occur until they begin to attend the gym as younger or older adults.

The only comment that can be made with any certainty regarding the size and shape of the labia minora is that they are all very different and that the range of what can be considered to be 'normal' is very broad indeed. A very long or very short labia minora would, thus, be considered to be a variant of normal and their appearance would not result in the ability to predict whether any individual woman would have any symptoms or be concerned about how they look.

WHEN EXAMINED CAREFULLY IT IS CLEAR THAT THE LABIA MINORA ARE RARELY OF EQUAL LENGTH (EVEN THOUGH THEY MAY APPEAR TO BE SO ON BRIEF INSPECTION), SHAPE OR DIAMETER. THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CLITORIS, PARTICULARLY WITH THE FORMATION OF THE PARACLITORAL FOLDS OFTEN DIFFERS WITH ONE SIDE BEING MORE PROMINENT THAN THE OTHER.



Variation in Labia Minora

Some women report that they have had the impression of the labia minora being elongated before they reached puberty, although most in this group would report that it was around the time of puberty that they became more aware of this. Others will comment that they had noticed a gradual increase in the length of the labia minora. Within this latter group a significant proportion will have observed that pregnancy appeared to be a trigger factor for acceleration of this growth. Sometimes the increase in length and/or thickness will be isolated to one labia minora and this disproportion may be a function of normal growth where one exceeds the other from the prepubertal stage of growth.

The decision to undergo a labiaplasty procedure is an individual one. The two main factors are appearance and discomfort. Both are often of concern to the affected woman. Patients should seek out surgeons who have experience with both supraclitoral (above clitoral) and infraclitoral (below clitoral) labial surgery. Surgeons should approach with caution operating on adolescents.

