

# GROWING

A Booklet for Girls

Fourth Grade

## Changes

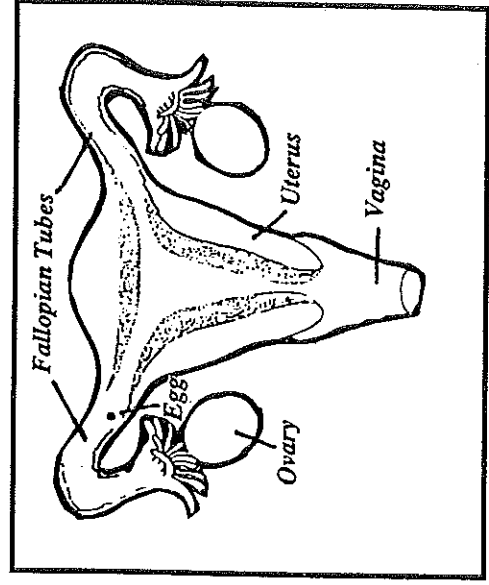
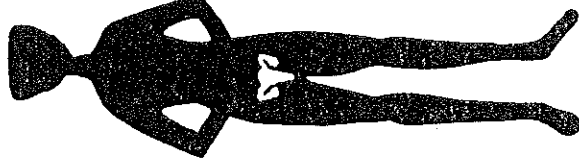
Let's talk about changes. Let's think back to the youngest age you can remember. What are changes that have hap-

pened since then? The years between 10 and 14 may be a lot of fun. But physically they may be among the most puzzling years of your life. That's because you are turning from a child into a young adult. Changes are taking place, both in your mind and your body.

We call this change puberty. Puberty is the different changes that occur in your body and feelings. You grow a lot and start to menstruate. Your breast and hips get bigger. You grow new body hair. You may have new feelings that you don't always understand.

Starting at puberty your body begins to make special hormones that cause it to change. One special hormone is called estrogen. Estrogen is responsible for many changes that take place in your body. Girls change at different ages. Most girls change at the ages of 9 to 13. Puberty does not make you better or worse but only different.

This diagram shows the organs of your reproductive system.



## GROWING

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These are the roles they play in your menstrual cycle:  
**Ovaries** These two organs, each about the size of a walnut, hold the ova, or egg cells. Each ovary has about 200,000 egg cells in it, but each egg is only as big as the point of a needle. About once a month, hormones cause one ovary to release an egg cell. This is called **ovulation**.

**Fallopian tubes** After the egg cell is released from the ovary, it goes into the nearby fallopian tube, swept in by the waving "fingers" on the end of the tube. While it's in the fallopian tube, the egg cell can be fertilized by a sperm cell from a male. The tube leads to the uterus.

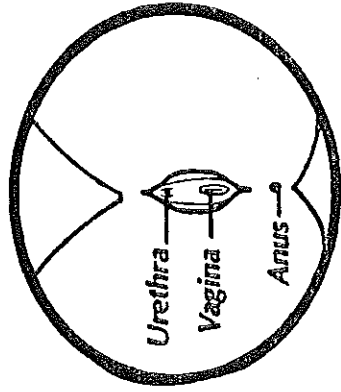
**Uterus** This is a hollow organ which holds the egg cell if it has been fertilized. While the ovary is releasing the egg, hormones are causing the uterus to build up a thick lining of tiny blood vessels and soft tissue. If the egg is fertilized that month, it will go into the uterus, implant itself into this lining, and draw nourishment from it while growing into a baby.

Usually, the egg is not fertilized, and the lining is not needed. The lining then breaks down into a reddish fluid and slowly flows out of the body through the vagina over a period of three to seven days. The time of this flow is called the menstrual period; during this time, you are "menstruating" or "having your period." After the menstrual period ends, the cycle of releasing the egg and building up the lining begins all over again.

**Vagina** The passage from the uterus to the outside of the body, through which the menstrual flow comes out. (Sometimes, small amounts of clear or whitish fluid also come out, especially around the time of ovulation or right before your menstrual period. This is called vaginal discharge.) When a baby is born, it is delivered through the vagina.

*\*Most vaginal discharges are normal and nothing to worry about. However, if you notice a burning or itching sensation, or if the discharge has a strong, unpleasant odor, you should check with your doctor.*

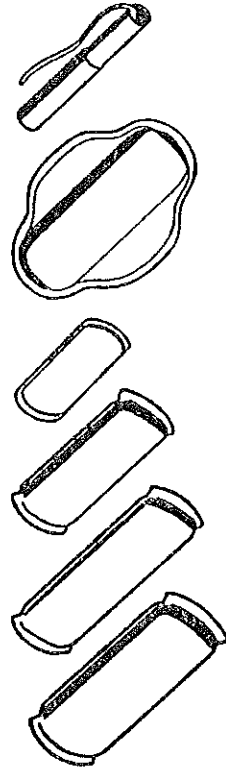
The entrance to the vagina is between the urethra where urine comes out, and the anus, through which bowel movements are passed. If you held a mirror so that it reflected between your legs, you'd see these three openings. They look something like this:



This whole area is called the genital area.

### Hygiene Products

There are two types of menstrual protection: pads and tampons. Pads are worn outside the body. Most have adhesive on the back, so that they can be attached to underwear; these types of pads are easy to use and comfortable for girls who are just starting to menstruate. They're tapered so that they don't show under clothes. Tampons are inserted into the vagina. There are many sizes and styles. You will want to talk with your mother about the type which will be best for you.

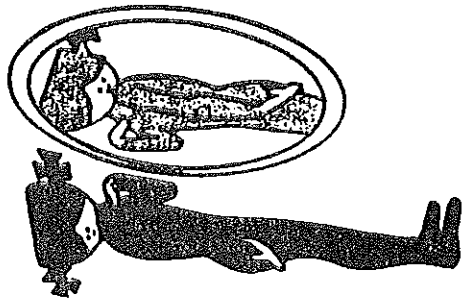


## Your First Period

Girls don't all get their first periods at the same age. Some girls begin menstruating when they are 9 and some don't begin until they're 16. Every girl has her own internal clock. Generally, you can expect your first period about two years after your breasts first start to develop, and soon after you have some hair under your arms and in your pubic area. Vaginal discharge is also a good indication that you could begin to menstruate soon. If you get your period earlier or later than any of your friends, it doesn't make you "normal" and them "not normal" - or vice versa. It's normal for each girl to be a little bit different!

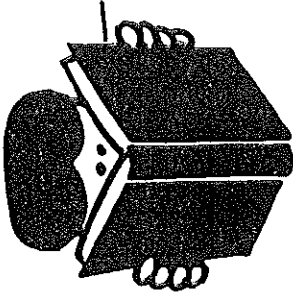
Don't be surprised if your periods don't come on a regular schedule for a while. For example, after your first period, your next one may not come till two or three months later. It usually takes about two years for a girl's body to figure out how often she will have a period. It's nothing to worry about.

Most women have their periods about every 28 days, but some have their periods every 22 days or even every 43. Shorter and longer menstrual cycles are normal, too. There's nothing to worry about.



## Having Your Period - What's It Like?

A menstrual period usually lasts from three to seven days. Again, this can vary from girl to girl. The flow is typically heavier at the beginning of your period than at the end. Over an entire period, you'll menstruate about half a cup of menstrual fluid (which contains the endometrial lining and blood). There are only about two ounces of blood in that fluid. Your body contains more than a hundred ounces of blood, and it quickly replaces the little bit you lose during your period.



## Cramps

Some girls will experience discomfort during their periods, called "menstrual cramps." The most common complaint is cramping in the lower abdomen. Sometimes the pain feels like a constant dull ache, or like a feeling of heaviness. You may also feel some achiness in your lower back and inner thighs.

What can you do to relieve cramps? Lots!

- Exercise. Take a long walk or go swimming.
- Deep-breathing exercises are good, too.
- Take a warm bath. This will ease and relax your body.
- Place a heating pad on your abdomen.

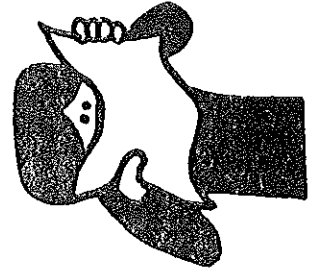
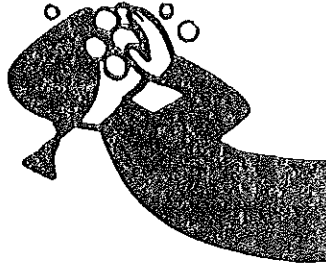
## Part of Growing Up Is Learning to Respect Your Body

Now that you're growing up and going through puberty, you have to start taking care of your body differently. You can't just throw some water on your face and pretend it's clean, or skip taking a daily shower or bath.

Your glands are becoming more active than ever. The sweat glands under your arms and in your genital area start producing more sweat during puberty. When sweat comes into contact with bacteria on your skin, it can create an unpleasant odor.

To wash the sweat and bacteria away, you need to take a shower or bath every day and after any strenuous physical activity, such as gym or dance class. After you bathe, it's a good idea to use a deodorant or an antiperspirant. And, of course, put on clean clothes.

Another good reason to bathe every day is that your oil glands - especially those on your face, back, shoulders, and chest - become more active during puberty.



## Pimples

For many preteens, pimples are a part of puberty. Sometimes they get them no matter what they do – and no one can say exactly why. People used to think that pimples were caused by eating too much chocolate or greasy food, but that doesn't seem to be the case – although you should avoid eating too much of those kinds of foods for nutritional reasons.

Still, there are things you can do to keep pimples from becoming a big problem. Keeping clean is the most important, so make sure you wash your face (gently – don't rub it raw!) at least twice a day. If the problem persists, you can try an anti-acne cream, lotion or cleansing pad. If none of this works and acne is still a problem, you should talk to your doctor.

The sebaceous glands on the scalp are also very active during puberty. This can make your hair greasy, dull, and stringy. Chances are, you'll need to shampoo more often – maybe even every day.

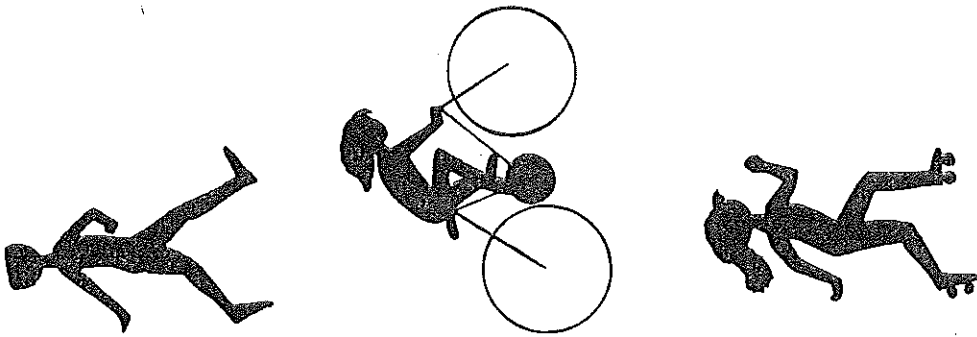
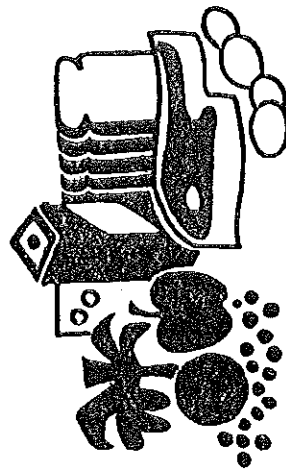
Finally, your body's not really clean unless your mouth is clean, too! To keep your teeth and gums healthy and to make sure your breath is fresh, you need to brush your teeth, gums and tongue regularly. And don't forget to floss!

## Nutrition

During puberty, eating a well-balanced diet is more important than going on a diet. In fact, because your body is going through so many changes, eating right is more important than ever before. And "eating right" means choosing a variety of foods from the four basic food

groups – especially foods that are rich in calcium (like milk, yogurt, and cheese) and iron (like beef, turkey, beans, and eggs).

Some weight gain is normal during puberty. Not only are you growing taller, but the shape of your body is changing, too. Nature seems to want adult women to have a higher percentage of body fat than young girls have. So there's nothing to worry about unless you really are substantially overweight. If this is the case, a well-supervised diet may be a good idea. But you and your parents should consult a doctor first.



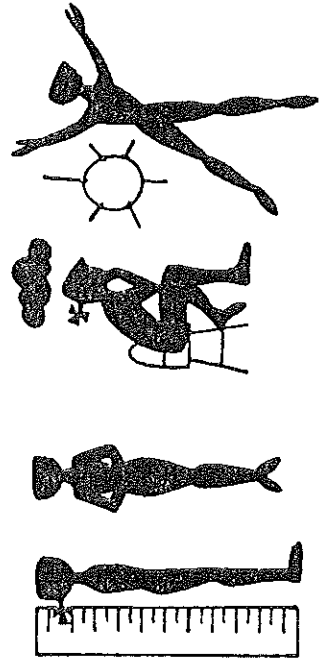
## Exercise

The best way to keep your weight down and stay in terrific shape is to exercise. Exercise also gives you more stamina and flexibility and strengthens your heart, lungs, and bones.

You don't have to make the team to get good exercise (although team sports can be a great way to stay fit). There are lots of physical activities you can do with a friend or all by yourself, including:

- Running
- Swimming
- Jumping rope
- Fast dancing
- Roller-skating
- Fast walking
- Bicycling
- Skiing
- Climbing stairs
- Ice skating

You will experience many changes in your life. Taking care of yourself and knowing what to expect can make growing up feel pretty good.



## Glossary

Here are the words we mentioned in this booklet and a few others that you may have heard and want to know the meaning.

### Adolescence

(ad-oh-LESS-ens) - The period of physical and psychological development from the beginning of puberty to maturity.

**Anus** (AY-nus) - The opening of the rectum through which solid waste is passed out of the body.

**Cervix** (Sir-vix) - The lower section of the uterus that protrudes into the vagina.

**Egg** - Also called an ovum, it's the female reproductive cell.

**Estrogen** (ES-troh-jen) - Female hormone produced in the ovaries that is responsible for many of the changes that take place during puberty.

**Fallopian tubes** (fal-LOH-pee-un) - Two tubes connecting the ovaries to the uterus through which the egg travels.

**Fertilization** (fur-till-ih-SAY-shun) - The joining of a female egg and a male sperm to form an embryo.

**Genitals** (JEN-ih-talz) - The external reproductive organs.

**Hormones** (HOR-moans) - Chemical substances - produced by organs called glands - that regulate the growth and activity of body tissues and organs.

**Menstrual cycle** (MEN-stroo-al SIGH-cu) - The process of ovulation and menstruation that occurs approximately once a month beginning at puberty and ending with menopause.



**Menstrual fluid** (MEN-stroo-al FLOO-id) - The uterine lining, consisting of spongy tissue and blood, that flows out of your body through the vagina during your period.

**Menstruation** (men-stroo-A-shun) - The period during which the uterine lining - the endometrium - passes out of the body through the vagina.

**Ovaries** (OH-va-reez) - Two glands, one on either side of the uterus, that contain a woman's egg cells and produce the hormones estrogen and progesterone.

**Ovulation** (oh-view-LAY-shun) - The moment at which an egg is released from an ovary.

**Period** - The time when a woman is menstruating.

**Pituitary gland** (pih-TOO-ih-terry) - The gland at the base of the brain which is responsible for producing hormones that regulate menstruation and the development of puberty.

**Puberty** (PEW-bur-tee) - The stage of life during which human males and females become sexually mature.

**Pubic area** (PEW-bik) - The area where the legs join the body and pubic hair appears during puberty.

**Urethra** (you-REE-thrah) - the tube that carries urine from the bladder out of the body. In males, semen also exits the body through the urethra.

**Uterus** (YOU-ter-us) - Also called the womb. Muscular organ lined with soft nourishing tissue that carries the fetus until birth.

**Vagina** (va-JEYE-na) - The flexible passageway leading from the cervix to the outside of the body, through which menstrual fluid flows.