

PUBERTY FOR GIRLS

FACT SHEET

What is puberty?

Puberty (or adolescence) is the time when a child begins to change into an adult. The changes affect the way people look, feel, think, and relate to others.

Some of these changes might feel great, while others may be confusing or feel uncomfortable.

Puberty usually happens between the ages of 9 and 16. Many girls will notice changes around the age of 10 or 11. It's different for everybody. Puberty will start at the time that is right for each person.

Everyone is not the same

It is important to understand that general information about body changes and the reproductive system is not true for everyone. A small percentage of people are intersex – they have natural variations from conventional 'female' or 'male' bodies, including genital, chromosomal and/or a range of other physical characteristics. This is totally normal for them. Also, some people are transgendered and so their gender identity may be different from the sex they were assigned at birth.

What happens at puberty?

Most people will go through physical and emotional changes. Body chemicals called hormones make these changes happen. The female hormones are called oestrogen and progesterone.

Puberty for girls means changes like:

- hair growing under arms and in the pubic area
- skin changes, including pimples for some girls
- an increase in height, sometimes very rapid, called a growth spurt
- some weight gain
- hips get wider
- breasts develop
- menstruation begins (periods)
- ability to become pregnant once periods start (if sexual intercourse with a male occurs)
- awareness of sexual feelings in the body
- mood swings

Some girls may like or dislike what is happening to their body, but puberty is a natural and normal process. If you have any concerns talk to someone you trust or see a doctor.

About periods and pregnancy

Periods are part of the monthly menstrual cycle of the female reproductive system.

Most girls are born with thousands of tiny eggs (ova) inside their ovaries. When a girl reaches puberty, these eggs mature, usually one at a time, and travel along one of the Fallopian tubes to the uterus (womb).

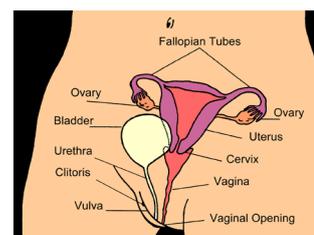
Each month, the lining of the uterus becomes thick and soft, ready for a possible pregnancy. This lining is made up of tissue, blood and other fluids.

If an egg is fertilised by a sperm from a male (this can happen as a result of sexual intercourse), then the girl may become pregnant. If not, the blood and fluids are passed out of the body through the vagina – this is called menstruation, or a period.

A period usually lasts for 3 to 7 days each month. Many girls start to have periods between the ages of 10 and 14, but they can start as early as age 8. They will continue to have them about every 28 days until they are about 50 years old.

A calendar is helpful to work out when a period will happen next.

Getting a period is a sign that the body is healthy and working properly!



When you have a period ...

Pads and tampons can be used to absorb blood and protect clothing. They come in a variety of sizes for heavy, medium and light blood flow.

Pads are attached to underpants by an adhesive strip on the pad.

Tampons are inserted into the vagina and absorb the blood flow. Some girls prefer using tampons so they can do activities such as swimming during a period.

Some things to know about using pads and tampons

- Wash your hands before and after changing pads or tampons.
- Change pads and tampons every 2–4 hours, or more often if needed.
- Only pads (not tampons) should be worn overnight.
- Dispose of pads and tampons in sanitary bins, or wrap them in paper and put them in the garbage (don't flush them down the toilet).

What will a period feel like?

You might feel fine when you have your period, but some girls might experience Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS), which are feelings that may occur up to 2 weeks before a period. Breasts may feel tender and you could feel depressed, anxious or tired. Some girls and women might also feel a bit sick or sore in the abdomen during their periods.

Regular exercise, a healthy diet, gentle massage or a hot water bottle placed on the abdomen are ways of relieving some of this discomfort. Speak with a doctor or someone who can be trusted if the pain becomes too uncomfortable.

Masturbation

Touching or rubbing the genital area so that it feels good is called masturbation. This is a normal but private activity done in a private place, such as in the bedroom or bathroom. Masturbation can be a normal and healthy way of experiencing pleasure and learning about the body.

Body hygiene

Pimples

Glands in the skin which produce oil become more active during puberty, causing excess oil to build up. This may result in pimples on the face or other parts of the body. Pimples are a normal part of puberty and are temporary for most people. Some people may develop a severe case of pimples, known as acne. If the condition is severe, a doctor or skin specialist may be able to prescribe medication.

Take care of the skin by:

- washing the face with warm water and cleanser twice a day
- trying not to squeeze pimples, as this may cause scarring and increase the risk of infection

Healthy strategies

During puberty perspiration (sweating) will increase, so it is important to wash clothes and the body regularly. Washing underarms and cleaning the vulva during a shower or bath are good ways to stay healthy. Putting on deodorant will also help control body odour that sometimes is present during puberty.

Changing feelings

Puberty is not just a physical process. Hormones can cause mood changes or mood swings, where someone may feel happy one moment and sad or angry the next.

The changes that occur during puberty can often be very confusing and frustrating. You may find it helps to talk to someone you trust about these changes.

These mood swings won't last forever. Eventually people will feel calmer and gain a more even emotional state. In the meantime, it helps to try:

- finding a quiet, private space until the confusing or frustrating feelings are gone
- doing regular exercise like going for a run, playing soccer, or dancing
- making sure you get enough sleep
- talking to someone who can be trusted about these feelings

Weight gain and body image

Some people may put on weight around the time of puberty. Girls need to maintain a certain body weight for periods to start and continue. Magazines and other media sometimes give out messages that being slim is important. But the most important thing is to be healthy and happy.

Eating a well-balanced diet and getting regular exercise will help control weight. If you are worried about serious weight gain, it's important to get advice and supervision before starting any intense training or diet programs.

What about breasts?

Most girls will develop breasts during puberty. Some girls experience lumps and tenderness while their breasts are growing. The size and shape will be different for everyone. Whatever size your breasts are, they are just right for you. But if you have concerns talk to someone you trust or see a doctor.

Puberty and relationships

Puberty is a time of discovering new kinds of relationships that might eventually lead to a sexual relationship. Loving and sexual feelings, or feelings of attraction to other people, might be experienced.

Some people may form relationships quite early, while others show no interest until they are older. Everyone is going to feel differently. While everyone goes through puberty, each girl's experience is going to be unique – it's all part of growing up.

CONTACT
SHINE SA

SHINE SA

© SHINE SA. Last updated October 2014

SHINE SA fact sheets are regularly reviewed and updated. To download the most recent version visit www.shinesa.org.au

Clinic & Counselling Appointments and General Enquiries

Tel 1300 794 584

Clinic locations and times are available at www.shinesa.org.au

Sexual Healthline

Tel 1300 883 793 Country callers (toll free) 1800 188 171

Talk to a sexual health nurse about any sexual health issue.

Available 9am – 12.30pm, Monday – Friday

National Relay Service

www.relayservice.gov.au

133 677 (TTY/Voice) 1300 555 727 (Speak & Listen) 0423 677 767 (SMS Relay)