

### 1. What is puberty?

Puberty is the time when a girl's body changes from a child's into a woman's. The girl's body prepares for the possibility of motherhood.

### 2. What is a "growth spurt"?

A "growth spurt" happens before other body changes. It means girls are growing faster. Instead of growing two inches taller girls can grow four inches in a year. This happens to girls about two years before boys.

### 3. Why do our bodies change?

Your brain makes chemical messengers called **hormones**. They tell the ovaries to grow and make another hormone, **estrogen**. The estrogen travels to the rest of the body through the blood and causes the girl's body to change.

### 4. How will I know the "growth spurt" is starting?

Watch your feet. They grow first. New shoes may not fit. Girls also notice **sweat glands** and **oil glands** are more active. They need to shower more often and use a deodorant.

### 5. What changes first?

Breast changes usually begin about six months before a girl notices any hair growing between her legs. Hair grows under the arms about two years later.

### 6. When do you get hair down there?

Your pubic area is the V-shaped part of skin between your legs. Soon after the breasts begin to grow, the hips get wider and pubic hair begins to grow. As it grows it gets longer, darker in color and curly.

### 7. When do breasts grow?

Girls notice breast changes between age 9 and 14. Some may begin at seven while others may begin at sixteen. African American girls often begin earlier. Breasts can take five years to fully develop.

### 8. How do breasts grow?

Doctors describe breast growth in stages.

**Stage 1** - child's flat breast

**Stage 2** - a raised bump - "breast bud" grows under the nipple. The nipple and areola, the circle around the nipple, get darker and larger.

**Stage 3** - nipple and areola continue to grow and get darker. Breasts get larger and may look pointy.

**Stage 4** - nipple and areola form a mound that rises above the breast. Some girls skip this stage.

**Stage 5** - adult stage, full and round with the areola blending with the breast

### 9. One breast is bigger. What's wrong?

Breasts may not grow at the same rate. This is normal and with time the breasts will get more even.

### 10. Do those creams and pills really make breasts bigger?

There are no creams, pills or exercises that can make breasts bigger. Breasts enlarge as you grow. Breasts can take up to five years to fully develop.

### 11. Is it normal for your breasts to hurt sometimes?

Breasts can feel tender, sore or even painful. This is normal. When breasts grow, they are more sensitive. Women notice their breasts are larger just before their period. This growth can also make breasts more sensitive before the period.

### 12. Will your breasts stop growing if you put pressure on them?

Wrapping something around your chest or sleeping on your stomach will not slow down breast growth.

### 13. My breasts are huge. Is there anything I can do?

Some girls find outfits that make them feel less embarrassed. A bra that fits properly or a snuggler sports bra can also help.

### 14. What is the white or yellow stuff in my underpants?

This is a protective mucus discharge. It can be clear, thin and watery or sticky and white or yellow. It may have a slight odor or no odor. The bottom part of the **uterus**, the **cervix**, makes it to get rid of harmful bacteria. Girls notice it about six months before getting their period.

**15. How do you know when you are going to get your period?**

Girls usually get their first period within a year of when their mothers got theirs. The period usually starts when the breasts are between stage 3-4. (average 12 yrs.)

**16. What do ovaries do?**

Ovaries do two things. They make the hormones, estrogen and progesterone, that cause a girl's body to change. They also hold all the eggs or ova. The ova are tiny cells. They are already in a baby girl's ovary before she is born. Once a girl begins to have a period, one egg cell will grow and come out of the ovary (ovulation).

**17. What is the uterus?**

If the egg is going to become a baby, it will need a place to grow. The uterus or womb is a muscle bag that can stretch. It is a special home inside the mother where the baby grows to get big enough to be born.

**18. What does the uterus do?**

Every time an egg begins to grow, the uterus makes a new lining. The lining is soft, spongy and rich with blood to protect and feed a baby.

**19. Why do girls have periods?**

A period is the way the uterus gets rid of its old lining. If the egg does not become a baby, the old lining, tiny pieces of spongy tissue and some blood, dribbles out from the cervix, the bottom of the uterus.

**20. What does the period look like?**

A period may be bright red or brown in color. It is usually brownish in the beginning and end. It can be thin and watery or have thick clumps called clots.

**21. How much blood comes out?**

The amount of blood can vary from one tablespoon to ¼ cup. It looks like a lot more. The old pieces of the lining of the uterus are also red and come out at the same time.

**22. How long do periods last and how often do they come?**

A period can last from 2-7 days - 2-3 days one month and 5-6 days the next. It can come again in 21-36 days. It is NORMAL for the period to be irregular for the first 2-3 years. Then it often lasts the same number of days and comes between 26-32 days or about once a month.

**23. Can you prepare for your period?**

It is a good idea to buy pads ahead of time. Some girls actually try different kinds of pads. This way they learn how to attach them to their pants and find a brand that is a comfortable size.

**24. What if I get my period in school?**

Is there a school nurse or a health room that can help you? Most female teachers keep a supply of pads just in case a girl needs them. Talk with your mom and teacher and be prepared.

# Girls to Women

For Girls ONLY ©



## Answers to girls' "What's happening to my body?" questions

Mary Lee O'Connell, C.R.N.P.  
[www.ParentsAndKidsTalking.com](http://www.ParentsAndKidsTalking.com)