



Girls and Their Bodies

How a Girl's Body Grows

Puberty is when a girl's body goes through physical, emotional, and even social changes. The changes mean your body is growing and becoming physically that of an adult. There is no exact age of when puberty begins but girls usually begin between the ages of 8 and 12, but can start earlier or later. Some of the changes may be so small that you may not notice them happening.

The physical changes of puberty begin at different ages but are the same for every girl and usually happen in the same order:

1. **Breasts begin to grow** between ages 8 and 13. Some girls may begin at an earlier age or a later age. They will be fully developed about 4- 5 years after they begin to grow. Don't worry if one breast grows faster than the other. It's common and they will even out but they will never be exactly alike.

2. **Pubic hair begins to grow**; straight hair begins to grow between ages 11 and 12, usually after breasts begin developing. The straight hair generally finishes growing by age 14 and curly pubic hair begins to grow afterwards. This is a sign that your first menstruation (period) is about 6-months to 1-year away.

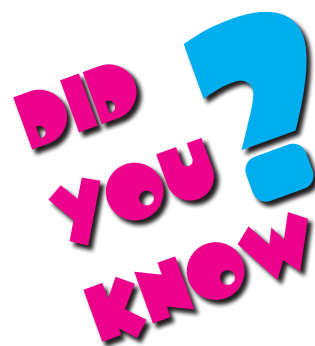
3. **Growth spurts** usually begin between 10 and 11 years of age but may start earlier and end at about age 14 but can continue through age 18.

4. **Underarm hair** and coarser body hair begin to grow. The amount of body hair you will develop depends on your family genes.

5. **First menstrual period** usually begins between the ages of 12 and 13 but can start earlier or later – anywhere from ages 9 to 18. The process of ovulation (when the female's egg is released and can be fertilized with a male's sperm creating a baby) can take up to 18 months from the start of your period. Since there is no way to know when a girl's first ovulation begins, a girl is at risk for getting pregnant once she begins her menstrual cycle.

Emotional and social changes during puberty are normal because your body is changing quickly. You may feel confused, excited, uncomfortable, or worried. It's important that you learn to deal with your feelings instead of unleashing your frustration on your friends and family. Some of the emotional and social changes that may happen include:

- ▶ Feeling clumsy or awkward
- ▶ Embarrassed about your breasts growing
- ▶ Rapid changes in mood from feeling sad to feeling great
- ▶ Frequent arguments with parents or caregivers especially over who is in control
- ▶ Strong feelings of friendship and love, anger and hate



DID YOU KNOW?

As you go through puberty, you will need to keep better care of your body and you may need to begin using different products to control your sweat and body odor, pimples on your face, and other things. Checkout the Using Hygiene Products section for more information

Girl Talk: Taking Care of Your Body

During the teen years your body grows and changes all the time. Your hair and skin may become oily or drier, you have hair in places where you didn't before, you may sweat more, or you may have odor in areas where you never had it before! All these changes are normal signs that your body is growing into adulthood.

Taking care of yourself is important. One way you can take care of yourself is by practicing good personal hygiene, or keeping yourself clean. Products for personal hygiene can be found at drug stores or grocery stores in the health and beauty sections. Here are some tips to make sure your body stays healthy so you feel good about your growing body.

Acne, also known as pimples, is caused by overactive oil glands in your skin. The oil mixed with dead skin, and bacteria clog and irritate the pores in your skin and create raised bumps called pimples.



▶ You can reduce the amount of pimples you get by washing your face every day with a mild soap or a facial cleanser.

▶ Acne products can help give you some relief. Products that contain benzoyl peroxide are the best because they help reduce oil and get rid of dead skin. (Benzoyl Peroxide can bleach/stain clothes, pillow cases and towels)

▶ Many hair products contain oils that can make acne worst so keep hair sprays and gels away from your face as much as you can.

Body Odor is caused by sweating, which is natural and healthy. It's your body's way of cooling down. When sweat mixes with the bacteria on your skin it can cause your body to smell.

▶ Take a bath or shower daily with soap, giving your body a good lather every time and making sure you wash your armpits and genital areas well.

▶ Wear deodorant and/or antiperspirant every day. Deodorants prevent underarm odor and antiperspirants work to reduce the amount of sweating.

Some products contain both a deodorant and antiperspirant. They come in roll-ons, solids, gels and sprays.

Shaving

Once puberty begins, you'll start to notice darker hair growing on your legs, underarms, and pubic areas. There is no set time when girls should begin shaving. Some girls choose not to shave at all. It really depends on when, or if, you feel like you have too much hair. If you choose to shave, there are two types of products commonly used – a disposable razor or an electric razor. Which product you choose to use depends on the amount of hair growth and what you're most comfortable using.

Disposable Razors usually have several blades, one on top of the other, and can provide you with a very clean shave. You'll find disposable razors made especially for women which can be gentler for the skin.

Tips for Shaving:

- ▶ Try shaving in the shower when your skin is soft.
- ▶ Use a shaving cream or gel, to moisten the skin you plan on shaving to avoid nicks and cuts.
- ▶ Change razors often because a sharp blade helps prevent cuts.
- ▶ Shave in the direction the hair grows.
- ▶ To avoid spreading infections, don't share razors.

Electric Razors are usually rechargeable and cordless, but some may have a cord attached. Electric razors don't provide as clean a shave, but there is no need to use shaving cream or gel if you use an electric razor.

Feminine Hygiene Products will be needed when it's time for your period each month. There are two types of products you can use during your period – pads or tampons. You may need to try different products until you know which one works best for you depending on your activity level, whether your blood flow is heavy or light, and what you're most comfortable using.

What you should know about pads

Pads stick to the inside of your underwear and soak up the blood that comes out through the vagina. A sticky strip holds them in place on your underwear.

Some pads are thinner for days when your period is light, and some are thicker for when you are bleeding more. You can also use these thicker pads at night when you sleep.

Check your pad every couple of hours during the day to see if it needs changing. You should change it before it is soaked with blood or starts to smell.

No one can see that you are wearing a pad, so don't worry about that.

If you are concerned about any smell, changing pads often and keeping up good hygiene will help control this. You do not need to use deodorant or scented pads (which sometimes can irritate your skin or vagina).

You can use a panty liner, which is a very thin pad, together with a tampon if you want extra protection. Or you can use a liner alone on light days.

You probably don't want to wear pads when you swim. They can soak up lots of water and get bulky, and then can leak when you get out of the water. You could try a tampon instead.

What you should know about tampons

A tampon goes inside your vagina to soak up blood before it leaves your body. Instructions come with tampons to show you how to put them in. Using tampons sometimes takes practice.

Some tampons have a plastic or cardboard covering that makes it easier for you to put the tampon in. This is called the applicator. Do not leave the applicator inside your vagina.

All tampons have a string at the end. This string helps you take the tampon out when it needs to be changed.

You need to change your tampon at least every four to eight hours. If you think you might sleep for more than eight hours, it's a good idea not to use a tampon overnight.

Tampons will not get lost in your vagina or "slip up."

You can wear tampons when you swim. Water does not enter your vagina.

If you have trouble putting in a tampon, you might try a smaller one or one with an applicator. If you really cannot get it in, you might see your doctor.

It is very important to use the tampon with the lowest level of absorbency for your needs.

On heavy days, you may need a "super" tampon, and as your flow gets lighter, you may need only a "regular" tampon. Or, you may need a "regular" tampon on heavy days, and then can switch to a "lite" tampon for lighter days.

If you remove the tampon after four to eight hours and find that some white material is still showing, you should use a lower absorbency.

If a tampon absorbs as much as it can before four hours, you might want to try a higher absorbency.

Girls who have never had sex can use a tampon. You might try a "slender" tampon at first because they can be easier to put in. What about your virginity? Some people think having a torn hymen (the covering to the vagina) means you are not a virgin. Using a tampon might stretch or tear your hymen — or it might not. But doctors say that changes to your hymen do not mean you are not a virgin. Having sex means that you are no longer a virgin.

Scented tampons can cause irritation. It's best not to use scented tampons. If you're concerned about smell, make sure to wash daily and change your tampon regularly.



You could be at risk for Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) if you use tampons that are too absorbent or don't change them often enough. Toxic shock syndrome (TSS) is a very rare but dangerous illness that affects your whole body. TSS is caused by certain types of bacteria that make poisons. Tampons may make it easier for bacteria to grow in your body. You can avoid TSS by not using tampons at all, changing them often, or by switching back and forth between tampons and pads. The symptoms of TSS can be caused by many other illnesses, but make sure to tell an adult and call a doctor if you are using tampons and have the following:

- ▶ **High fever that comes on all of a sudden**
- ▶ **Vomiting or diarrhea**
- ▶ **Muscle pains**
- ▶ **Dizziness or fainting**
- ▶ **A rash that looks like sunburn**
- ▶ **Redness of eyes, mouth, and throat**
- ▶ **Strange vaginal discharge (fluid)**
- ▶ **A feeling of confusion**

It is important to get medical help right away if you have any of the above symptoms after using a tampon. Doctors treat TSS with antibiotics.

Do's and Don'ts when using pads and tampons:

Do keep track of when your period starts and ends each month so you can figure out when to prepare for it monthly. Your period may be a bit difficult to track at first because it can take up to two years for it to become regular.

Don't flush pads, tampons or wrappings down the toilet. Wrap them in toilet paper and throw them out in the garbage.

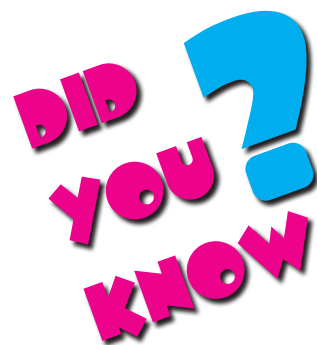
Don't use pads or tampons in torn wrappers. They may not be clean especially if they've been in your backpack or purse.

Menstrual cramps are dull, throbbing, or cramping pains in your lower abdomen that you may experience during your period. Applying a hot-water bottle directly to your lower abdomen may help ease the pain. Make sure to wrap the hot-water bottle in a washcloth so you don't burn your skin. You can also find medication at the drug store or grocery store in the pharmacy aisles that may help.

References

How a Girl's Body Grows
Girls Health, www.girlshealth.gov
Wyman Teen Outreach Program®, Changing Scenes Curriculum©2012

Girls Talk: Taking Care of Your Body
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**DID
YOU
KNOW?**

Kotex has a video you can watch that shows you how to use a tampon. Visit <https://www.ubykotex.com/get-the-facts/article?id=50740> to watch.

(The Arizona Department of Child Safety does not endorse this product, and provides video link for informational purposes only.)