

Understanding a Girl's Body

The reproductive parts of the female body are used to have sex and make and care for babies. This picture shows the *breasts* on the chest and the *vulva* between the legs in the *pubic* area. There are also reproductive parts inside the body.

During puberty the breasts and vulva develop. Body hair grows in the pubic area. These changes are normal. Other important changes take place inside the body. How soon or how fast the changes happen is different for each girl.

The **breasts** and **nipples** are the part of the reproductive system that produces milk for a newborn baby. The breasts are made of soft, fatty tissue. Breasts come in all sizes and shapes. Nipples also may be different shades and shapes.

The **vulva** is a mound of soft, fatty tissue. Inside the vulva are the urinary opening, where urine (or pee) comes out, and the opening of the *vagina*. The vulva protects these openings.

Inside a girl's body the vagina is the passage way that connects to the uterus. The uterus is the organ where a baby develops when a woman is pregnant.

A girl also has two *ovaries* inside her body that hold female egg cells and make the female hormones *estrogen* and *progesterone*.

Menstruation

One of the changes that happens during puberty is that a girl's body begins to *menstruate*. Menstruation is a normal process that happens for many years of a girl's life. During menstruation the built-up lining of the uterus slowly passes out of the body through the vagina. This happens about once a month. It is also known as *having a period*.

Periods are different for each girl. A girl may start having periods as young as age 9 or as old as age 16. Most girls will have a period about every 28 days, although the time between periods can be as short as 21 days or as long as 40 days. Periods may last from 1 to 5 days. There may be a lot of blood or a little. Some girls may feel cramps in the belly or lower back.

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Taking care of periods. A girl will need to wear a *pad* or *tampon* during her period to collect the blood. She can ask her mother or another caring adult for help. Menstruating can be a little uncomfortable at times. But most girls can continue to be active and do all the things they usually do. Bathing regularly will help a girl stay clean and healthy.

Things to Know and Think About

- Sexual changes in a girl's body are a part of puberty and growing up.
- Changes in the reproductive organs prepare the female body to reproduce, or make a baby.
- Each girl's body grows and develops at its own pace.
- Breasts come in all shapes and sizes.
- Beginning to menstruate, or have periods, is part of puberty.
- Bathing regularly helps keep a girl's body clean and healthy.
- Knowing about your body and how it works is an important part of respecting and protecting yourself.

Things to Do Daily

- Take a bath or shower using a soap that fights germs, bacteria and odor.
- Eat healthy. A variety of good foods is important for a growing and changing body.
- Be active every day. You'll look and feel better.
- Get plenty of rest and sleep. You'll feel less stressed.

Things to Remember

- Ask for help or information about your body when you need it.
- Notice any lumps in your breasts. Report them to a caring adult.
- Talk to a caring adult who can help you prepare for your periods.
- Talk about your feelings or concerns with a caring adult.
- Respect other people's feelings and bodies.
- Make choices that respect and protect your body and your future.