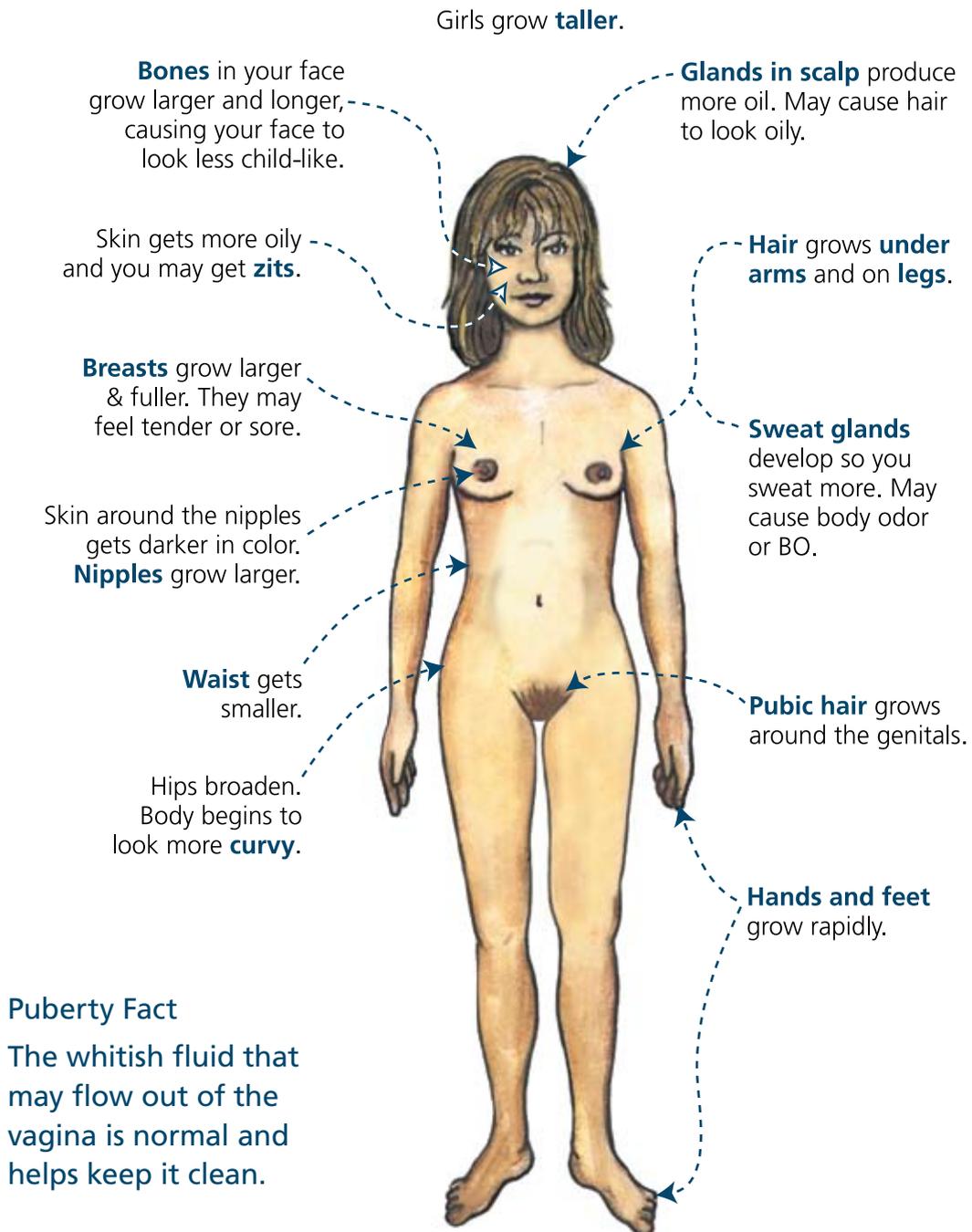


girls: outside body changes

Between the ages of 8 and 15, most girls will go through these changes:



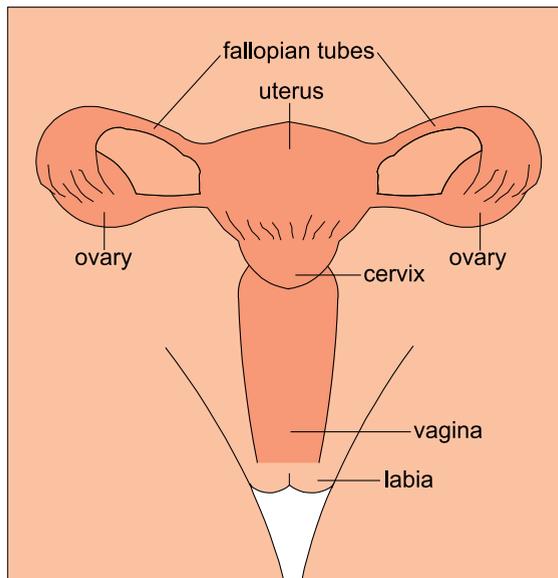
girls: inside body changes

Ovulation, menstruation, and the monthly cycle

Some time during puberty, girls begin the monthly cycle of ovulation and menstruation. Menstruation, or having your period, is when the uterus releases blood and fluid and this bloody material comes out through the vagina. The normal age range for getting your first period is about age 11 or 12, but it can happen as early as age 8 or as late as age 16. One very important thing to know and understand is this: Once you start your period, your body is able to get pregnant.

Here's what happens inside your body every month or so:

- Your ovaries begin to produce female sex hormones called estrogen and progesterone.
- Estrogen tells one of the eggs, which has been in a girl's ovaries since birth, to "grow up"—something they've never done (until puberty).
- About once a month or so, one of the grown-up eggs (which is the size of about a grain of sand) is released from the ovary.
- The Fallopian tubes "catch" the egg and provide a tunnel-like path for the egg to travel to the uterus.



- The Fallopian tube is also where the egg can meet and combine with a male's sperm (see page 15 for details about sperm), and become fertilized. If the egg does not come into contact with sperm within 48 hours, the body absorbs it.
- At the same time, the lining of the uterus, which was preparing for a fertilized egg by building a thicker layer of tissue and blood cells, isn't needed and dissolves. The resulting fluid leaves your body through the vagina and that, is your "period flow."

Puberty Fact

Once you start your period, your body is able to get pregnant.

what girls want to know...



Q: One of my breasts is smaller than the other. My mom says it's normal, but I don't believe her.

A: This IS normal. During puberty, when breasts first begin to develop, it is very common for one breast to be larger than the other. Don't worry, as they grow, they will eventually even out before they reach their final size and shape. You will also notice that your nipples and the dark ring of skin around them, the areola, will get bigger and darker.

Q: How do I know when I should start wearing a bra?

A: Whether or not to wear a bra is an entirely personal decision. If you have larger breasts, you might find it more comfortable wearing a bra because it provides support for your breasts ... and there's less jiggling and bouncing that way.

For this reason, many girls find it more comfortable to wear a bra when jogging or exercising. Another thing to consider, if you're worried about guys seeing your nipples under your shirt: they're less visible underneath a bra.

Q: What if I'm caught by surprise and start my period at school?

A: Almost everyone is caught by surprise by their very first period. There is no way around it unless you wore a pad or tampon every day for a year or two! Don't panic! For most girls, the first period is more like a stain than a flood, so there's usually time to figure out what you're going to do. Here are some tips for the surprise visit:

- Start carrying a pad or tampon in your backpack, or keep it in your locker at school. Most girls don't use a tampon for the first period, because you don't want to be trying to figure out how to use a tampon when you are under pressure, or in a public bathroom.
- Visit the school nurse, who has a supply of pads for this very reason!
- Women's bathrooms often have machines that sell tampons and pads. Have some spare change stashed away and be prepared.

period fast facts for girls

Q: How will I know when it will start?

A: There is no way to know exactly when you will start your period. But there are clues or signs from your body you can look for. Have your breasts started growing? Do you have pubic hair? If yes, then you will probably begin your period within the next year or so. More immediate body signs that your period is about to start are tender breasts, feeling tense or moody, feeling “bloating” in your abdomen, having cramps in your back, legs or abdomen, or even getting more zits than usual. Remember, girls start their periods at all different ages. Only your body knows what is normal for you.

Q: How much blood will there be?

A: Many girls worry about their first period, and that a lot of blood will suddenly come gushing out. It’s a fact that the blood usually comes out slowly. During your entire period, you lose no more than a few tablespoonfuls to about half a cup of blood and tissue. How much you bleed from period to period can change, too.

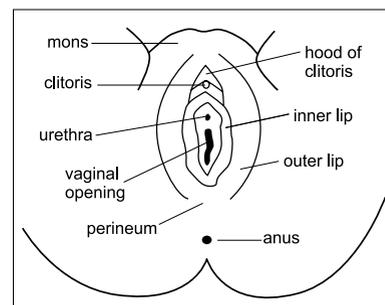
Q: What should I use to catch the blood so it doesn’t get on my clothes?

A: Most girls use either a sanitary pad or a tampon to absorb the flow. Pads have adhesive strips and are worn inside your panties. Tampons are placed inside the vagina. Both tampons and pads come in different levels of thickness for when your period is heavy or light, with some being made especially for teens. Whatever type

of protection you choose, be sure to change your tampon or pad every three to four hours (or sooner if your flow is heavy) to prevent odors and stains on your clothes.

Q: How long will it last?

A: Most periods last from three to seven days. Each day is a little different, though, and with the last few days there’s usually a lighter flow. Your actual period cycle (the time between the first day of one period to the first day of the next) can be as short as 21 days or as long as 32 days. During your first year or two of having periods, you may not even have your period during some months. Changes in your cycle from month to month are normal, too. Changes in your health, heavy exercising, starving yourself, or having a lot of stress can affect the length of your cycle or cause you to miss periods. It’s a good idea to get in the habit of tracking your cycle on a calendar so that you know what’s normal for your body.



Q: Will my period hurt?

A: The bleeding is not painful, but it’s common for some girls to have cramps during their period. Most of the time, cramps are mild and easy to manage. To help lessen cramps, try to exercise, get plenty of rest, eat well, avoid salty foods, and drink plenty of water. A heating pad or mild pain medicine (e.g., Tylenol® or ibuprofen) can also help you feel less crampy.

