

## IT'S A GIRL THING



*Puberty. Growing up. Becoming a woman. Sounds pretty serious. Like a huge change is underway. What does it all really mean? And what's this about a period?*

*Share this booklet with your parent or trusted adult. Talk with them about the highlighted words.*

## **AM I GOING TO BE TOTALLY DIFFERENT AFTER I GO THROUGH PUBERTY?**

*Well, yes and no. Your body will change. Your thoughts may change. But...YOU will always be YOU. A science whiz, a singer, a determined goalie, a best friend, a trusted sister...those aspects of yourself will remain and get even better. For now, we're going to focus on the physical changes your body will go through during puberty. One of the biggest changes is a **period**.*

*That's right. You will start **menstruating**. Otherwise known as "**getting your period**". About once a month. This is the **big change** that signals you are growing and changing from a girl into a woman. It's a whole new experience, but it doesn't have to ruin your day. Or your month. Think of it as a time to really take care of yourself. Once you're used to having your period, it won't feel like such a big deal. You can still feel like your familiar, everyday self. You know, the one who sinks the basket just about every time. The one who has a knack for picking out excellent books to read. The one who is always there for her friends. Everyday you.*

*Everybody goes through puberty, though every body is different. People change at different times and at different rates. It doesn't happen all at once. There are some stages that might seem confusing or strange. Some are kind of cool. You'll be fine. We're all in this together!*



## YOUR CHANGING BODY



Puberty doesn't happen all at once. It takes time. **Puberty** is the process of growing from a girl to a woman, or from a boy to a man. It's one word that covers a whole lot of changes. Girls generally start going through puberty any time between the ages of 9 and 16. It takes a few years to fully develop.

Puberty begins when the brain releases **hormones**. Hormones are chemicals that tell the body it's time to grow. In girls, these hormones are **progesterone and estrogen**.

**Breasts** begin to develop. Like all other changes, this one will happen at different times for different girls. Some girls' breasts start growing when they are 8 or 9 years old. Other girls' breasts start growing when they are 14 or 15 or even older. Many girls fall somewhere in between. It's all normal.

The nipples and surrounding area, called the **areola**, are getting darker and growing a little bigger. At first, these are called **breast buds**. As your breasts continue to grow, the nipple will stick out from the rest of the breast. You might notice one

breast is developing faster than the other. That's normal too. They will probably even out in time. But if they don't, don't worry. Many women's breasts don't match each other exactly.

You'll begin to grow **pubic hair**. This is the hair that will grow between your legs and cover your external genitalia. Boys also grow hair in the pubic area as they become men. The first hairs are straight and soft. As you continue to develop, the hair will grow in thicker and curlier. Pubic hair may grow in varying thicknesses. Usually it is in the shape of an upside-down triangle. The hair may grow up a little toward your belly button and out into your inner thighs. Pubic hair may or may not be the same color as the hair on your head. Often it is darker.



You'll also begin to grow hair under your arms and thicker hair on your legs. You might want to shave the hair under your arms and on your legs. That's up to you. But be sure to check with an adult first.

**When will I get my period?** Will it just start one day and totally surprise me? Most girls begin menstruating between the ages of 9 and 16. There's no way to know exactly when you will get your first period. There are some clues you can keep in mind, though. Your period will generally begin after breasts and pubic hair begin to grow. Usually girls reach a body weight of at least 100 pounds before they begin menstruating. Right before your first period you might feel achy. Or bloated. Or grumpy. You might not feel anything at all.



You might even have what looks like a big clump of blood; don't worry. It's perfectly normal.

**Everyone's going to know when I have my period, aren't they? Guys too! It's going to be embarrassing!** Relax, no one will know! First of all, your period is nothing to be ashamed of. All girls get it. But it is private. It's your business. You can store your pads, tampons or pantliners discreetly in your purse or backpack. As long as you change your protection regularly, you shouldn't have to worry about leakage. If you are afraid that your pad will "show" through your clothing, choose an ultra thin pad or tampon. Also, many girls feel better if they wear loose or dark clothing on days when they have their periods.



Your first period may be very light. Just a few brown or red spots in your underwear. It may not show up the next month. It takes your body time to get used to its new cycle. A light period one month. Nothing the next month. A heavy period the month after that. Everyone's cycle varies. But really, it's all normal.

**How much blood will there be each time?** It might seem like a lot, but it's generally between a few tablespoons to one quarter of a cup per cycle. Usually your period is heavier the first couple of days, and then gets lighter toward the end.

Remember to wash daily – even "down there" to keep odors away and just to stay clean and comfortable. Menstrual blood is odorless but if it is exposed to the air for a certain amount of time, it could start to smell.



**What if I leak on my sheets or on my underwear?** You can minimize leakage worries by remembering to change your pad or tampon every 4-8 hours, or more often if your flow is heavy. You can also use a thicker pad for overnight. This kind of pad is designed to reduce the chance of leaking. But if you do have an accident, and it happens to all of us, rinse the soiled cloth as soon as possible in cold water. Hot water will just set the stain. Then put it in the laundry as usual.

**How should I prepare for my first period?** While you're waiting for your first period to arrive, be prepared with your own personal supply of feminine care products. Wear pantliners or keep a pad in a little bag in your locker or backpack, and a package of pads at home, ready and waiting for that big day when you get your first period. If you get your period at school, you can get a pad from the school nurse.

**I need to figure out which product to use? How do I do that?** The feminine care product that's right for you depends on....you. The heaviness of your flow. Your level of activity. What feels best to you. Talk to a parent, school nurse or trusted adult if you have questions about

feminine care. The 3 basic categories of feminine care products are **pads, pantliners, and tampons.**

Do your favorite jeans seem much shorter these days? **Growth spurts** during puberty bring you almost to your full height. You might even grow up to 6 inches in a year! Hips and waist develop. You may gain some weight. That's normal. You need a certain amount of increased body fat to develop properly.

The **vagina** begins producing discharge, part of a normal cleansing process. This is a clear or whitish-yellow fluid. Pantliners can help contain this fluid and keep you comfy and dry. If the discharge seems dark or itches or burns or has a strong odor, talk to your doctor, just in case, to check for a possible infection.

These are all the changes you can see. But big changes are happening inside your body too. "Becoming a woman" means your body is preparing to have babies later in life. Your **ovaries** grow and begin to produce **eggs**. The result? Your first period.



### **Key Definitions:**

**Cervix:** the lower part of the uterus.

**Endometrium:** the lining of the uterus that is shed every month when a woman is not pregnant.

**Fallopian tubes:** 2 tubes through which the egg travels from the ovaries to the uterus.

**Ovaries:** 2 reproductive glands that produce hormones and eggs.

**Uterus:** muscular organ in the body where a fertilized egg develops.

**Vagina:** the passage leading from the cervix to the outside of the body through which menstrual fluid passes. When a baby is born, it also passes through the vagina.

**Vulva:** the whole pubic area comprising your external genitalia, or outer genitals.

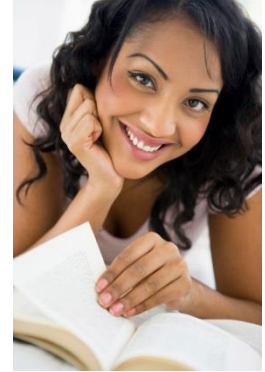


### **What is a period?**

The short answer is: Your period is the monthly discharge of blood and tissue that leaves your body through the vagina. It happens about once a month and lasts for about 2-5 days. Your first period might begin any time between the ages of 9-16. Whenever you start is right for you. You'll continue to have your period for many years to come, until you are about 45-55 years old.

The official term for getting your period is **menstruation**. It is a natural change and it shows that you are growing up. How do you feel about this? Excited? A little nervous? Emotional? A whole range of emotions is totally normal. Take

some time to write in a journal about how you feel about growing up. All around the world, other girls your age are experiencing very similar feelings.



Only girls and women have periods. Boys and men don't. Menstruation is a key part of a woman's reproductive process. It allows women to have babies (when they're grown up and ready to). Here's how menstruation happens: Every month, a part of your brain called the **pituitary gland** releases a hormone that sends a message to the eggs inside the ovaries. Every month, only one egg among all of those stored in your ovaries will develop fully. When that egg is developed, the brain releases another hormone causing the egg to leave the ovary. When the egg leaves the ovary, it is called **ovulation**. Ovulation takes place about 13-15 days before your period shows up.

While all this is happening, the female body naturally prepares for a possible pregnancy. The female body produces hormones called **estrogen** and **progesterone**. These hormones cause the lining of the **uterus** to get ready for a baby to

grow inside the uterus. The lining, called the **endometrium**, gets thicker with tissue and blood vessels that would help a baby develop. Meanwhile, the egg that has left the ovary travels down one of the **fallopian tubes** that leads to the uterus. While in the fallopian tubes, the egg could join with a male sperm. This process is called **fertilization**, and would result in a pregnancy. The fertilized egg would then attach itself to that nice thick lining in the uterus, where, for 9 months, it would grow and develop into a baby.

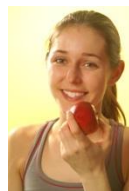


If the egg does NOT meet a male sperm by the time it reaches the uterus, which is usually the case, the egg will dissolve. Now, because there is no pregnancy - no fertilized egg to nourish into a baby - the excess lining of the uterus (extra blood and tissue), called the **endometrium**, comes off. It leaves the body through an opening in the vagina. And that is your menstrual period.



## **GET UP AND GO**

With TV, computers, and video games taking up our free time, many kids today aren't as active as kids once were. Exercise is really important for everyone, no matter what age. If you exercise, you'll feel better, you'll look better, and you'll have a lot more energy. Staying active for at least 30 minutes, 3 times a week, can go a long way toward keeping you fit. Get your heart pumping and muscles moving by walking, running, biking, inline skating, playing team sports, swimming, dancing...anything, as long as you're working that body and having fun.



## **EAT RIGHT**

Good nutrition comes from eating a variety of foods that will keep you energized and healthy. Here's the skinny on good nutrition. Basically, you should make sure you get plenty of whole grains, fruits and vegetables. Add 2-3 servings a day of milk, yogurt and/or cheese. Dairy has calcium that's key for girls and women. It strengthens bones and keeps them strong as you

get older. Make sure to keep the protein coming with 2-3 servings a day of meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, nuts and/or seeds. Lighten up on fats, oils and sweets. You don't have to deny yourself the yummy stuff - just don't overdo it.

## **HOW DO I LOOK?**



Girls and guys your age are starting to grow and change. You're starting to get a preview of what you're going to look like as an adult. Right now, some of your friends might be taller than you. Some are shorter than you. Or they have larger hips. Some are developing breasts. Some aren't yet. You're changing too. Everyone is looking different....and that's great! People grow and change at different rates. The end result is a nice mix of shapes, sizes and looks.

If you take care of yourself and respect your body, you'll naturally feel great and look great too.

## **FEELING FINE & FREAKING OUT**

Puberty isn't only about physical

changes. It can be an emotional time as well. For girls, for guys, even for families. Hormones are largely responsible for ever-changing moods during puberty.

***\*\*I've noticed I get kind of emotional about things that never used to bother me. Even sappy commercials will get me going!*** That's a common reaction during puberty, especially around the time you have your period. Hormones peak and send your emotions on a roller-coaster ride. During puberty, your emotions can feel like they're out of control. But if you know what to expect, they'll be less disruptive.

***\*\*I want to be alone more often. I just want privacy to write in my journal, listen to music or just veg out.***

As you grow up, you naturally want a little more independence. That's ok. And it's totally understandable. You need time and space to grow and think. When you emerge from puberty, you will be filled with ideas and opinions about yourself and the world that you probably didn't have when you were a little kid. It doesn't mean you should cut off the people around you who love you. Make an effort to balance "alone time" with quality time with others.



## **GUYS – THEY’RE CHANGING TOO**



*Girls and guys are different. You’ve known that for ages. But a lot of the changes that girls and guys go through during puberty are the same such as growth spurts, body hair, acne, development of sweat glands and emotional issues. But just as girls go through special girls-only changes, guys go through some special changes of their own.*

*For most boys, puberty takes place between the ages of 11-17. Girls usually start puberty first. And just as with girls, some boys start going through puberty earlier, and some start later. The hormone that spurs development in boys is called **testosterone**.*

*At puberty, hair begins to grow on a guy’s body. Some of the places where hair grows are similar to girls: underarms, legs, pubic area. Guys also start to grow hair on their faces. Some guys have hair on their chests. Another guy change is the **larynx** (Adam’s apple) grows. When this happens, a guy’s voice will start to get deeper. Guys also go through growth spurts, just as girls do.*

*Testosterone causes the **penis** and **testicles** to grow and develop. These are the male genitalia. Guys start to produce **sperm** in their testicles. Sperm are tiny cells that fertilize a female’s eggs to create babies.*

*Just as girls are often concerned with their breast development and other changes in their bodies, boys have emotional reactions to the physical changes they are going through. A lot of times, these changes make us feel self-conscious. All people, boys and girls alike, go through intense changes during puberty. Be patient and tolerant of yourself and of other people.*



## **TAKING CARE OF YOU**

*Your growing body is experiencing hormone action like it’s never seen before. Oil and sweat glands are now working overtime, and this can cause odors. Puberty not only increases the production of sweat, it also changes the odor as well. But you can keep body odor under control and stay healthy with extra attention to **hygiene** (personal cleanliness). Take regular baths and showers. Use mild soap and water*



to wash your face twice a day. Use an **anti-perspirant/deodorant** under your arms every day.



This new hormone action could also result in **acne** (pimples, zits). The glands that are now hard at work producing oil are located, not coincidentally, in the places where we often get acne – face, back, chest, and shoulders. When these glands go to work, they send oil to pores on your skin’s surface. If the pores get clogged with a combination of oil, dead skin cells, dirt, and bacteria – you’ve got a pimple.

Pimples are no fun, that’s for sure. But not everyone gets them. Some people get pimples occasionally. Some people never get them. Some people have persistent cases of acne that never seem to go away. If that’s true for you, ask your parents to take you to see a **dermatologist** (a doctor who takes care of skin).



Here are a few things you can do to help prevent pimples:

\*Keep your skin clean. Wash your face twice a day with a mild cleanser and water.

\*Prevent or fight pimples with a solution containing benzoyl peroxide or salicylic acid. You’ll find a wide range of these kinds of products at the drugstore – cleansers, wipes, creams, lotions, etc.

\*Keep your hair off your face. Your hair has natural oils that cause your skin to break out.

\*Avoid touching your face a lot. Dirt and bacteria on your hands can rub into your skin.



\*Avoid oily make-up or lotions. Look for oil-free products or those that are designed for teenage skin.

\*Keep your sheets and towels clean by washing them weekly. They can house dirt and bacteria that can cause pimples.

\*Though it’s tempting, don’t pick at pimples. They’ll go away more quickly if you leave them alone.

## WHAT NOW?



*Every adult has gone through puberty. It was easy for some, not so easy for others. A lot of people fall somewhere in between. You'll find that most adults in your life - whether they're parents, health care professionals, educators, scout leaders, relatives - really will understand what you're going through. Talk to them if you have more questions.*



*You might be wondering, now that you're growing up, if you're still a kid, or now an adult, or what. You're still a kid. It's just now you're a kid who's slowly changing into an adult. Enjoy this exciting time in your life. There is plenty of time to be a grown-up later on.*