

# A Girl's Changing Body

## For Moms

The preteen stage is a time when many changes occur for girls, most noticeable are the changes to her body. This is referred to as puberty. Your daughter may start growing hair under her arms and on her legs, as well as her private parts. Maybe she is getting taller or gaining weight, or her hips are expanding. She will start growing breasts soon too, if she has not already. And soon she will start her menstrual cycle or 'period'. She may also begin developing romantic feelings towards others. As your daughter notices these changes in herself, it can leave her feeling confused or embarrassed. Sometimes, these confused feelings lead to a negative self-image and a low self-esteem. As an adult, you went through these same changes and can be there for your daughter to help her process the mixture of emotions.

Your daughter's changing body may start to attract attention from boys. She may be flattered by this, though it can often leave girls feeling insecure and confused. Help your daughter learn the best way to respect herself and her body. Help her think of appropriate ways to respond when people make comments about her body.

Help your daughter by showing her new hygiene routines such as applying deodorant, wearing a bra, and what to do when she starts her menstrual cycle.

As your daughter enters into puberty, this may also be a time when YOU feel a mixture of emotions! While you feel proud of your daughter growing up and developing into a woman, you may also feel sadness that she is no longer a little child. Additionally, you might feel anxious about the attention she gets from boys and her need for independence, all while figuring out how to raise your daughter in a new country and culture! These feelings are very normal for moms. Consider talking to other moms about how you are feeling and their strategies for walking alongside their daughters through puberty.

Most importantly, talk to your daughter and help her sort out her confusion.



## Menstrual Cycle

Your daughter may start her menstrual cycle soon or she may have already. You can be a great resource by telling her about your experience when you were her age. Girls often feel anxious about starting their menstrual cycle, so it can be helpful to talk about before she begins it. Make sure she has the products she needs like panty liners, pads, tampons, menstrual cups, or underwear, and that she knows how to use them. She can keep the products she will need in her backpack, so she's prepared if she gets her period at school. It's important she change her hygiene patterns to prevent the odor that comes with a menstrual cycle. Be sure to also communicate the physical and emotional feelings often connected to a menstrual cycle, such as abdominal cramping, bloating, tender breasts, mood swings, or feeling tired. These things are referred to as premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and are normal. However, if her period is keeping her home from school or making her feel really sick, visit a doctor as there may be other issues. You should let your doctor know if she hasn't started her period by age 17.

Some cultures believe that using tampons takes away a girl's virginity. In the U.S. they are very common and girls who are abstinent or waiting until marriage often use them.



### Moms, think about it...

- \* Have you noticed your daughter maturing physically and emotionally? It might be very difficult for her to start a conversation with you about the changes in her body, even if she really wants to. As the adult, take time to initiate questions and listen to her responses. Your opinions and feedback are important, and hers are too.
- \* Do you listen to your daughter's concerns about her appearance and affirm her in her beauty? Talk about the difference between outer beauty and inner beauty and ask her what she thinks is beautiful about herself. Remind her that everyone's body is different and acknowledge her changing body in a positive way. Let her know that beauty comes in all different shapes and sizes and encourage her to focus on inner beauty. Do you encourage your daughter to participate in activities such as music and sports that help build confidence and character without focusing on appearance?

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## For Daughters

At this age, your body might be changing, or it will change soon. You will develop breasts, the shape of your body will change, or you may gain weight or get taller. You may also start to notice pubic hair and that the hair under your arms and on your legs is getting thicker and darker. These changes are normal and are referred to as puberty. Your friends are also going through these changes, but remember, everyone's body is different, and changes happen at different times. These changes usually bring a mixture of emotions. In one sense you might feel embarrassed or awkward about going through puberty, but in another sense, you may feel more confident and excited that you are growing into an adult!

As your body changes, you might notice people making comments about your physical appearance. Whether they say something positive or negative, it can feel awkward to know that people are noticing your body now. Just remember, no matter what shape you have, your body is beautiful and deserves to be respected by yourself and others. If peoples' comments are not respectful to you, you should stand up for yourself and talk to someone about what was said.

Many girls in the U.S. shave their legs and their underarms when they become teenagers. Every culture does things differently and however you and your mom decide to take care of your hair is okay. Talk to your mom about how she takes care of the hair on her body and what is best for you.

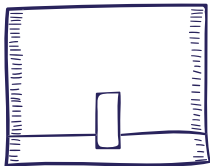
Now that you are getting older, your hygiene practices should change. You will need to start bathing more, wearing deodorant, and carrying toiletry products so you are ready for your menstrual cycle.

Sometimes it may be uncomfortable to talk about these things, even with your mom. It is hard to imagine, but your mom went through these same changes and felt the same mixture of emotions you do. If you haven't already, bring up your feelings about puberty with your mom. Ask her how she dealt with these changes and any advice she has for you. For example, you may want to talk to her about wearing a bra or someone at school you have a crush on. She can help you sort through these things.

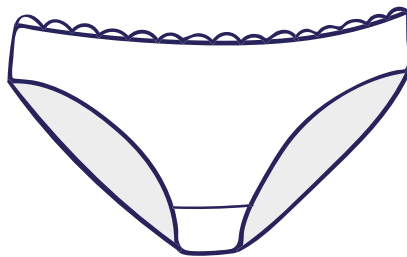


## Menstrual Cycle

You will start your menstrual cycle soon if you haven't already. This is also called a 'period'. The average age girls start their period is around 12 years old, but everyone is different. You might feel anxious about starting your first period, which is normal. Talk to your mom, an older sibling, or another trusted adult about what their experience was like. You may also want them to show you how to use certain products such as a pad, tampon, menstrual cup, or underwear so you are prepared when your period arrives. Store some supplies in your backpack in case you start your period at school. Once you start your menstrual cycle, it will last for 3-7 days and occurs once a month. The time during or around your period you might also feel abdominal cramping, bloating, tender breasts, mood swings, or exhaustion. These things are referred to as premenstrual syndrome (PMS), and are uncomfortable, but normal. If these feelings are regularly keeping you home from school let your mom and your doctor know. It's helpful to keep track of your cycle so you know when to expect it by marking the dates of your cycle on your calendar. If you have a smart phone, there are a lot of apps that help you keep track of your cycle and how you feel during that time.



panty liner



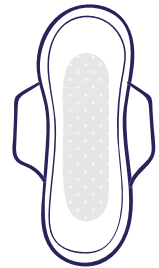
menstrual underwear



menstrual cup



tampon



pad



## Daughters, think about it...

- \* Most girls start going through puberty from the ages of 9-13. Have you or your friends started going through puberty? What have you noticed that's changed?
- \* Consider how media around the world portrays only certain body types as beautiful. Women and girls are so diverse and represent many different body shapes and weights, skin colors, and hair types and colors. Beauty is represented in this diversity, not just one type of body.

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# Heart to Heart



## Ask your Daughter

- ◆ I've noticed your clothes are fitting you differently. It seems like your body is starting to change and you are starting puberty. Have you noticed this? How does this make you feel?
- ◆ Are you noticing your friends' bodies are also starting to change?
- ◆ Would you be interested in going bra shopping with me this weekend? I think it's a good idea you start wearing one.
- ◆ Are you prepared for your period? Maybe we can pack a toiletry bag for your backpack. I can help and explain how to use the items.
- ◆ Boys may start to notice your body more and make comments to you. If anyone says anything unpleasant to you about your body, please tell me or tell your teacher at school. Your body deserves to be honored and respected. Has anyone made comments that make you uncomfortable?

## Ask your Mom

- ◆ How do you take care of your body?
- ◆ What changes to my hygiene and health routine do I need to make as my body changes?



# What makes us beautiful?

Puberty can be hard. Your body is changing and sometimes these changes can be uncomfortable. You may find that society's ideas of beauty are impossible to reach. Take the time to talk about what beauty is to you.

What is beauty?

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Who in your life do you think is beautiful? What makes them beautiful?

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What do we think is the most beautiful part of each other?

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Draw a portrait of each other,  
celebrating the most beautiful parts of you!

