

called the **hymen**, may cover part of the vaginal opening. In some instances, it completely occludes the orifice. After rupture, small rounded pieces of tissue called *caruncles* remain. Although an imperforate hymen denotes lack of penile intercourse, a perforate one does not necessarily indicate sexual activity (see also Sexual Abuse, [Chapter 16](#)).

Nursing Alert

In girls who have been circumcised, the genitalia will appear different. Do not show surprise or disgust but note the appearance and discuss the procedure with the young woman (see also [Chapter 2](#), Cultural Considerations “Circumcision”).

Surrounding the vaginal opening are **Bartholin glands**, which secrete a clear, mucoid fluid into the vagina for lubrication during intercourse. Palpate the ducts for cysts. Also note the discharge from the vagina, which is usually clear or white.

Anus

After examination of the genitalia, it is easy to identify the anal area, although the child should be placed on the abdomen. Note the general firmness of the **buttocks** and symmetry of the **gluteal folds**. Assess the tone of the anal sphincter by eliciting the **anal reflex (anal wink)**. Gently scratching the anal area results in an obvious quick contraction of the external anal sphincter.

Back and Extremities

Spine

Note the general **curvature** of the spine. Normally, the back of a newborn is rounded or C shaped from the thoracic and pelvic curves. The development of the cervical and lumbar curves approximates development of various motor skills, such as cervical curvature with head control, and gives older children the typical double S curve.

Marked curvatures in posture are abnormal. **Scoliosis**, lateral curvature of the spine, is an important childhood problem,