

CHANGING

TIMES

INFORMATION ABOUT PUBERTY

for boys and girls

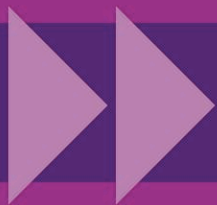
AVERT

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CHANGING TIMES

This booklet is based on the questions young people often ask about the physical and emotional changes that are associated with puberty. Young people are interested in finding out about the 'facts of life', and some learn a great deal before they reach puberty. Most will have talked with their parents and friends and picked up information in school. But it can be difficult for young people to ask questions about puberty and for their parents or guardians to find the right time to talk with them.

Because it's hard to talk about, young people can feel under-prepared and anxious as they approach and experience puberty.



What is puberty?

Between the ages of 10 and 14 most boys and girls begin to notice that their bodies are changing. These changes take place over a number of years and are referred to as puberty.

The changes take place in all boys and girls but they will start at different times. Generally they start later for boys than girls. In some people they start before the age of 10. Other people will only start to change after the age of 14. They also take place at a different rate in different people. In some people all the changes take place in 2 years. In other people they can take as long as 4 years.

Puberty starts when extra amounts of chemicals called hormones start to be produced in the body. These hormones guide what happens in the body. As well as causing physical changes these hormones also cause emotional changes to occur.

What are the physical changes

A boy's voice gets deeper, his muscles develop and his chest gets broader. Hair starts to grow under his arms, and on his legs and face. In due course he will need to start shaving.

During this time his penis and testicles will also grow bigger and longer. Hair, called pubic hair, will also start to grow at the base of his penis. He will start to have erections and he may have wet dreams.

What is an erection?

An erection is when a boy's penis hardens and lengthens. Most erections are not straight, and tend to either have a curvy bend upwards or to either side. Many boys worry that their penis is smaller than other boy's, but most penises are around the same size when erect.

What is a wet dream?

A wet dream is when some semen (the sticky liquid that contains sperm) comes out from a boy's penis while he is asleep. A boy may remember he had a sexual dream. Or he may just notice a wet patch on his pyjamas or on the sheets when he wakes up.



that take place in

BOYS?

It is a good idea for a boy to wash his testicles and penis, particularly behind his foreskin if he has one, after he has had a wet dream. Because a boy may develop an infection around his penis and testicles if they are not cleaned regularly, it's a good idea to wash them daily.

What does it mean for a boy's voice to break?

This is just a way of saying that a boy's voice will get deeper. Sometimes it can happen very quickly, perhaps even overnight. Other boys may have a time when their voice is higher at one moment and then lower even a minute later. All boys' voices will eventually settle down and sound deeper (lower pitch).

How often does a boy need to shave?

When a boy first has hair on his face, it is usually just a small amount on his upper lip and chin. This can be removed by shaving it off with a razor. Razors can be bought in most supermarkets and chemists

Using shaving foam or gel before a boy shaves will help reduce any irritation caused to his skin by shaving. At first a boy probably won't need to shave very often. But eventually a boy will probably need to shave every day as this hair starts to grow back quickly.

What are the physical changes

A girl's breasts will start to grow and her hips get rounder. Hair will start to grow under her arms. Hair, called pubic hair, will also grow between her legs. She will also start to have periods.

What is a period?

When a girl "has her period", a small amount of bleeding (a few spoonfuls) takes place from her vagina. The vagina is a small opening that girls have between their legs. The bleeding will last for a few days and usually happens every month. This bleeding is sometimes referred to as menstruation and is not something to be scared of. Some girls get a white stain in their pants before they have had their first period, and this means their first period may begin soon.

Most girls will have their first period between the ages of 11 and 14. But some girls will start as early as 8, whilst others may be as late as 17.

Once a girl has had her period a few times she may notice that her body or mood changes slightly beforehand. For example, her breasts may feel sore, or become larger, or she may get spots on her face. But no one can tell if a girl has her period just by looking at her.



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GIRLS?

How does a girl stop blood getting on her clothes during her period?



When a girl has her period she can either use sanitary towels or tampons to soak up the blood. Most girls start by using sanitary towels.

Sanitary towels are thin pads made of a soft cotton-like material. They are worn by a girl inside her pants. Most towels have a sticky strip on them that sticks the pad to the inside of the girl's pants.

A tampon is like a small rolled up piece of cotton wool with a string at one end. A girl pushes a tampon into her vagina leaving the string hanging outside her body. The string is then used to pull the tampon out. As a tampon is put into the vagina there is no problem about going to the toilet when using a tampon.

Sanitary towels and tampons can both be bought in supermarkets and chemists. Towels and tampons come in different thicknesses so you can use a thicker one when the bleeding is heavier, and thinner ones for lighter bleeding.

In areas where sanitary towels & tampons are not available, a girl can use rolled up tissues or old cloths or rags to soak up the blood.



How often does a sanitary towel or tampon need to be changed and how do you dispose of them?

A sanitary towel should be changed every few hours during the day, even if the flow of blood is not very great. Tampons should be changed several times a day. Both tampons and towels can be worn overnight but should be changed first thing in the morning. Changing tampons is particularly important because if a girl forgets to change a tampon for a long time, perhaps 24 hours or more, it could make her ill.

Used sanitary towels and tampons should be wrapped up and put in a bin. In most women's public toilets there is a special bin in each cubicle which used sanitary towels and tampons can be put in.

Do periods hurt?

Some girls feel uncomfortable or have cramp-like pains when they have periods. For some girls the pain can be quite intense and it may be necessary to talk to a doctor about it. Usually the pain is not very bad and does not last very long. If you have any difficulty you should talk to an adult, as there are a number of things that can be done to help.

When a girl has her period she can do the things she normally does including having a bath or shower. Washing the vaginal area daily helps prevent infections developing. But it's a good idea to wash and dry from front to back to avoid spreading germs to the vagina.

When having a bath the amount of blood will not be enough to change the colour of the water. If a girl is using a tampon she should take it out before having a bath or shower and use a new one afterwards. If a girl wants to go swimming whilst she has her period she should use a tampon rather than a sanitary towel.

When does a girl need to start wearing a bra?

There is no set time when a girl needs to start wearing a bra and some girls go through life never wearing one. Girls who wear a bra usually do so because they feel more comfortable wearing one. Some girls wear a bra only when they are doing sports, others wear one all the time except when sleeping. Bras are made with different size cups for different breast sizes. The first time a girl buys a bra, she should be measured by someone in the shop to ensure she gets the correct size.

Often one breast grows faster than the other. Some girls' breasts remain small throughout their adult lives. Some girls find that their breasts or nipples start to tingle or itch whilst they grow. But these feelings stop when the breasts stop growing.

It is not necessary to wear a bra to keep breasts healthy.



What do I do if...

...I get spots?

Almost everybody has spots at some time during their life. Most young people get spots around puberty. Washing your face more often with mild unperfumed or antiseptic soap and warm water may help. Some people find that not eating certain foods such as chips and chocolate can help. Other people say this won't help because it is the higher level of hormones in the body that is causing the spots to occur. For some people drinking lots of water can be very effective in helping prevent spots.

It is important to try not to pick at or squeeze the spots as this can cause them to become infected. It may help to use some special anti-acne cream or lotion. You can buy this from chemists and some supermarkets.

If you get very bad spots, it might be acne which you doctor can help with by giving you pills or special creams.

...I get an erection when I don't want to?

Try sitting down and concentrating on something else.

...My period starts and I don't have a sanitary towel or tampon?

You can always use something soft like tissues, or rolled-up toilet paper, inside your pants to soak up the blood until you can get a sanitary towel or tampon.

...My period starts when I am at school?

If you are at school you should ask a friend or a teacher or other adult if they could help. There might be some sanitary towels in the school office as it quite often happens that a girl's period starts unexpectedly.



...I'm not having wet dreams?

This is nothing to worry about as not every boy has wet dreams.

...Someone says I smell?

As boys and girls' bodies develop during puberty so too do their sweat glands. These glands help control the body's temperature and result in more sweat being produced. The best way to reduce the risk of smelling is to wash and change your clothes regularly and perhaps use anti-perspirant deodorant on especially smelly areas, e.g. under your arms. However, most girls do not need to use a vaginal deodorant, and these may cause irritation.



...My period doesn't start when I expect it to?

When a girl first starts having periods they can occur at very irregular intervals. It can often take a couple of years before a girl's periods settle down and occur at regular intervals. The interval between periods is then usually about 28 days (a month).

Changes in your emotions can also cause changes to your periods. For example, worry about a period starting can sometimes cause further delay to the period.

However if you have had sexual intercourse you could be pregnant if your period does not start when you expect it to. You must in these circumstances talk to an adult or see a doctor as soon as possible. (See page 25)

...I am being bullied because of my size?

If you are being bullied because of your size or for any other reason, then you should talk to an adult.

...I am unhappy about the way I look?

Height and weight are the two things that can particularly worry young people. But try and think about things you like about yourself and the way you look. Also remember that your body is changing and will keep changing.

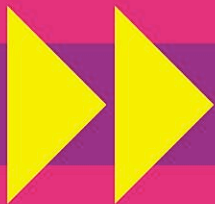
Human reproduction

One of the main physical changes of puberty is the growth and development of the sex organs.

Boys and girls both have sex organs that are outside the body and can be seen. They also have sex organs inside the body. Those on the inside are usually called the reproductive organs, and those on the outside the genitals.

Two of the main sex organs in a girl's body are the vagina and ovaries.

In a boy's body two of the main sex organs are the penis and testicles.



Some more about a girl's sex organs

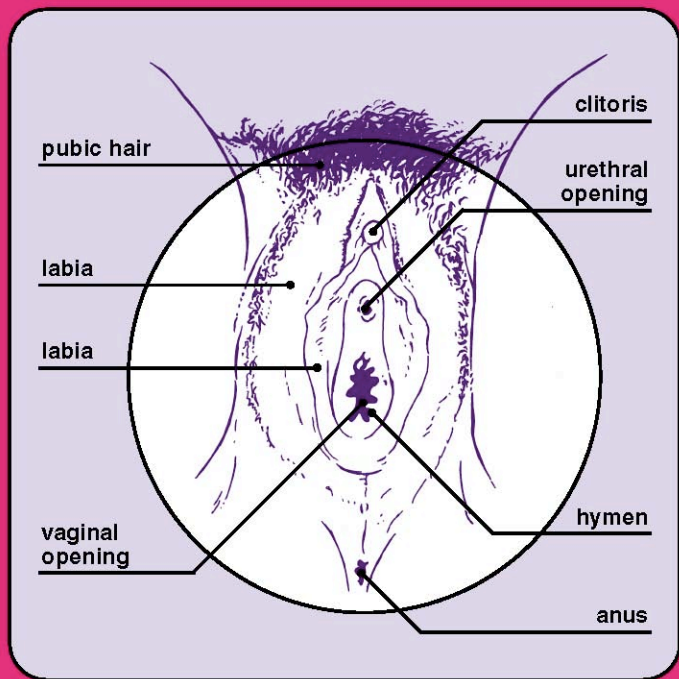
The opening to the vagina is one of three small holes that a girl has between her legs. At the front is the urethral opening which a girl urinates (wees) through. The anus is the opening at the back where she defecates (poos) from.

From the vaginal opening in the middle there is a passageway or tube called the vagina which leads to a girl's internal sex organs. When a girl has her period the blood comes out through her vagina.

Inside the vagina is a thin skin called a hymen. The hymen partly covers the vaginal opening, but there is still enough of a gap for blood to get through.

Another important sex organ is the clitoris. This is about the size of a pea and it is at the front of a girl's outside sex organs. The outer lips (labia) of a girl's sex organs, the clitoris and the vaginal opening are together known as the vulva. You may hear some people use slang words such as fanny and pussy to refer to the vagina and vulva.





▲
A girl's sex organs
(outside)



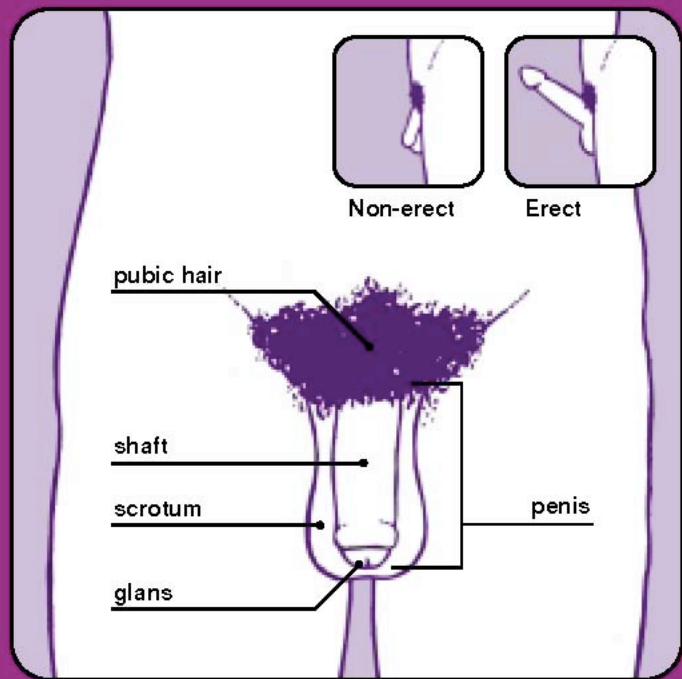
Some more about a boy's sex organs

The boy's sex organs outside his body are his penis and testicles (testes). Slang names for the penis include cock, dick, prick and willie. Slang names for the testicles include balls and bollocks.

A boy's penis hangs down between his legs at the front of his body. The main part of the penis is called the shaft. The end of the penis is called the glans. The foreskin is skin that covers the glans. Usually it can be pulled back quite easily. If it is tight it can be stretched by gently pulling it over the glans. All boys are born with a foreskin, but some have it removed whilst they are a baby. This removal of the foreskin is called circumcision.

The scrotum is a loose wrinkly pouch of skin that hangs down behind a boy's penis. It contains the testicles (testes). As a boy goes through puberty his testicles move lower down his scrotum. One of the testicles usually hangs lower than the other.

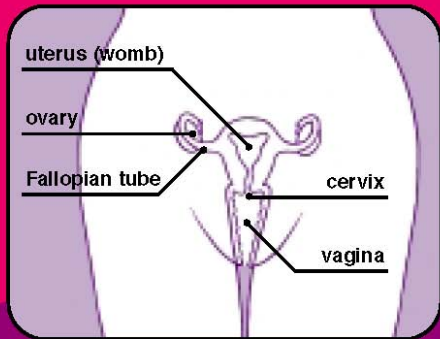




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**A boy's sex organs
(outside)**

Eggs and sperm

A girl has two ovaries inside her body. These ovaries contain a girl's sex cells or eggs. During puberty the ovaries begin to release eggs. Usually they will release one egg every month. These eggs are very small, each one being no bigger than the head of a needle.



◀ A girl's reproductive organs (inside)

A boy's sex cells are called sperm and they are even smaller than a girl's eggs. At puberty a boy's testicles will start making sperm. Sperm leaves a boy's body through his penis, usually when it is hard and erect. This is known as ejaculation. When a boy ejaculates millions of tiny sperm are sent from his testes up through his penis and out through the end.

When sperm from a boy meets up with an egg from a girl they can join together, and from this a baby grows. This joining is called fertilisation or conception.

How do sperm and an egg meet? - Sexual intercourse

Sperm and an egg can meet when a boy and a girl have sexual intercourse. Sexual intercourse is when a boy's hard penis goes inside a girl's vagina, and he then ejaculates sperm through his penis.

A boy is physically able to become a parent when he first starts to ejaculate sperm. A girl is physically able to become a parent when her ovaries start to produce eggs.

What happens to an egg if it meets with any sperm?

When an egg is released from a girl's ovaries it travels down inside one of her Fallopian tubes towards the uterus or womb. Whilst this is happening the uterus starts to get ready for a fertilised egg by developing a thick lining. If the egg is fertilised on the way, then it settles in the uterus and this is where the baby starts to develop.

What happens to an egg if it does not meet with any sperm?

When the egg is not fertilised, there is no need for the thick lining of the uterus. The lining slowly begins to come away and flows through the cervix or "neck" of the uterus which connects the uterus to the vagina. It then comes out of the girl's body through the vagina. This is the blood that comes out when a girl has her period. As soon as a girl starts to have her period her ovaries start getting ready to release another egg. The length of time between one period and the next is the menstrual cycle.

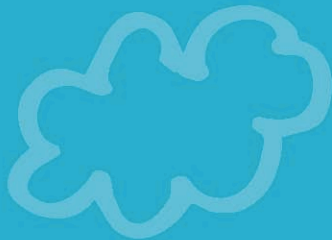
Changing feelings

Boys and girls have many changes in their feelings during puberty.

They may experience sudden changes in mood. Their feelings can swing backwards and forwards and they may feel like laughing at one moment and crying the next. Sudden mood changes are at least partly caused by the increasing amount of hormones in the body.

Some boys and girls can feel unhappy about growing up. At times they may still want to be treated like a child. At other times they want to be treated like an adult.

The physical changes that are occurring can also cause considerable worry. Some people become worried because they are growing or changing faster or slower than their friends. But most young people worry at some time about the changes taking place. In time the worry passes as their body sorts itself out.



Many young people also worry about their friendships during this time. Some young people want to have someone special to be with and talk to. This is also a time when some young people start to have boyfriends or girlfriends. But if you don't want to start going out with someone yet, don't worry. Everybody should take things at their own pace, and not change their feelings or interests until they are ready to.

The kind of relationships you want to have might change around puberty. You might start to feel sexually attracted to other people. Most people feel attracted to people of the opposite sex. Some people feel attracted to people of the same sex. Both of these feelings are natural, but some people feel embarrassed or ashamed about having them. See page 26 for a link to our help & advice page, which provides lots of useful places you can go for support.

Starting to feel sexually attracted to other people happens partly because the sexual changes taking place in your body change your feelings. Most sexual feelings have physical signs.

Sexual feelings

What are the main physical signs of sexual feelings?

The main sign for boys that they are getting sexually excited is when they get erections.

The main sign for girls is when their vagina begins to get moist. The clitoris gets bigger too.

For both boys and girls when they are sexually excited or “turned on”, extra blood comes to the surface of the skin, particularly around the penis and vagina. You can feel warm and sensitive and sexy just about anywhere on your body.

At what age do boys and girls start to get sexual feelings?

A person can have sexual feelings any time in their life, but these change around puberty. You might find some sexual feelings just seem to happen to you. But sexual feelings mostly come about from things you choose to do, either on your own or with someone else.

A main way that people express their sexual feelings is by touching their own genitals. This is called masturbation. Some people don't masturbate at all, or hardly ever. Other people masturbate every day. Masturbation does not cause you any harm.

Some girls enjoy touching their clitoris. Many boys enjoy touching their penis, particularly the tip.

When a person is masturbating they become more and more sexually excited. They may then reach a peak of sexual excitement which is called having an orgasm or “coming”. This is when all the tension and excitement that has built up is suddenly released. Boys ejaculate when they have an orgasm and their penis will then go limp.

For many people masturbation is their first sexual experience. Some people refer to masturbation as playing with yourself, or, especially with boys, jerking off, a hand job, or wanking.

Sexual feelings in relationships

When people have sexual feelings for each other they will usually want to do sexual things together. There is no set time or order in which to do things.

They often want to kiss and cuddle and hold hands. When people kiss they sometimes ‘French kiss’. This is when both people open their mouths when they are kissing and their tongues touch together.

People also like to touch each other through their clothes or put their hands inside to stroke or touch each other’s genitals.

There are a variety of other sexual activities that people will also do including sexual intercourse.

It can seem natural to bring sexual feelings into a relationship. But it can also change how people feel about each other and



about themselves. You might want to do something because you feel curious about it. Or because you think it will make you feel good. And you might want to do it because you feel very close to someone.

But it's important not to do any of these things because you feel under pressure. And that you think about the consequences and how you'll feel afterwards.

Sexual intercourse

Sexual intercourse is when a boy's hard penis goes inside a girl's vagina. This is often called having sex or making love. For many people this can be the most important sexual thing they can do with someone. It can be very enjoyable and fulfilling. For some people it can be the way they can most show their love for each other.

But there are a lot of things to consider. A girl can become pregnant from having sexual intercourse. There are also infections that boys and girls can get if they have sexual intercourse with a person who already has the infection. These are called sexually transmitted infections or diseases. A person can't always tell if they've got one.

You also need to think about your feelings and what you believe. If you have sex because you were pressurised, were drunk or were just curious to know what it would be like, then you may regret it later.

You also need to consider the law. In many countries, it is against the law for a boy to have sexual intercourse with a girl who is under a certain age.

Pregnancy

If a boy and a girl have sexual intercourse the girl can get pregnant.

She can become pregnant even if:

- She has not had her first period;
- The boy withdraws his penis from her vagina before he ejaculates;
- She is having her period;
- It is the first time she has had sexual intercourse;
- the boy doesn't put his penis all the way in or she only gets semen around the entrance of her vagina.

The first sign that a girl may be pregnant is that her period does not start when she expects it to. If this happens then it is very important to see a doctor or talk to some other adult as soon as possible.

Contraception can be used to prevent pregnancy occurring when a boy and girl have sexual intercourse. Some contraceptives, like the contraceptive pill, are used by girls. Boys can use condoms. Condoms also prevent sexually transmitted infections from being passed from an infected person to another person during sexual intercourse.

Help & advice

Puberty is a time when you are going through many emotional and physical changes. There may be times when you feel concerned about what is happening to you or how you feel. It can be really hard to do, but it can really help to talk to other people.

It can be really helpful to talk to your parents or guardian. If you can't, or as well as talking to them, there are other people who can help. You might be able to talk to someone at school, either a teacher or another adult. There are also a number of organisations that can help.

For further sources of help and advice,
please visit www.avert.org/help.htm



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