

Because I'm A Girl



*A publication about puberty
and feminine development*



For our readers

This educational pamphlet contains information that may be of a sensitive nature. We sincerely hope that our readers will find this information useful as its sole purpose is to educate youth about puberty and female sexual development.

While every care has been taken in the compilation of the information contained in this pamphlet, this information should not be relied upon as a substitute for formal advice from your physician or other health care provider.

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Is your body changing? Are you extra emotional? Do you wonder "why is this happening to me?"

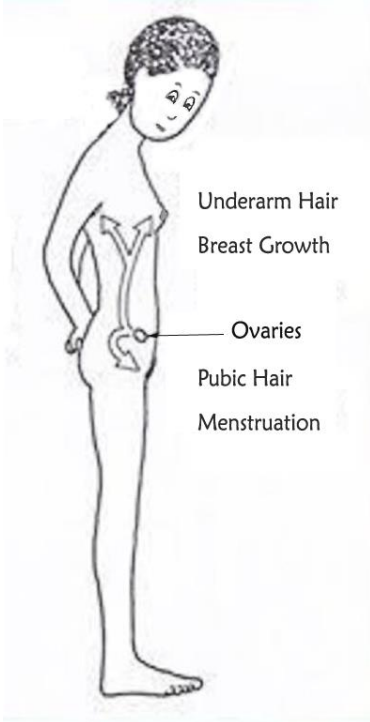
You might be entering the age of puberty.

What is puberty?

Puberty occurs when a boy or girl's body begins to develop and change. When a girl is fully developed, she can have a baby. This booklet explains how a girl's body will change as she becomes an adult.



My body is changing. *What's happening?*



Are your breasts growing? Do you have hair that is growing on your body? Do you have body odor or pimples?

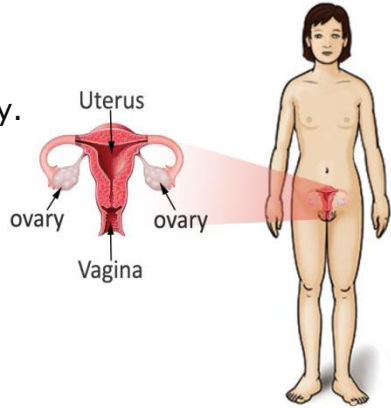
Changes in your body are signs that you are becoming an adult. When a girl is about 9 – 10 years old, she may begin to see that her body is changing. However, every girl is different and may start to develop earlier or later.

While your body outside begins to look different, there are many changes that are going on inside. As your body develops, your female organs will also be growing and changing. About 1 ½ years after your breasts start growing, you may get wet panties from a liquid discharge. This is a sign that you will soon start to have your menstrual period.

All of these changes are normal and are nature's way of preparing you to be a mother.

What is a female reproductive system?

Girls are born with female organs that make up her reproductive system. These organs are located down below the tummy. Each part of the system plays an important part in the development of a baby. The reproductive system has two ovaries, fallopian tubes, a uterus and a vagina.



What is a menstrual period?

A menstrual period is a part of the menstrual cycle. This monthly cycle begins with the release of a mature egg from an ovary. The egg travels down the fallopian tube toward the uterus. The uterus develops a bloody lining in wait for a fertilized egg. Once the unfertilized egg enters the uterus, it breaks apart and passes out of the body with the bloody lining through the vagina. This blood flow usually lasts from 2-7 days and is the menstrual period. Your first menstrual period will start with a bloody or brownish color discharge in your panties. When you start your period, you should talk to an adult friend and tell them what has happened.

Talk to an adult

For some girls, puberty can be a very difficult time of life. It is important to talk about your feelings. When you first start your period, find an adult friend and tell them what has happened. Remember, every woman has gone through this time of their life and talking it over can help.



Why do I feel like this?

When your body starts to develop, your hormones will change too. You may feel happy one minute and sad the next. These are normal feelings and show that your hormones are working. If you feel very depressed and angry, it is best to talk to a parent or grown up. As you grow, it is perfectly normal to feel many different emotions.

What is PMS?

PMS is the abbreviation for Premenstrual Syndrome. Not all girls have PMS. It usually occurs before or during their period. PMS can make you feel moody, unhappy, and sick to your stomach. Some girls feel bloated, have tender breasts or may have problems with constipation.

I feel sick and my stomach hurts.

Some girls experience cramps before or during their period. Cramps occur when the uterus is trying to push out the bloody lining that was building up in the uterus during the month. Not all girls have cramps, but if you do, it helps to take a pain reliever like aspirin.

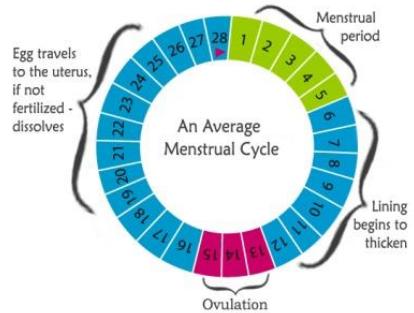


How often can I expect my period?

A normal menstrual cycle for girls ranges from 21 to 45 days; a normal period lasts from two to 7 days.

If you experience and a heavy blood flow during, or in between your period, be sure to talk about this with an adult or your doctor.

When you have your period, we recommend a washable sanitary pad to protect your clothing. It is durable and can last several years with care.



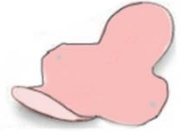
How will I know when to expect my next period?

An average cycle is 28 days, mark on a calendar the day your period starts and count 28 days. Your period will most likely begin somewhere around that day. Carry a pad with you when you feel that your period is close.



What is a sanitary pad?

Sanitary pads protect your clothing from the blood flow. We encourage the use of washable sanitary pads as they can be washed and will last a couple of years with care.

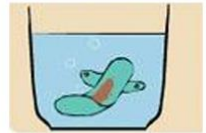


How do I wash a sanitary pad?

You need to wash a washable sanitary pad every time after use. A soiled pad should be changed every 4-8 hours depending upon your blood flow. Remove your soiled pad and rinse with cold water. Then,

1. Place in a bucket and soak until ready to launder.
2. Wash the pad with soapy water.
3. Rinse and hang out to sun dry.
4. If you are away from home when you change your pad, simply place it in the provided plastic bag and follow the above steps when you return home.

1. Soak in cold water



2. Wash



3. Sun Dry



Should I be concerned about irregularities?

Some young women experience irregular periods when they first start having their menstrual period. Changes in diet, stress, exercise, or illness can make a difference in your menstrual cycle.

Sexual activity

Do you feel insecure or are having peer pressures to have sex or to have a baby?

If you are thinking about having sex with another person, please talk to someone about your feelings before acting on these sexual desires. You might feel ready to have a baby, but in fact your organs need to develop further for your safety and that of the baby.



HIV/AIDS

When we talk about sex, it is important to discuss HIV/AIDS. There is no cure for HIV/AIDS, but can be prevented by using protection during sex. If you are thinking about having sex with another person, please talk to an adult or your doctor about using condoms during sexual activity.

Growing up is an important part of your life. We hope that as you grow and develop into a woman, you will have the wisdom to make good decisions, the confidence to stand up for your rights and the determination to move forward in your journey of life.

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