

## What is a period (menstruation)?

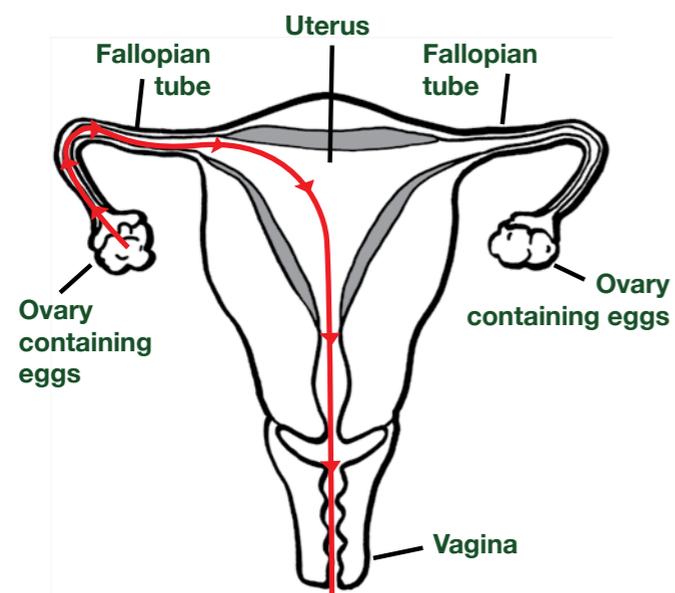
Menstruation, or having a period, is when a female bleeds through her vagina. It can be very scary the first time it happens, especially if you are not expecting it. Periods are normal and mean that your body's reproductive system is starting to mature. This is the system in your body that allows you to have babies.

As a female, you are born with ovaries (containing many eggs), fallopian tubes, a uterus, a cervix and a vagina.

Once a month from the time of puberty, an egg leaves an ovary and travels down the fallopian tube toward the uterus. At the same time, the wall of your uterus grows thicker.

If the egg joins together with a sperm (from a male), you will become pregnant. The fertilised egg joins onto the uterus wall and a baby grows in the uterus.

If the egg does not join with a sperm, your body pushes out the egg and the extra lining in the uterus. It leaves your body through the vagina. This is called menstruation or having a period. It lasts between 3 and 7 days.



## More about menstruation

- You can do ALL of your normal activities during a period.
- Before your period, you might get swollen or sore breasts, constipation, tiredness, pimples, headaches and strong feelings (sad or angry). This is called pre-menstrual tension (PMT) and is caused by changing hormones.
- During your period, you might get cramps. You can take a painkiller, or put a hot water bottle on your tummy or back.
- You need to keep very clean, so wash well, with soap and water.
- You can use different ways to absorb the blood:
  - disposable pads on your panties. Wrap them up and throw them in the bin after use.
  - disposable tampons, which you insert into your vagina. Change them at least twice a day and wrap them up and throw them in the bin after use.
  - folded cloths on your panties, which you must change at least twice a day and wash very well with soap and water after use. Make sure they are dry before you use them again.
- Your menstrual cycle is the amount of time it takes from one period to the next. The average cycle is 28 days, but it can be anything from 21 to 34 days. When your period first starts, your cycle may not be regular so you may not know when you will have your next period. Always carry a spare cloth, pad or tampon so that you are not caught by surprise. Once your period becomes regular, you can use a calendar to keep track of your cycle.

### Ask for advice and help

You may have lots more questions about puberty. Speak to a friend, family member, teacher or health worker. You could also phone one of the numbers below.

loveLife 0800 121 900 or sms 'plz cal me' to 083 323 1023

Childline 0800 055 555 (also working with adolescents)

Lifeline 0861 322 322

During puberty, your body's reproductive and sexual organs develop fully. This does not mean that your body is ready for sex or for a baby. Teenage pregnancy can harm your health.



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Puberty

# Puberty

## What is happening to my body?



Your body is telling you that you are growing up

Sometime between the age of 8 and 18, girls and boys start to feel changes in their bodies. These can be worrying if you don't know what is happening. **What is happening is called puberty.** Puberty is a time of great change, both to your body and your mind, as you move from being a child to being an adult.

## Changes during puberty

### YOUR MIND

You feel more independent and want to take your own decisions. You are able to think about your values, consequences of your actions, and your plans for the future. This allows you to set goals and make decisions to help you move towards your goals.

### YOUR FEELINGS

You start developing your own identity and ideas about yourself and what makes you special. The big physical changes to your body may make you feel confused about who you are and you might worry about what you look like. You might have mood swings and feel happy, sad and angry in a short time. Sometimes you may not know why you have these feelings.

### YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Your growing independence means that you might feel closer to your friends than your family. You may feel that your friends understand you better than your family. You may feel embarrassed of your family and argue more with them, but it is important to show respect and to listen to their ideas, even if you don't agree with them.

Puberty is a time of many mixed feelings and emotions. Sometimes it is hard to even think straight!

## YOUR BODY

During puberty, your body grows faster than at any other time in your life, except when you were a baby. Your hormones become very active and your body's reproductive system starts to mature.

### Girls

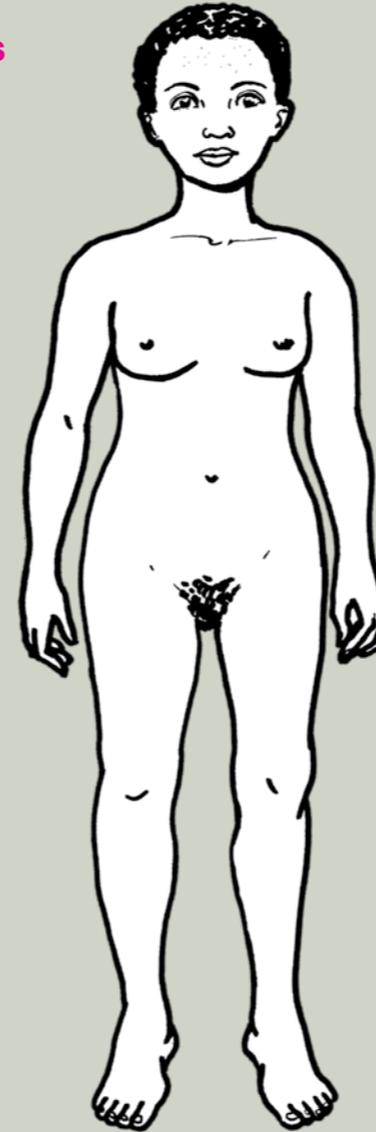
Breasts get bigger. One might grow faster than the other

Hips widen and body becomes more curvy

Discharge (mucus) from the vagina increases

Ovulation and menstruation begins

Puberty is a normal part of growing up and we all go through it. But we all develop at our own pace, so the changes may happen quickly or be spread over a few years.



### Girls & Boys

Face and body may get pimples because of increased oil production in the body

Hair grows under the arms and around the pubic area (pubic hair)

Sexual desires develop

Often feel tired

Sweat and body odour (smell) becomes stronger

Height and weight increases

Hair on arms and legs becomes thicker and darker

Can feel clumsy as body changes shape



### Boys

Voice gets squeaky, then becomes deeper

Hair grows on the chest and face

Muscles show more clearly

Penis and scrotum get bigger and change shape

Have erections and wet dreams

Produce sperm in the testes

Adolescence is an exciting time! You are becoming an adult, and have your whole life ahead of you. Dream big and plan for your bright future. And when you are faced with choices, take wise decisions to make sure that nothing gets in the way of you achieving your dreams!