

A typical 28 day menstrual cycle

The menstrual cycle

The four phases of the menstrual cycle:

Phase 1: Each month egg follicles on the two ovaries start to develop. Hormones stimulates the uterus to build up its lining with extra blood and tissue, making the walls of the uterus thick and soft. Only one follicle will continue to develop and get ready to release an egg.

Phase 2: The egg is released and over the next few days it travels down the fallopian tube to the uterus.

This phase is called ovulation. Pregnancy is most likely to happen around the days when ovulation occurs.

Phase 3: After releasing the egg, the egg follicle closes and releases a hormone that helps to keep the uterus lining thick and ready in case the egg is fertilised by a sperm. A sperm is the male cell that is required to fertilise a female egg to make a baby, and is produced by a boy's testicles. It makes it possible for him to father children one day when he is old enough.

Phase 4 - Menstruation: The egg continues to travel to the uterus and if it unites with a sperm, it will be fertilised and may result in a pregnancy. This means that if the fertilised egg attaches itself to the uterus wall, it will develop into a baby. If the egg is not fertilised, the unfertilised egg, blood and the tissue lining the uterus is not needed and leaves the uterus through the vagina. This is the start of a girl's period and lasts between 3 to 6 days. There are 28 days in each cycle. However, for a few years after a girl first starts her period, the cycle may be longer.

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United Nations
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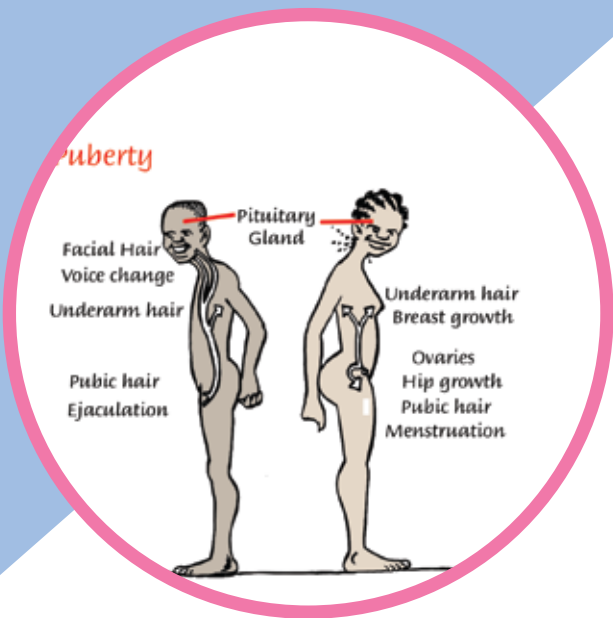


Government of
Azerbaijan

Adapted with appreciation from the Grow and Know series:
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Growing Up and Changing

Knowing about Puberty for Girls



What is puberty?

Puberty is a time when most girls and boys between the ages of 10 and 14 begin to notice changes in their bodies. Some are changes you can see (physical) and some you cannot see (emotional), like your feelings. It is a time when boys begin to produce sperm and girls begin to produce eggs. These changes are due to chemicals called 'hormones' produced by the body and take place over a number of years. These changes include:

- A girl's breasts start to grow, her hips get rounder, and grows pubic hair and hair under her arms.
- Girls start their monthly period. It is called menstruation and is not something to be scared of. It is normal and lasts for 3-6 days. For most girls this happens between the ages of 11-14 but can happen earlier or later. The time from one period to the next is usually 28 days, but can be longer at first.
- Hormone levels change and can make a growing girl feel happy one moment, and angry, sad or confused the next moment. Talking to sisters, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, or female teachers about these feelings can help.

What I need to know about menstruation

• Is menstruation unclean?

The smell is natural and normal, but can be much less with washing at least twice a day with soap and water around the vagina. You can place cloths, cotton or pads in your underwear when you are bleeding. Take extra pads in a plastic bag to school so you can change after a few hours. Wrap the used pad in some paper and throw it in the waste bin. You can take a sweater or kanga in case you have a leak on your uniform.

• Does it mean that when a girl menstruates she becomes a woman?

No! It does not mean that she is a woman. It means her body is getting ready for the day when she will grow up and become a woman and a mother. Young girls can become pregnant at this time, but they are not ready to become mothers or wives yet.

• Is it normal to get pains during my periods?

Yes. Most girls get some pain during their period. Pain medicine and light exercise during this time can help.

• If I miss my period for one month, does it mean I am pregnant?

When you first get your period, the flow can be mild. It may be a few months before you get it regularly every month. You can get pregnant during this time, but sometimes missing a period could be due to stress, or you have become too thin, or are travelling. You can mark the times of your period on your own calendar so you can be prepared every month.

• How should girls and boys behave towards each other during puberty?

As boys and girls go through puberty they experience physical and emotional changes that can sometimes be embarrassing. Boys should not make fun of girls when they have their monthly period, and girls should understand that boys feel shy when they experience erections. These are all normal feelings and experiences, and boys and girls should be understanding, respect each other and not tease each other during this confusing time.

• **Growing up and being responsible:** When you go through puberty, you may feel pressure from older boys and men, from other girls, from the internet or television, to have a boyfriend, to drink alcohol, to try smoking cigarettes or take other drugs. You might be called names because you have not had sexual relations with boys. These behaviours are risky and not really 'cool'. Remember it is your body and your choice! Be a STAR instead. See, Think, Act and Remain safe.

• It is hard to say no when you feel this pressure, but talk to your sisters, aunts, mother, grandmothers, female teachers and health workers. They can help you to manage peer pressure and guide you through this confusing time.

Why should you avoid early sex?

Early sex is a risk for girls below 18 years

- You stand the risk of being exposed to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or HIV and AIDS which has no cure. If you get an STI or HIV while you are pregnant, you can pass it on to your baby.
- Early sex can lead to teenage pregnancies. Many girls who get pregnant drop out of school. This affects your future. Without an education, you have limited options in life to be successful. As a single mother, finding enough money to support you and your baby can be difficult.
- Early pregnancy can make you feel shameful, guilty, lonely, depressed, stressed and rejected by your family and friends.

Is it true that if I delay having sex I won't be able to have children?

• That's not true! Early sex is a risk for a young girl's health. Your body is not fully developed to carry a baby. This can lead to serious health problems for both you and the baby. The baby could come out too early or be very small and not fully developed. Both you and your baby could die. You may not be able to have children in future. You will be able to have healthier children if you wait until you are older and your body is stronger.