



# Physical Changes ...Girls Part II

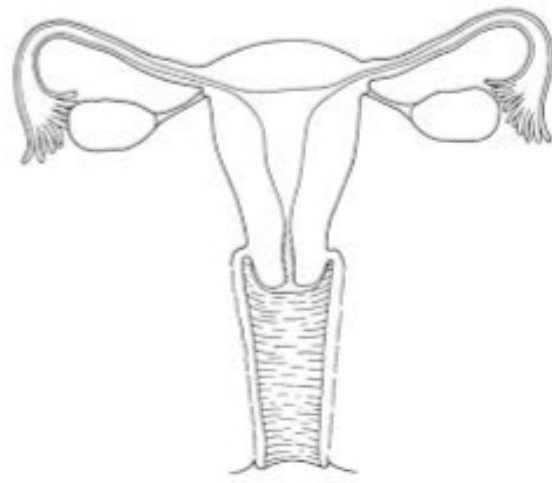
Usually develop about the age of 10 to 14 years old  
(but as early as 8 or as late as 15)



## Girl's Reproductive System

Besides the changes you will notice on the outside of your body, some miraculous changes are occurring deep within your body in your reproductive system. Your reproductive system is made up of some special organs. It includes:

- Ovaries - two small glands about the size of almonds located on either side of the uterus.
- Ovum - or eggs are one of the ingredients of new life. Smaller than the dot on an "i" there are over 250,000 ovum in the ovaries from the time a girl is born. About one every month ripens and is released.
- Fallopian Tubes - connected to the upper right and left sides of the uterus, these two finger-like passageways go from the ovaries to the uterus. The inside opening of the Fallopian Tube is about the size of two hairs on your head.
- Uterus - is a muscular organ about the size and shape of an up-side-down pear. It is also called the womb to signify it is a special holy place where the baby grows.
- In the prayer, "Hail Mary" when we talk about "the fruit of thy womb, Jesus," we are remembering the place in Mary's body where Jesus grew.
- Vagina - is a muscular tube about 4 to 5 inches long which connects the uterus with the outside of the body. The vagina is also called the birth canal during the delivery of a baby.
- Vulva - two folds of skin on the outside of the body.



**Menstruation:** After your body has developed, an ovum will mature and be released from one of your ovaries each month. The ovum travels down your Fallopian Tube, where it looks for the other ingredient of new life. A period (another word for menstruation) usually lasts from 3 to 7 days, and about 2 weeks after the start of the period a new egg is released.

During the menstrual cycle, one of the eggs comes out of an ovary and begins its trip through the Fallopian Tube, ending up in the uterus (the uterus is also called the womb).

Before the egg is released from the ovary, the uterus builds up a lining with extra blood and tissue. If the egg is fertilized by a sperm cell (this is called conception) a new life begins. It stays in the uterus and grows, in the special place God prepared for him or her. The baby uses that extra blood and tissue to keep it healthy and protected as he or she develops.



Most of the time, though, the egg is only passing through. When the egg doesn't get fertilized, the uterus no longer needs the extra blood and tissue, so it leaves the body through the vagina as a menstrual period.



Beginning with their first period, many girls expect their menstrual cycles to occur exactly on schedule. But that rarely happens. During the first year (and sometimes longer) some girls have periods that seem to have no schedule. Cycles can be as short as 3 weeks; others can be as long as 6 weeks - or sometimes even longer. It may take a while for your periods to become regular (every 3 to 5 weeks). It is important to keep a personal calendar and mark the first day of each period. Your cycle is counted from the first day of your period to the first day of your next period. This helps you understand more about your body and allows you to be prepared, especially when

traveling away from home.

Even after your periods do become regular, it is not unusual for a girl to miss a period if she is sick, under a lot of stress, exercising heavily, has a poor diet, or is nervous about something. Of course, more than any other reason, pregnancy can cause a girl's period to stop.

Some girls bleed heavier than others during their periods. But don't worry, you won't bleed too much. You have about 5 quarts of blood in your body and you only lose 1 to 3 ounces (less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup) of it during your period. However, if your period is really heavy (you soak more than 6 to 8 pads or tampons in a single day), talk to your doctor.



You may also feel some discomfort before, during, or after your period. Some common symptoms include:

- cramps
- bloating
- soreness or swelling in your breasts
- headaches
- sudden mood changes, such as sadness or irritability depression

Vaginal Discharge is another sign that puberty is beginning. You may notice a yellowish discharge from your vagina. After your period begins, you may also notice a clear or whitish discharge between periods. This is normal. If the discharge is itchy or smelly, you may need to see a doctor.



## Supplies:



**Pads** - Most girls start with pads. A pad is just several layers of soft cotton material made to absorb liquid. It has an adhesive strip on one side. You just peel the strip off and place that side against the crotch of your underwear. There are different sizes and shapes (maxis, supers, winged, pantliners, minis, contoured, scented, unscented), so ask your mom to help you find one that is right for you. Don't flush used pads down the toilet. They can stop up the plumbing. Wrap them in toilet tissue and put them in the trash.

**Tampons** - A tampon is a narrow tube of absorbent cotton that is inserted into your vagina to collect the blood as it's leaving your body. It is recommended that you wait at least six months from when your period begins before you try tampons. Start with and only use the Junior, Lites, or Slims, these are specially made for your body.

The first time you try a tampon, be at home, allow plenty of time and have your mom near by, if possible. The more relaxed you are, the easier it will be to insert the tampon. If properly inserted, it shouldn't hurt. Make sure if you do wear a tampon, you change to a new tampon or pad every four to eight hours. Wash your hands before and after you insert a tampon.

