Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Health**
Public and Aboriginal Health Division

Puberty

Some of the important things to know about body changes, feelings, relationships and more!

HealthyWA
Health information for Western Australians

Puberty

Puberty...Exciting? Weird? Wonderful? A little bit scary? Awkward? Freeing? Boring? Inspiring? Embarrassing? Empowering? Stressful?

No matter how you feel about puberty, what helps is to know about the changes that the body goes through, before they happen, so you know what to expect. This booklet has lots of information to help you understand these changes and to help keep you happy, safe and well.

You may have heard lots of stuff about puberty already from books, movies, online, your friends, your parents – but it's always good to check you have the right information.

What are all the changes that happen during puberty?
How do I look after myself?
Do I have any questions I have been too afraid to ask?
How do I know if the information I have is reliable?
This book can help to answer these questions and more!

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What is puberty?

Puberty is the word used to describe the time when your body grows and changes from a child to an adult.

The physical changes during puberty are your body developing so that it can potentially make a baby (although there are many reasons why people may not want to make a baby or be able to make a baby). Being physically able to have a baby does not mean that you are emotionally ready – this takes a lot longer and it might be something you think about later in life.

When does puberty happen?

Puberty can start anywhere between the ages of 8 and 15 years. For a lot of people it will start around the age of 10 or 11 years. For girls, puberty usually starts between the ages of 8 and 13 years. For boys, puberty usually starts a little later between the ages of 9 and 14 years.

These changes happen gradually over a few years. They can happen faster for some people and more slowly for other people. You might start to notice changes in your body or in your friends' bodies. One friend might be getting very tall and another friend might be starting to get some pimples. You might be starting to grow more hair in your armpits, or you might not notice any changes at all. Some people worry if they haven't noticed their body changing at the same rate as their friends. It is important to remember everyone is different. There are lots of different ways to go through puberty that are normal and OK. You may like to chat to your parents about when they started to notice changes during puberty, as this will give you some idea of when you might start to notice changes in your body.

Who can I talk to about this stuff?

Sometimes when you're going through puberty, it might feel as if there is no one to talk to. It may be hard to believe, but all the adults you know have been through puberty – yep, your parents, your grandparents, your favourite singer or sports star...even your teacher! So, you may find the adults in your life understand more than you think they do! Often, they are waiting for you to come and ask questions! Think of the trusted adults you can talk to – asking questions, talking through any concerns and sharing things you are looking forward to can help clear your mind and prepare you for the changes ahead.

Changes during puberty

Your body has been growing and changing from the time you were in the womb (uterus). Over the years you have become taller, you have put on weight as you grow, your feet have grown bigger, your brain has matured and you have learnt lots of new things. Puberty is a time when growth and changes happen much more quickly – the only other time you grew so quickly was when you grew from a baby to a child.

Your body starts to produce special sex hormones. These hormones act like tiny messengers and travel in our blood to drive the changes you notice during puberty. Some of the changes happen to your body (physical), others affect the way you think and feel (emotional) and the way that you relate to the people in your life (social). It can feel like you are the only person going through these changes, but a lot of people go through similar changes during puberty.

Emotional and social changes

Although the physical changes are easier to notice because they are things you can see, it is likely that you have already started to change in the way you think, feel and the way that you relate to your friends and family. These emotional and social changes happen all throughout your life but there can be quite big changes during puberty.

Lots of feelings

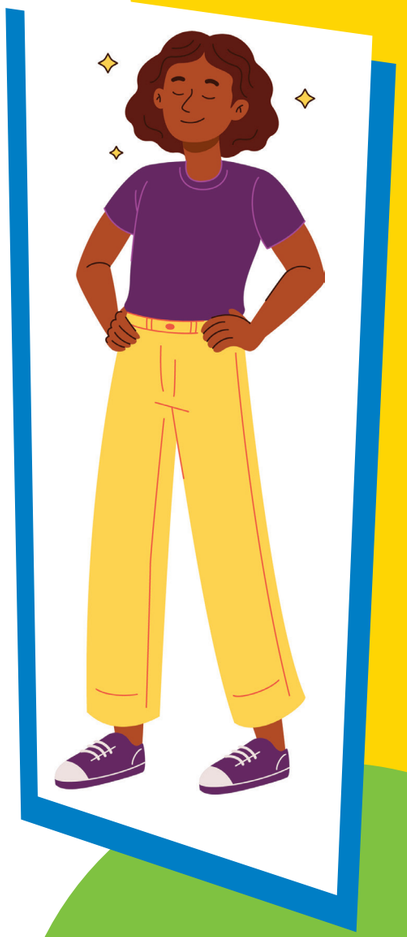
The hormones that your body produces during puberty can make your emotions feel stronger and more intense. It is common to have mood swings – this is when your feelings change very quickly and randomly. One minute you might feel on top of the world and the next minute feel really down. Feeling this way can be hard, but you don't have to go through it alone. Talking with trusted adults can help you sort out your feelings. There are also lots of great online supports listed on page 36.

Independence

You may find that as you get older you don't want or need so much help from the adults in your life. You might feel like you want more privacy and space from family members. You might want to be able to make more decisions yourself, to try new things and express yourself in new or different ways. It is normal to want more independence as you get older, it's part of learning to be an adult and to look after yourself. This can be hard for some of the adults in your life. Try to be respectful when you are discussing things with your parents and carers – they are more likely to listen to your point of view if you can talk to them calmly about your wants and needs. And remember that you still need support from trusted adults, so don't be afraid to ask when you need help.

Friendships

Friendships can become increasingly important as you get older and you will probably find that you want to spend more time with your friends than you do with your family. We all value what our friends think and this can be especially important to you during puberty. Sometimes the intense feelings you get during puberty and the mood swings that can happen, can make friendships a little trickier during this time. Being understanding of each other's feelings can help a lot (even though it's not always easy to do!). Your friendship groups might change a little – or a lot. You may find that you become closer to some people and that some friendships become less important to you. This is all part of growing up.



Sexual thoughts and feelings

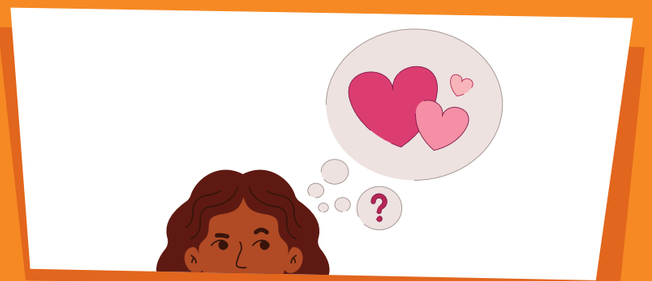
You will probably start to have more sexual thoughts and urges during puberty. This is also due to all the hormones!

You might start to feel attracted to another person or people. It might be someone you know in real life or someone you have seen on social media or TV. Sometimes this is called having a 'crush'. These feelings can feel very intense at times. It's completely normal to have these feelings. It is also completely normal to not have these feelings at all.

What if I have a crush on someone?

You may keep these feelings to yourself or you may choose to talk to a friend or someone you trust about them. If you have a crush on someone you know in real life, you might choose to tell that person. It is your choice to decide who you tell about any feelings you have.

If the person you have a crush on feels the same way you may find yourself in an exciting new friendship or relationship. Sometimes the person you have a crush on may not feel the same way and you might feel rejected or hurt. It is important to continue treating this person with kindness and respect their feelings. It can be a good idea to talk to a friend or a trusted adult if you are feeling hurt or are not sure how deal with the situation.



What if someone has a crush on me?

You may find that someone feels strongly about you, but you don't feel the same way. Try to be honest and clear about your feelings while being kind and respectful. A good way to handle situations like this is to think about how you would feel if you were the other person and how you would like to be treated.

It is important to know that it is not OK for someone to make you feel uncomfortable or pressured when it comes to crushes or sexual feelings. If someone acts like they have sexual feelings for you and this makes you feel uncomfortable, you should tell a trusted adult.

If you would like some more information about relationships, love and sex, check out page 36 for a list of helpful books and websites.

Physical changes

Some of the physical changes that happen during puberty happen to people of all genders. Here are some of the things to expect.

Body size and shape

'Haven't you grown!' It's likely you have heard this saying a few times already and you are likely to hear it even more as you go through puberty. You might have a growth spurt and gain a few centimetres in height one month and then grow more slowly the next. You may also put on weight in spurts. It doesn't always happen evenly. Getting to know your changing body each month and year can be a bit of a challenge at times. You may feel some pain in your arms and legs as you grow ('growing pains') and you may find you feel a bit clumsy or less co-ordinated at times. Don't worry, you will soon get used to your new size and shape and you may find that you feel stronger and able to do new things too.

Pimples and acne

During puberty your body is a hormone-producing machine. These hormones make the oil-producing glands in your skin grow bigger and produce extra oil (sebum). This oil can block the pores which causes pimples. The most common places to get pimples are on the face, neck, chest and back, but you can get pimples anywhere on the body. When pimples become very red and sore, you might get something called acne.

Washing your skin gently with warm water and a mild soap or face wash every morning and night can help. Dirt doesn't cause acne but washing can get rid of extra oil. You may also find that certain foods such as sugary and fatty foods make your pimples worse. Try to avoid touching or squeezing pimples as this can make them worse or cause scars. If your skin is really bothering you, then you should see your doctor or trusted adult who can help.

"Washing your skin every day can help prevent pimples."

Sweat

As you go through puberty you will probably start to sweat more. Remember that sweating is normal and almost everyone sweats more during puberty. The extra oil (sebum) that the glands in your skin produce during puberty can mix with the sweat and bacteria can grow. This can cause a smell called body odour (or BO). You might notice the smell in your armpits. Your feet and genitals might also have different smells.

The best way to keep clean is to wash your body every day using mild soap and warm water. You may need to wash your clothes more often once you start puberty. This helps to wash away the bacteria that contributes to the smells.

You may want to consider using deodorant and/or antiperspirant to help address BO and sweating. Deodorant is a pleasant smell to mask BO, and often comes in a spray. Antiperspirant stops sweating, and is applied to the armpits as a roll-on or spray. If you choose to use deodorant and/or anti-perspirant follow the instructions on the pack to make sure you are using them safely. Remember, wearing clean clothes and washing your body every day is the best way to keep clean and avoid BO.

"Sweating is normal and almost everyone sweats more during puberty."

Body hair

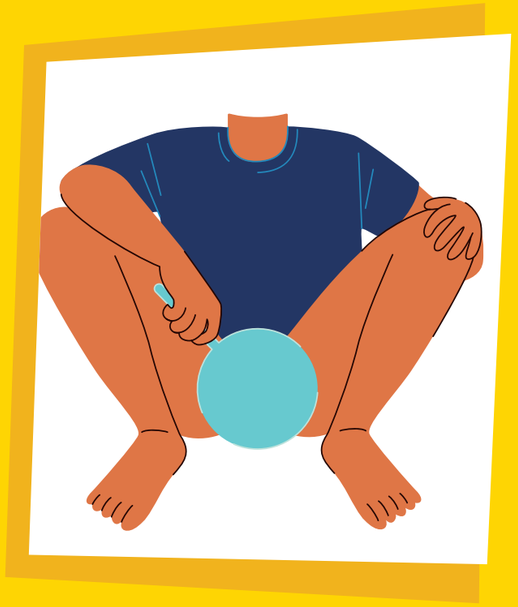
Hair will usually start to grow in your armpits and around your genitals (pubic hair) as you go through puberty. This hair will often be thin and straight at first and will often become thicker and sometimes curlier as you get older. You may also find more hair growing on your legs and arms. Hair might also appear on your face and other places on your body. Everyone has different amounts of hair. Some people might have lots of hair and others might have very little hair – this is all normal.

Should I shave?

Just as people have different likes and dislikes with the way their hair looks on their head, people have different likes and dislikes for the rest of the hair on their body. Some people like to leave the hair on their body to grow naturally. Some decide to trim or shave some areas – like the hair in the armpits, around the genitals (pubic hair) and on the legs.

There are different ways hair can be removed such as: shaving, waxing, hair removal creams, tweezers and threading. It is up to you to make decisions about your body hair. There are no right or wrong choices. Some people who have sensitive skin may notice reactions to certain products or treatments. It's helpful to speak to a trusted adult about what method is right for you. If you choose to remove hair, you may like some lessons from someone who has done it before! Try not to share razors with other people as it can pass on infections and viruses.

The reproductive system



Some changes during puberty are specific to the body parts that you have. To understand these changes, it can be helpful to know the parts of the reproductive systems.

The reproductive system is made up of all the different organs that are needed for making a baby. Reproduce means 'to make more of' which is why making a baby is called reproduction.

Most of the organs are inside the body and some are on the outside of the body. Sometimes these parts are called the genitals.

It can be hard to see all the parts of your genitals because of where they are located on your body. If you feel comfortable, you can use a hand-held mirror to have a look and become more familiar with your own body.

A tour of the female reproductive system

Vulva

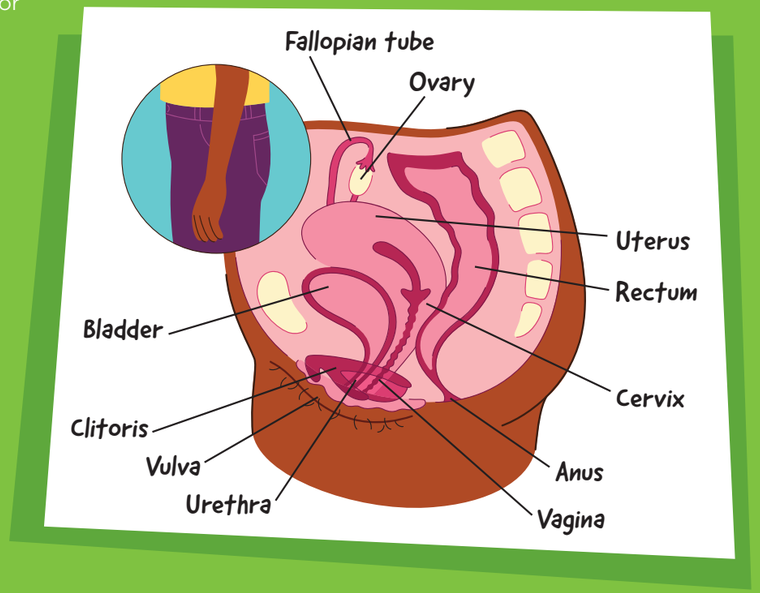
The vulva is the outside part of the reproductive system. Many people say 'vagina' when they really mean vulva, but they are different body parts.

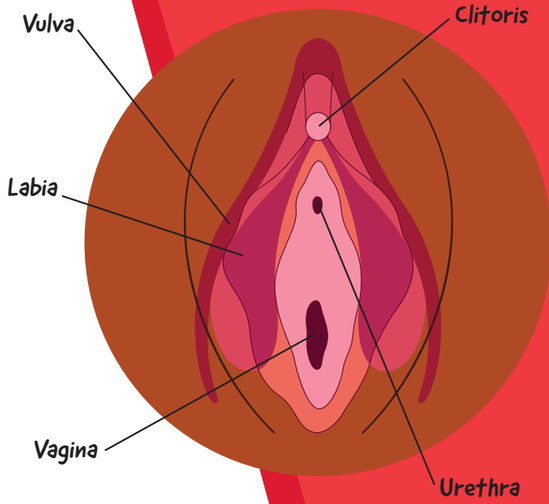
The vulva includes pubic hair, the inner and outer vaginal lips (labia), the clitoris and the openings of the vagina and urethra.

When sexually excited, it is normal for the glands inside the vulva and vagina to make fluids that make the vulva become wet. Sometimes this can happen while sleeping. Sometimes a 'sexy' dream (also known as a wet dream) can make the vagina and vulva more wet than usual when waking up. For some people this might happen once or twice, for other people it might happen more often. For other people it might not happen at all – that's normal too!

Urethral opening

The urethra is the tube which carries urine (wee) away from the bladder. The urethral opening is one of the three holes in the genital area to outside the body. One hole is the anus (butthole) where faeces (poo) comes out. Above the anus is the vaginal opening. The urethral opening is above the vaginal opening.



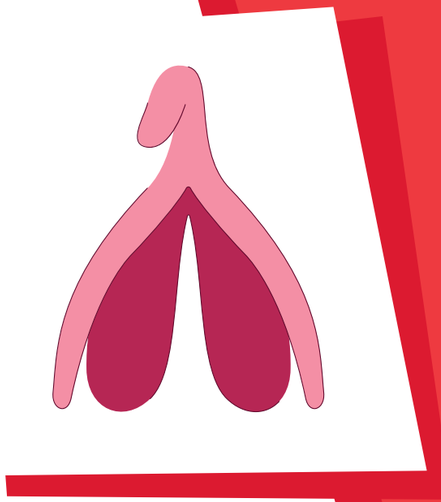


Labia

The outer labia are the larger, thicker lips of the vulva. The inner labia are the thinner lips. These folds of skin protect the entrance to the vagina and urethra. Just like many other body parts, labia come in all different shapes, sizes and colours. For some people the inner labia stick out past the outer labia, for others the outer labia cover the inner labia – both are completely normal. Labia grow and change during puberty and hair usually begins to grow on the outer labia.

Is my vulva normal?

Sometimes we compare ourselves and our bodies to the ones we see around us. Many images of bodies that we see around us – on TV, in movies, online and on social media – are changed or edited (photoshopped to look a certain way). This means that the images we see don't show what different bodies and different vulvas really look like. It may be a good idea to talk to a trusted adult if you have questions about your body or if you are feeling unsure.



Clitoris

The part of the clitoris on the outside of the body is only the tip. The tip of the clitoris is about the size of a pea and is just above the urethral opening (the hole where the wee comes out). The rest of the clitoris can't be seen because it is inside the body. When sexually excited, the clitoris fills with blood and swells. The tip of the clitoris has many sensitive nerve endings and when it is stroked or rubbed, it can feel very pleasurable and build to an exciting feeling called an orgasm.

Vagina

The vagina is a stretchy tube inside the body that is made of muscle that can expand. It is about 9 cm long and leads from the cervix to the outside of the body. The vaginal opening is between the anus (butthole) and urethral opening.

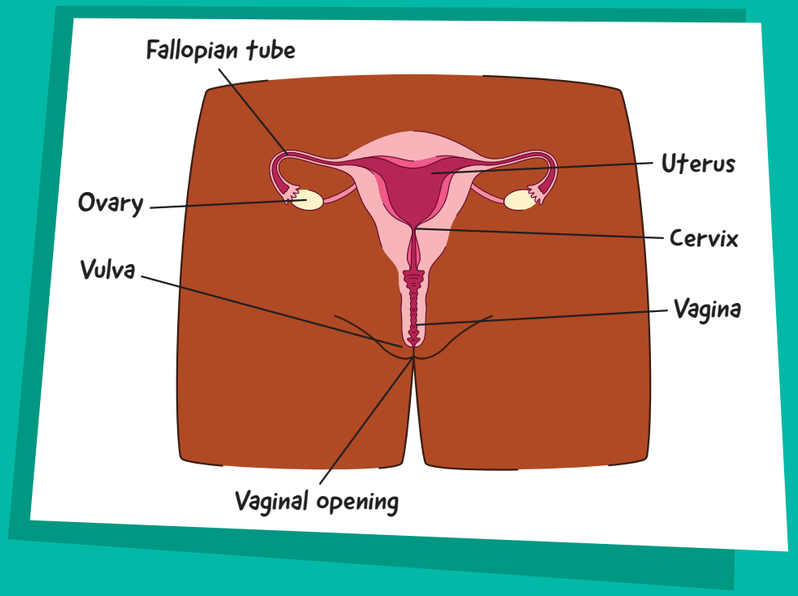
When someone gets their period (or menstruates), menstrual fluid (blood) leaves the body from the uterus through the vagina. The vagina is where an erect penis can enter the body during sexual intercourse (sex). The vagina is also where a baby can travel through during birth to move from the uterus to outside the body.

Hymen

The hymen is made up of thin elastic folds of tissue just inside the entrance of the vagina. Hymens come in different shapes and sizes and vary a lot in how much of the vaginal opening they cover. The hymen stretches and the opening usually gets larger as the body grows and matures.

Can a tampon break my hymen?

There are lots of myths about the hymen, like the myth that a hymen can 'break' when a tampon is used for the first time. The hymen does not break – it stretches and changes as the body grows. The opening may be big enough for a tampon to go in easily. If the tampon is bigger than the opening, the hymen will stretch. Sometimes when it stretches there may be some small tears. Going slowly and using lubricant may help. (See page 21-23) for more information about tampons).



Cervix

The cervix is at the top of the vagina. It looks like a small donut with a tiny hole in the middle. This hole connects the vagina to the uterus. It lets menstrual fluid (blood) out and can let sperm in. The cervix dilates (stretches open) during childbirth to make room for the baby to come out of the uterus.

The cervix produces mucus which helps to keep the vagina clean. Throughout the monthly menstrual cycle (see page 20), the thickness and amount of mucus changes. Some of this mucus comes out through the vagina (which is called discharge) and may be seen on toilet paper or underwear – this is totally normal and part of a healthy cycle.

Uterus

The uterus (sometimes called a womb), is a hollow, pear-shaped organ that is about the size of a fist. This is where a baby grows during a pregnancy. The uterus can expand up to 50 cm in length to allow for a growing baby! The lining of the uterus builds up and gets thicker and spongy each month so that it can make a nice cushy place for a possible pregnancy (see page 32 – How a baby is made).

Fallopian tubes

These are two tubes, one on each side, that go from the ovaries to the uterus. The fallopian tubes carry an egg (ovum) from the ovaries to the uterus each month as part of the menstrual cycle (see page 20). At the end of each fallopian tube are parts that look like tiny fingers that sweep the egg into the fallopian tube when it is released.

Ovaries

There are two ovaries, one at the end of each fallopian tube. The ovaries store eggs. Each of the two ovaries is the size of an almond and contains 150,000 to 200,000 eggs (ova) that have been there since birth! Each egg (ovum) is around the size of a pin head. The ovaries also produce hormones including estrogen and progesterone. During puberty, the ovaries start to release an egg each month as part of the menstrual cycle. The time when an egg is released is called ovulation. Sometimes more than one egg can be released, but this is not common.

Physical changes – girls

As people go through puberty, the body begins to change shape. For girls, the hips will usually begin to widen, and thighs will become more rounded. Breasts will also develop.

Breasts

For a lot of girls, the first sign of puberty is when breasts start to grow. This will happen at different ages for different people. Some people might start to notice their breasts growing when they are 8 years old and other people might notice when they are 13 years old or older. At the start of puberty when breasts are growing, the nipples and the area around them might be more sensitive and a bit sore. Breasts can also become tender before or during periods.

Sometimes people worry about the size of their breasts and think they are too big or too small or worry about the shape or colour of their nipples. There is no one right way for breasts to be. Breasts and nipples come in all shapes and sizes, just like people do. Sometimes one breast might be a little bigger that the other. This might be that one breast has grown more quickly than the other or it can just be the natural difference in the sides of the body. Have a look at other parts of your body – your hands, feet, eyes – we often have one side that is slightly bigger or different to the other side.

Should I get a bra?

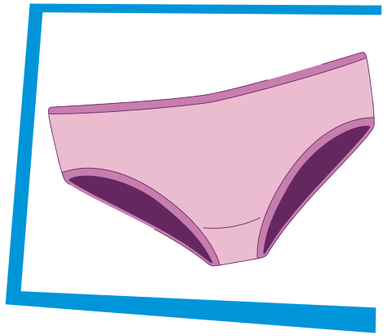
Some people like to wear bras and find that they support the breasts from moving uncomfortably, especially when playing sport. Some people prefer not to wear bras. There is no set time when it is right to start wearing a bra, if you choose to wear one. It may be a good idea to talk it through with a trusted adult first. It can be good to ask them to come with you when shopping for bras for the first time so that they can help you find one that best suits your needs.

First period

A first period will usually happen about two years after the breasts begin to grow. A period is part of the menstrual cycle. During a period, a small amount of blood comes out of the vagina over a few days and this happens about once a month.

Another sign that a girl may be close to getting her first period can be a mucus coming out of the vagina. It might be thin and slightly sticky or thick and gooey. It might be noticed when going to the toilet or on underwear. It is usually a creamy yellow or white colour when it dries on underwear.

Many girls will get their first period sometime between the ages of 9 and 15 years, but it may be earlier or later. Everyone is different. If a first period doesn't come by the age of 17 years, talk to a doctor about it. People usually stop having their periods between the ages of 45 and 55 years. This is called menopause.



What is this other vaginal fluid I get when I don't have my period?

During the days of your menstrual cycle when you are not bleeding, the cervix still produces mucus. This mucus keeps the walls of the vagina clean. Sometimes the mucus is called vaginal discharge because it moves through the vagina to outside the body. Vaginal discharge changes at different times of your menstrual cycle – sometimes it is clear and slippery and other times it is thicker and sticky; sometimes there is only a little bit and sometimes there is more. Vaginal discharge is a normal part of the menstrual cycle.

If you have a lot of vaginal discharge for a while this might be a sign you have an infection. A thick white discharge with a funny smell can be a symptom of thrush. When you have thrush, the first thing you notice can be itching in your vagina. Thrush is very common, and it can be treated easily. Get to know your body and see a doctor if you notice anything that is not normal for your genitals (like an unusual discharge, sore or itchiness).

Do I need to keep my vagina clean?

Vaginas are self-cleaning, and the mucus made by the cervix helps with this. You should not wash inside the vagina and should not use powders, perfumes or deodorants on your vulva or vagina. This can upset the natural balance in your vagina and cause infections. Wash your vulva (the outside parts) gently every day when you have a shower or a bath using water and your hands to clean between the folds of the labia (lips).

The menstrual cycle

Each month the uterus gets ready for a possible pregnancy. The lining of the uterus becomes thick and soft and is full of blood vessels. When the ovaries release an egg each month, the egg travels along a tube (fallopian tube) towards the uterus. This is called ovulation. If the egg does not connect with a sperm, the egg and the thick lining of the uterus is not needed and will break down and pass out of the body through the vagina. It looks like thick blood and is called a period or menstruation. The process of the body getting ready for a possible pregnancy and having a period is called the menstrual cycle. The whole menstrual cycle takes about a month.

The blood that comes out during a period can look bright red, dark red or brownish. It can be thin and watery or thick, or both. A period usually lasts between 2 and 7 days. For the first year or two when someone starts getting their period the length of the period might change a lot – this is normal too. During a period about 30–80ml (about 2–5 tablespoons) of blood comes out. You might like to try measuring this amount out to see what it looks like and try testing some period products to see how much fluid they can hold. (See page 21 for more about period products).

Periods usually come every month, but this can change, especially during the first two or three years. Two periods might come in one month and then go a few months without having a period at all. Once a menstrual cycle becomes more regular it usually lasts between 21–38 days but this can change from cycle to cycle.

The amount of blood may be different on different days of the period too (it might be heavy, light or in between). Everyone's menstrual cycle and period are different, and they can change over time. If you have questions about periods or are unsure about anything it is a good idea to talk to a trusted adult or the school nurse.

Period products

There are different types of period products that are used to soak up menstrual fluid. Pads and tampons are commonly used period products but there are other options too, like period underwear and menstrual cups.

Period products can be bought at a pharmacy or supermarket and come with instructions and pictures.

What period products should I use?

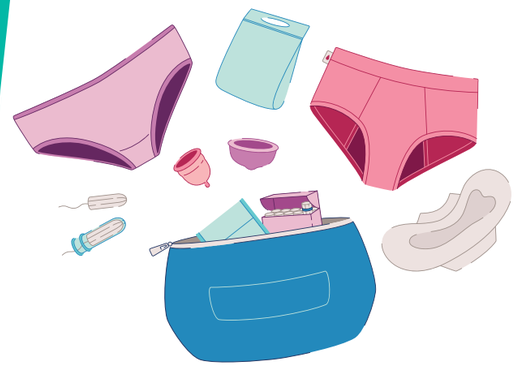
There are lots of different period products available now. Some are used to catch the blood outside of your body such as pads, reusable pads, period knickers, and period bathers. Some are put inside the vagina to catch the blood before it comes out of the body – like tampons and menstrual cups. It is up to you to decide which period products you are comfortable using. Many people use different period products at different times during their period and different times in their life. Some people like to use pads at night, some like to use tampons when swimming, some prefer to use products that can be washed and reused. Some period products are easier to use than others for beginners.

Finding the products that work best for you can take some time to figure out. You might want to talk over the different types with a parent, older sibling, cousin, school nurse or another trusted adult. Period products need to be changed regularly for hygiene and health reasons – it is best to check the instructions for each product. If a pad or tampon is left in place too long it can begin to smell. A tampon left in too long can make you sick.

What happens if I get my period when I am at school or at a friend's house?

It can be a good idea to get an adult to help you make up a little 'period pack'. This can be a pencil case or toiletry bag to hold pads, tampons, a spare pair of knickers and a plastic bag (for used knickers and pads/tampons). This period pack can be kept in a school bag or locker.

If your period starts while out and about, and no pads or tampons are available, a pad can be made from tissues or toilet paper and put in your underwear. If your first period comes when you are at school, try speaking to a teacher or school nurse. Often they have helped students with these things before. If you attend a public secondary school, you should have access to free period products through dispensing machines.



> "It can be a good idea to get an adult to help you make up a little 'period pack'."

Are there some things I can't do when I have my period?

For most people, having their period does not stop them for doing anything they normally do: run, ride, play sport, dance. If you go swimming you might want to use tampons, menstrual cups or period bathers.

For some people, a heavy period, cramps, pain or discomfort may make them not want to be active - that's OK! It is important to remember every person's body and period is different. It's up to you what you feel comfortable doing while you have your period.

You should shower or have a bath as usual. You might notice you get sweatier than normal when you have your period – that's normal! If your bleeding is so heavy or is so painful it stops you from doing normal activities, then talk to a trusted adult, your school nurse or a doctor.

How do I get the tampon in?

In tampon packets there are instructions for how to put a tampon in. These instructions usually have pictures too. There is a big range of tampons to choose from and you might like to try different types to find one that is comfortable for you. Some come with applicators which help to put the tampon in place. When a tampon is properly inserted, it can't be felt at all.

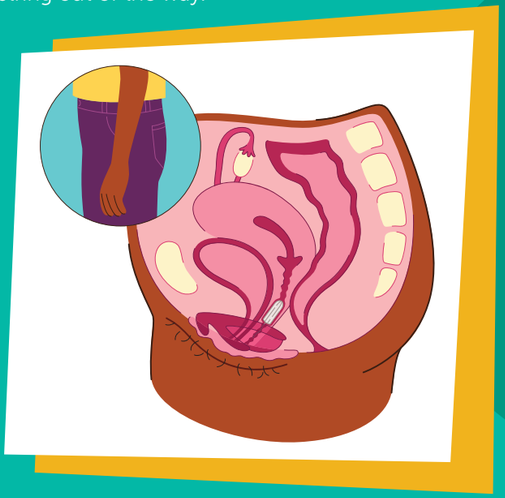
- Using a hand-held mirror can help you see what you are doing when you are first learning to use tampons.
- Wash your hands before and after putting a tampon in your vagina.
- Try not to touch the tampon much when you take it out of the wrapper.
- Find a position that you are comfortable in – this might be squatting, having one leg raised with your foot on the toilet or sitting on the toilet.
- Push the unwrapped tampon gently into your vagina using your finger or the applicator.
- Push the tampon slowly towards your lower back until the whole tampon is inside the vagina and you can't feel it anymore.
- Leave the string hanging out of the vaginal opening so you can take tampon out later.

Sometimes it can be uncomfortable when inserting a tampon for the first time. If you feel discomfort while the tampon is inserted you can take the tampon out and use a different period product. Try again another time if you want to. It can take some practice.

Tampons should be changed three to six times a day, depending on the amount of blood flow. If a tampon is left in for longer than eight hours (like when you are sleeping) there is small chance of getting a serious sickness called toxic shock syndrome (TSS). TSS causes sudden high fever, vomiting, abdominal pain, diarrhoea, headache, muscle pain and rash. For this reason, some people prefer to use pads or period underwear at night.

Do I need to take a tampon out to wee or poo?

A tampon is put inside the vagina. Urine (wee) comes out of the urethral opening – this is a different hole to the vagina (just above the vaginal opening). There is also a different hole for the faeces (poo) to come out (called an anus). So you don't need to take a tampon out to go wee or poo. Some people find it helpful to move their tampon string out of the way.



How do I get the tampon out?

A tampon won't fall out if the whole tampon is pushed inside the vagina and put behind the muscles at the entry of the vagina. It can't get lost inside you, either. The cervix stops the tampon going any further than the vagina. (Remember, the vagina is only about 9 cm long.)

To take a tampon out, slowly pull on the string that is hanging out of the vaginal opening. As you gently pull the string the tampon should slide out of the vagina.

Don't forget to take one tampon out before putting another one in. And remember to remove the last tampon when your period is finished.

Where do I put used period products?

It's important not to flush pads or tampons down the toilet. Place these items in the bin. There are usually specific sanitary bins in public toilet cubicles. You can also use regular bins. Some people wrap their period products in toilet paper or sanitary bags to keep it discrete.

Products such as period underwear or cups will need to be washed after each use. It is best to check and follow the instructions for these items.

Will I get period pain?

In the days leading up to a period, you might notice pain or aching in the stomach and pelvic area. This is often called cramps and can last for the first 12 hours or longer. Some people say they feel bloated and heavy at this time. If you do have pain during your period, try some stretches or other light exercise, or curl up with a heated wheat bag or place a hot-water bottle on the sore area. If this doesn't work, it is possible to take pain relief. Talk to a trusted adult, doctor or the chemist about what kind of relief would be good for you.

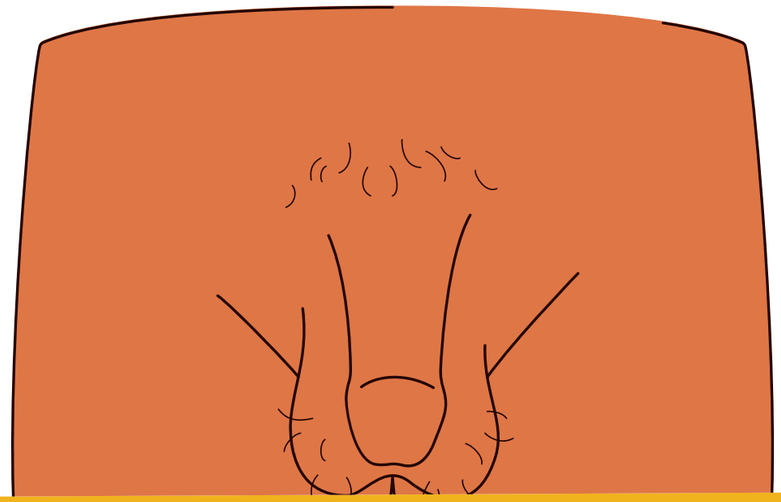
You may also find yourself feeling more emotional, or moody, in the days before your period. These physical and emotional symptoms are sometimes called pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS). Not every person has all of these symptoms. They usually go away after your period starts. Some people get diarrhoea or constipation just before a period. Drinking lots of water and eating fruit, vegetables and wholemeal bread and cereals can be helpful.

If the symptoms you have stop you doing your normal activities like going to school or spending time with friends, it is important to talk to a trusted adult and the school nurse or your doctor.

A tour of the male reproductive system (sex organs)

Penis

The penis is made up of two parts – the shaft and the glans. At the end of the glans is the tip (sometimes called the head). At the end of this is a small opening where urine (wee) and semen exit the body through a tube called the urethra. The penis is made up of spongey tissue that can expand and contract. Penises, just like other parts of our bodies, vary in size and how they look. There is a wide range of normal sizes for penises.



Why does my penis go hard?

Hard on? Boner? Woody? Stiffy? What nicknames have you heard for erections?

An erection is when the penis goes from being floppy and soft, to being larger and hard. It may stick straight out or curve. The penis isn't made of muscle and it doesn't have any bones, it becomes hard when blood flows into the spongy tissue inside the penis.

Erections can happen from the time you are a baby but as you go through puberty, they will probably happen more. This is completely normal. Erections can happen when you are sexually excited (turned on). They can also happen when you are nervous or excited... or for no obvious reason at all. It is common to get erections during the night and when you first wake up in the morning.

Sometimes erections happen when you don't want them to. There are some things you can do to help like wearing loose clothing (that can help hide erections) or distracting yourself with other things. Erections are usually easier to control as you get older.

Foreskin

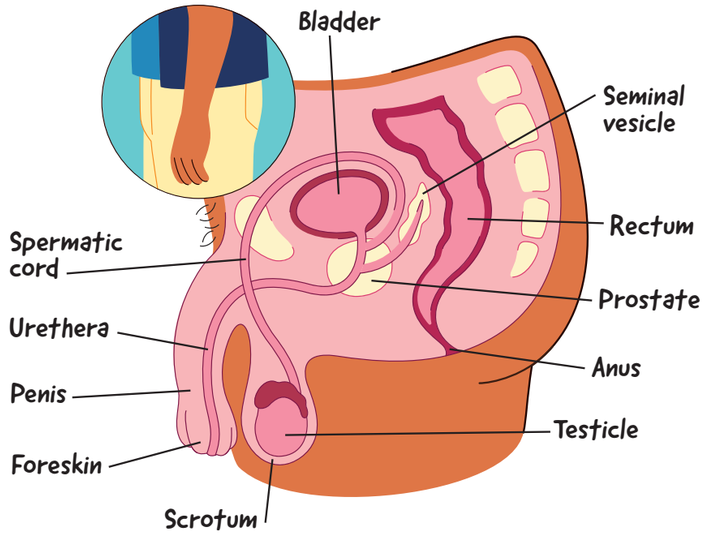
At birth, penises have a fold of skin that covers the glans (tip). Some people's parents choose to have a doctor remove the foreskin soon after they are born. This is known as circumcision. Circumcision may be done for cultural, religious or medical reasons. This makes the penis look a little different but it works the same way with or without a foreskin.

Scrotum and testicles

The scrotum (ball sac) is the sac of skin that hangs outside the body below the penis. The testicles (testes or 'balls') are two ball-like glands that hang in the scrotum (ball sac). The testicles produce the hormone testosterone which is a major part of puberty for people with testicles. During puberty the testicles start to make sperm.

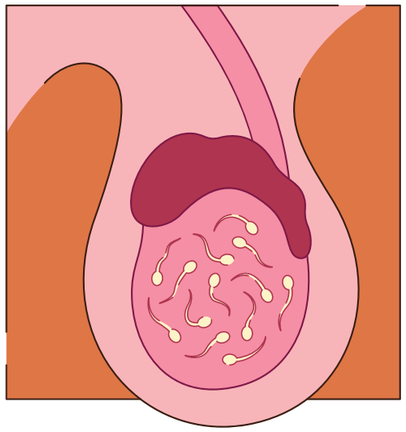
The testicles need to be kept at the right temperature for sperm to develop properly. This is why they hang outside the body. If it's too cold, the scrotum pulls the testicles closer to the body. If it's too warm, the testicles hang away from the body. It is quite normal for one testicle to be larger or to hang lower than the other. The scrotum is covered with wrinkly skin and many have lots of tiny, painless bumps on them – these are normal. Scrotums can be big or small. During puberty they can grow a little hair or a lot of hair. They can also vary in colour just like the rest of the skin on the body.

Testicles and scrotums are sensitive, touching them gently can feel good...hitting, twisting and rough handling can hurt a lot. When playing sports, some people like to protect their testicles with a 'cup' (a hard cup-shaped piece of plastic worn in underwear). It's a good idea to feel your testicles to learn what's normal for you, so you can tell if there are any changes and get help from a trusted adult or doctor.



Sperm

Sperm are shaped like a tadpole and their ‘tails’ help them move. This movement for sperm is important because it helps a sperm and egg to meet. Sperm are so tiny they can only be seen under a microscope.



Semen

Semen is a thick whitish fluid that carries sperm to the outside of the body through the tip of the penis. The tube that runs from the testicles to the urethra and out the end of the penis is where semen is carried to the outside of the body. Glands along the tube (seminal vesicle and prostate gland) help to provide fluids that mix with sperm to form semen. These fluids lubricate the tubes and nourish the sperm.

What is ejaculation?

When the penis is hard and someone gets very sexually excited (turned on), a thick white liquid (semen) may shoot out of the end of the penis. This is called ejaculation. Sometimes people call this ‘cum’. The semen or ejaculate contains 200-500 million sperm. The amount of cum is different for everyone but can be between a quarter of a teaspoon to one teaspoon of liquid. This liquid is not the same thing as urine (pee). Pee and ejaculate can’t come out at the same time – the body blocks the pee from coming out when ejaculating. Sometimes a thin, slippery liquid drips out of the penis before ejaculation – this is called ‘pre-cum’ or ‘pre-ejaculate’. This is totally normal. Sometimes small amounts of sperm can be found in pre-cum. When sperm gets inside a vagina, it can meet with an egg which can start a pregnancy.

What happens to my urine when I ejaculate?

Urine collects in the bladder until it can leave the body. Semen and urine (wee) travel through the same tube (urethra) to reach the outside of the body. When a penis is erect (hard) the flow of urine is stopped. This means that semen and urine are not mixed together. It can be difficult to urinate when you have an erection and might feel a little uncomfortable. This will go away when the erection goes down and you will be able to urinate like normal.

What is a wet dream?

Sometimes ejaculation can happen while you are sleeping. A wet dream is when semen comes out of the penis while you are asleep. This might be because of a ‘sexy’ dream or because the penis was stimulated when it rubbed against sheets or clothes. Wet dreams are completely normal. For some people it might happen once or twice, for other people it might happen more often. If you don’t have wet dreams, that’s normal too.

Sometimes your underwear, pyjamas or bed sheets might need to be washed after a wet dream. You might want to tell someone at home, or you might just take the underwear, pyjamas or sheets off and put them for washing.

> “A wet dream is when semen comes out of the penis while you are asleep”

How do I keep my penis clean?

Gently wash your penis with warm water each day when you are having a shower or bath. If you have a foreskin, pull it back gently and wash underneath.

Your foreskin should never be pulled back by force. Most boys find that the foreskin is easy to pull back by about 5 years of age, but for some it may not be easily pulled back until they are in their teens. Don’t forget to clean the base of the penis and testicles too.

Physical changes – boys

As boys go through puberty, their body beings to change shape. The shoulders and chest usually begin to widen and muscles will usually get bigger and stronger (not like a body-builder, but bigger and stronger than a child's).

Breasts

The hormones that start the puberty changes can also cause some changes to the chest for boys (around one-third of boys). They may notice swelling or lumps under their nipples. The nipples may also feel tender when clothing rubs against them. This is normal and usually nothing to worry about. The swelling usually lasts around four to six months, but it may continue for longer.

Genitals

During puberty, the penis grows longer and thicker. This happens at different ages and can take several years. Adult penis size varies widely (about 9.5 to 16.7 cm when hard (erect), with an average around 13 cm[1]. The size when soft doesn't have anything to do with how big it gets when it is hard. Some people's penises get much bigger when they're erect, others stay pretty much the same size as they are when they are soft.

Sometimes we compare ourselves and our bodies to the ones we see around us – on TV, in movies, online, in our daily life. It is important to remember that everyone's body is different, and bodies come in a lot of different shapes and sizes! Penises, just like other parts of our bodies, vary in size and how they look.

1. Belladelli F, Del Giudice F, Glover F, Mulloy E, Muncey W, Basran S, Fallara G, Pozzi E, Montorsi F, Salonia A, Eisenberg ML. Worldwide Temporal Trends in Penile Length: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. World J Mens Health. 2023 Oct;41(4):848-860. https://doi.org/10.5534/wjmh.220203

Body hair

Along with the hair that may start to grow in the armpits and around the genitals (pubic hair), boys may also find more hair growing on their legs, arms and chest. Hair will usually also appear on the chin, jaw line and cheeks (beard) and upper lip (moustache). Everyone has different amounts of hair. Some people might have lots of hair and others might have very little hair – this is all normal.

Should I shave my facial hair?

Your facial hair will be thin and soft at first but may become thicker and more bristly as you grow older. Some people choose to remove body hair. When it comes to removing hair on the face, some people choose to shave. If this is something you choose to do, you may not need to shave much at first and as your hair grows thicker, you may have to shave more often to keep the same 'freshly shaven' look or feel.

If you are thinking about shaving for the first time, you can talk to a parent or a trusted adult about this. You may also like some shaving lessons from someone who has done it before! Try not to share razors with other people as it can pass on infections.

Some people may choose to shave or wax to remove the hair from other parts of their body too. Sometimes people remove the hair from their chest, back or around their genitals (pubic hair). It is up to you to make decisions about your body hair. There are no right or wrong choices.

Voice

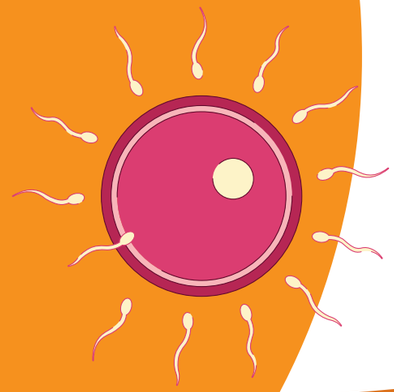
During puberty the voice will change and can become deeper, this is sometime called 'voice cracking' or 'breaking'. Some people's voices change slowly over time and others might change quickly. It can be difficult to control a changing voice and it might make some squeaky or croaky sounds at times – this is all normal. The changes in the voice are caused by parts of the throat (larynx) growing and changing. As the larynx grows, some people notice a small rounded shape just under the skin at the front of the throat that sticks out a little (this is often called the Adam's apple).

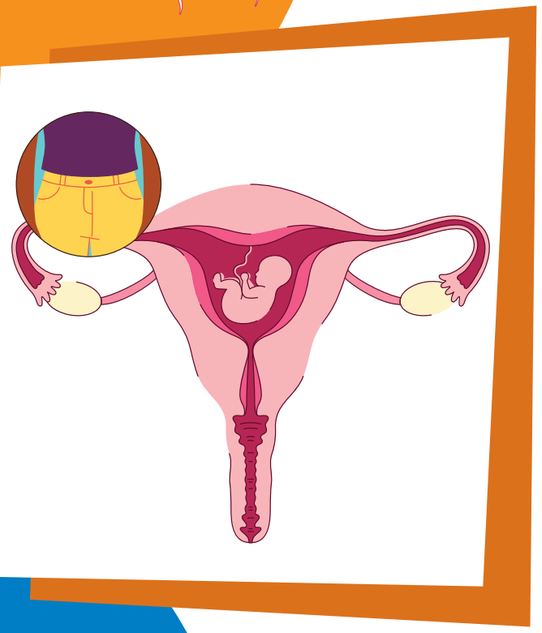
How a baby is made

Once a girl starts releasing eggs during puberty they are able to get pregnant if they have penis-in-vagina sex. To make a baby a sperm needs to join with an egg. During penis-in-vagina sexual intercourse (sex) an erect penis can be put inside a vagina. When a penis ejaculates inside a vagina the semen that carries the sperm is released inside. The sperm can start to move ('swim') towards an egg. Around the time an egg is released from an ovary (ovulation), the cervix produces a clear and slippery mucus which makes it easier for the sperm to move into the uterus and up towards the egg in the fallopian tube. If a sperm joins with an egg this is called fertilisation. If the fertilised egg implants into the uterus a pregnancy begins.

There are ways people can prevent pregnancy when they have penis-in-vagina sex. This is called contraception.

If you would like some more information about this check out page 36 for a list of helpful books and websites.





Looking after yourself

With all these big changes in your body, it is important to look after yourself well.

Some things that are helpful:

- Eat a well-balanced diet with lots of fresh fruit and vegetables. This helps keep up your energy levels and improve your mood. A lot of people find they eat more during puberty because their body needs energy to grow and develop.
- Get moving. If you don't enjoy sport, try hitting the dance floor (or the lounge room) with friends. Ride or walk to school, take your dog for a walk, go for a swim or get out on your skateboard. Choose an activity that you enjoy! Moving your body can help you sleep better and make you feel good.
- Drink plenty of water, especially when playing sport and exercising.
- Get enough rest and relaxation. Make sure that this isn't always in front of a screen! Try reading a book, doing some art or listening to music.
- Get enough sleep. Young people need more sleep than adults, so their bodies and brains can grow and develop.

"Young people need more sleep than adults, so their bodies and brains can grow and develop."

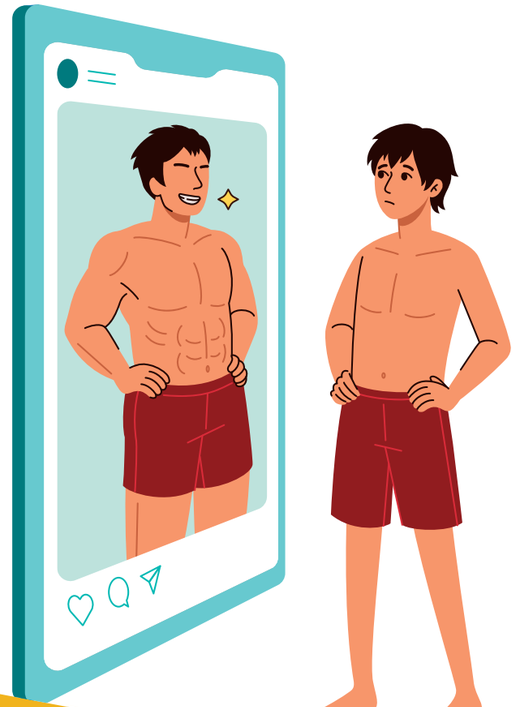
Body image

As you get older you may start to notice different things about your body and the way you look. You might also start to take more notice of how the people around you look. Sometimes you might even compare yourself to those around you. This is a really common part of puberty and getting older, but it can be a problem if it starts to make you feel bad about your own body.

The world around us tells us all kinds of things about what the 'perfect body' is supposed to look like. A lot of the images we see in movies, TV, advertisements and online only show people with bodies that look a certain way. Many of these images have even been changed or edited (photoshopped) to make the bodies look a specific way. It can be hard to tell what is real and what has been changed.

In reality there is no perfect body! Bodies come in all different shapes and sizes. Look around at your family, friends and people you see on the street. People with all different kinds of bodies are healthy, happy and doing things they enjoy.

It can be hard to avoid comparing yourself to others, but it is a good idea to remind yourself that we are all different and unique! Have fun finding your own personal style and appreciate qualities in yourself and others that are not about looks – making people laugh, being kind, giving 100% at school, being a good teammate. What do you appreciate about yourself?



Mental wellbeing

As well as physical changes happening to your body that you can see on the outside, there are changes happening on the inside too. Hormones can make us feel happy, excited or a bit moody and emotional; everyone has their ups and downs (even adults – but you already know that!). It's important to notice when you don't feel your best, as taking care of your mental wellbeing is just as important as your physical health.

There are plenty of things you can do to help take care of your mental wellbeing like eating well, getting enough sleep, exercising, taking time to relax if you are stressed, doing things you enjoy, spending time with family and friends, and being involved in your community. Sometimes you might not be able to deal with a worry on your own or you might feel more emotional than usual. When this happens, it is a good idea to talk to a trusted adult and ask for help if you need it. Talking to someone can be a great way to take care of your mental wellbeing and can help to cope with worries.

It's normal to sometimes feel sadness, frustration, worry and stress. If you have feelings of sadness that don't go away, feel worried on most days, feel like everything is too hard or just don't feel like yourself, it is important to talk to a trusted adult. Just like you need to look after your physical health, you need to look after your mental health too. Sometimes this means talking to a health professional like a doctor or a counsellor.

Conclusion

Puberty is a time of many changes which can make you feel all sorts of emotions. Talking things through and having people that can answer your questions and help you makes things a whole lot easier! Can you think of 5 trusted adults you can talk to?

If you would like more reliable information, check out ...

- **Relationships, sex and other stuff** – a booklet available from teachers, school nurses and online
- **getthefacts.health.wa.gov.au** – a website about sexual health and relationships for teens

If you would like help with any of these topics, try ...

- **Kids Helpline** 1800 55 1800 – a helpline for kids on all topics
- **Headspace** www.headspace.org.au – mental health support for young people
- **The Butterfly Foundation** www.butterfly.org.au – support for body image concerns
- **Beyond Blue** www.beyondblue.org.au – mental health support
- **Sexual Health Helpline** 9227 6178 (metro) 1800 198 205 (country) sexhelp@shq.org.au – for answers to your sexual health questions

An electronic version of **Puberty** can be accessed at gdhr.wa.gov.au/document/pubertybook

Additional copies of this book can be ordered by contacting SHBBVP@health.wa.gov.au

Illustrations by Annabel Haizer

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