



Always Changing & Growing Up

Everything you need to know about puberty

Grades 5-6

always

Table of contents

Growing Up - What a trip

Your body is changing

Puberty: Why bodies start to change	4
Body changes that happen	5

What happens in bodies with female sex organs

Understanding the menstrual cycle	10
Period FAQs	12
An overview of period protection	13
Pads	14
Tampons	16
Discharge & Daily Liners	20
Premenstrual Syndrome and Period Cramps	21

What happens in bodies with male sex organs

Physical changes	22
FAQs	24

Staying confident

Sex, gender & society

Staying healthy

Digital Identity and Growing Up Online

Support Systems

Find out more



Growing up

What a trip!

You're growing up. Growing independent, growing stronger and growing into an adult. Puberty is a time full of changes to the way you look and the way you feel; it's when you can learn to be a better leader, a better friend and a better you.

Puberty can start as early as 7 years old for some individuals or as late as 14 for others. It can be a really confusing time, as you might be wondering what's happening to you and why.

These changes are completely natural;
they happen to all of us.

The goal of this guide is to give you all the information you need to navigate puberty with confidence. It also shares helpful tips and advice from experts.

Simply read on to find out everything you've always wanted to know about puberty and periods.

Yours,

The Always Team

Your body is changing

Puberty

Puberty is a time of physical and emotional change that happens as children grow and mature. These changes are natural and everyone experiences them.

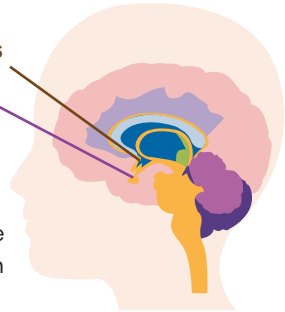
Puberty usually starts occurring between the ages of 7 and 14. Keep in mind, the onset of puberty is different for everyone. For some it happens early, while for others it can take longer. Your time is the right time!

So, why do we all change?

Puberty exists to prepare the body for reproducing, and it actually starts in the brain! During puberty, two parts of the brain called the hypothalamus and the pituitary gland start making a lot more hormones.

Hormones are chemical substances that act as messengers in the body and make changes happen. Some hormones will make your bones grow longer, others will guide the development of your brain or the changes in your reproductive system.

Hypothalamus
Pituitary Gland



Did you know? Everyone produces all the same hormones, but in different levels. Some people have more testosterone and some have more estrogen. That's one of the things that makes everyone different!

Changes during puberty

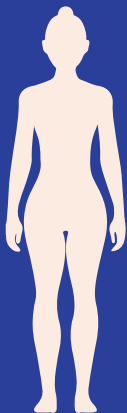
Now you know why changes occur, let's take a look at what changes children go through during puberty.

Bodies with female sex organs

- Breasts start to grow
- Vaginal discharge begins
- Hips and thighs broaden
- Labia may grow and widen
- Menstruation begins

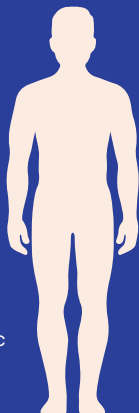
Bodies with male sex organs

- Breasts can grow
- Voice cracks and gets deeper
- Adam's apple enlarges
- Shoulders get larger and body gets more muscular
- Chest hair may appear
- Penis and testicles grow



Shared

- Emotions and feelings may seem stronger
- Brain development improves the way you think and understand
- New feelings of attraction may begin
- Height increases
- Skin gets oilier and pimples may appear
- Sweating increases, body develops own odour
- Body hair grows: face, armpit, leg and pubic



These changes can be tough for many people, so it's great to support each other as best you can through this stage in life.

How to deal with all these changes?

With all these changes going on, it's important to learn how to keep your body healthy. As you're growing up, it's time to start making your own choices and developing healthy habits.

Skin care

As the skin on your face gets oilier you may start getting pimples, blackheads or acne. If you get acne, it doesn't mean you're not clean. Most of the time, it's related to your new hormones that cause the extra oiliness, and it is also genetic.

The good news is that developing a regular skin care routine can help!

You can start with these few tips:

- The first step to a good skin care routine, whether you have acne or not, is to wash. A daily shower gets rid of the dirt and oil on your skin. To wash your face, use a gentle cleanser and your fingertips. There is no need to scrub your skin hard – rough pads or cloths can actually worsen acne.
- Don't squeeze any pimples because this can cause scars and may even create more acne.
- Don't get too much sun as this can make acne worse. Use sunscreen when you are out in the sun.
- Keep your skin healthy by eating a healthy diet, being physically active and getting plenty of rest (more tips on this later!).
- If you feel you need a product to take care of your skin, talk to a Doctor to see which one would be right for you.

Smile care

Part of staying healthy is making sure you keep your teeth clean. Make sure you brush them properly every morning and every night with a good toothpaste and a soft bristled brush.

Toothpaste helps fight cavities, strengthen teeth enamel and freshen breath.

For best results, brush from gum to teeth and don't forget your tongue. You should also **floss** daily in between your teeth and use a **mouthwash** to help reach places that brushing may have missed.



Hair care

Some people need to wash their hair more often during puberty because their body produces more oil. If your hair becomes oilier you may want to follow this simple two-step routine to keep it clean:

1. Wash with shampoo

A good shampoo will clean your hair by removing deposits such as dirt, sebum (an oily secretion of the sebaceous glands) and styling products. It can also protect it from damage and nourish it too!

2. Then apply conditioner

The role of the conditioner is to untangle your hair and make it easier to manage. It will also keep it moisturized and protect it from damage.

Sweat and body odour

Just as some glands start producing more oil during puberty, your sweat glands produce more perspiration. This is important because it helps regulate the temperature of your body – as the sweat evaporates away from your body it takes the heat with it! But, sweat can smell unpleasant when it comes in contact with bacteria on the skin. This smell is known as body odour.

To help prevent body odour you can:

1. Wash regularly with soap– at least once a day and especially after physical activity.
2. Use a deodorant or antiperspirant on clean skin.

Deodorants? Antiperspirants? What's the difference?

Deodorants are basically perfumes that help mask or cover your body odour. **Antiperspirants** help stop the body odour from developing by reducing sweat. Both come in many different styles and fragrances and are usually combined in one product. If you can't find a product that works for you talk with your doctor.



Body hair

During puberty, thicker and darker hair begins to appear in many new places, such as legs, underarms and in the pubic area. Having body hair is natural. Some people may decide to remove it, some may choose not to.

Breasts

Breasts begin to grow in bodies that produce high levels of estrogen. Those with male sex organs who produce higher levels of testosterone may also experience breast growth - and it's natural. It usually involves a little enlargement of the nipple area or a small amount of breast growth.

Regular preventive care

You've probably been going to the **doctor for checkups** all your life, so it should come as no surprise that you'll need to keep doing that. Regular healthcare is important, so be sure to visit your doctor and dentist on a regular basis.



What happens in bodies with female sex organs

Some of the most significant changes that happen during puberty are the changes that happen to our reproductive organs.

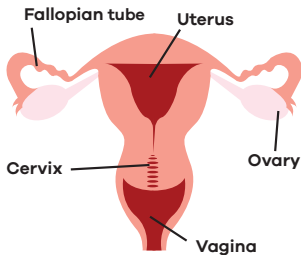
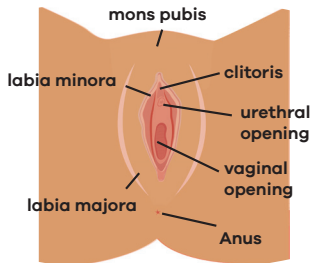
Your period

During puberty, the body starts to produce more estrogen and progesterone. Estrogen causes your reproductive organs to grow, mature, and prepare to start your menstrual cycle. Every month, your body will prepare for pregnancy. If no pregnancy occurs, the lining of your uterus (endometrium) will shed and leave your body as a period.

Even if your body is now ready for pregnancy, it doesn't mean you are! It's important to know why you get your period and what is happening inside your body. There are many other external factors to be considered for pregnancy and these include age, readiness, and much more.

Understanding your menstrual cycle

Your menstrual cycle is the time from the first day of bleeding in one cycle to the first day of bleeding in your next cycle. The average length of a menstrual cycle in the first few years is 21-45 days. After that, the normal length becomes 21-35 days, with the average length of a menstrual cycle being 28 days.

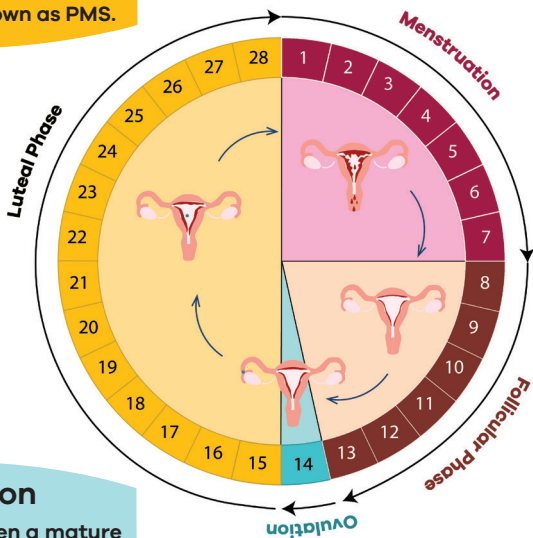


4 Pre-menstrual

The endometrium is thick and ready to receive a fertilized egg, but if fertilization does not happen, the lining is no longer needed. As a result, hormone levels change and the lining is shed. The hormones and shedding may cause symptoms known as PMS.

1 Menstruation

Your menstrual period, which is made of endometrial tissue, blood, and other fluids, exits the uterus through the cervix and vagina.



3 Ovulation

Ovulation occurs when a mature egg is released from the ovary.

The egg travels along the fallopian tube to the uterus. If a sperm fertilizes the egg, the cells can begin to form a pregnancy. Around the time of ovulation you may notice increased vaginal discharge.

2 Pre-ovulation

Each ovary holds thousands of eggs, and every month, rising hormone levels cause the ovary to produce a mature egg. During this time, estrogen causes the endometrium to get thicker.

Period FAQs

How long will my period last?

Well, it varies. For most, it usually lasts between 3 to 7 days.

I haven't started my period, am I late?

There is no right time for your first period to come. You're most likely to get it between the ages of 10 and 16, but everyone is different. If you haven't started your period by 16, talk to a trusted adult or doctor.

Why and how to keep track of my cycle

Everyone's menstrual cycle is unique. Keeping track of your cycle helps you understand how your body works and when your period will start. It can also be a big help for your doctor if you ever think there's a problem. Simply use a period calculator like the one on the Always website to keep track of your cycle.

What if my period is irregular?

Many people who menstruate have unpredictable periods for the first few cycles. But, once you've had a few periods, they should happen at least every 45 days, but no more often than every 21 days.

What is spotting?




Spotting is light vaginal bleeding that happens between periods. If it happens around your usual period (before or after), it can be normal. If it's happening often or unpredictably, you should check with your doctor.

How much blood will I shed?

An average of about 4 to 12 teaspoons of menstrual fluid is lost during a period. But only a small amount of that is blood. Since your body contains 4 litres of blood on average, it doesn't miss the little bit lost during a period – and your body makes up for it quickly. The first few days of your period are likely to be the heaviest and the last few days will get lighter. Your period blood won't all come out at the same time.

An overview of period protection

How do you deal with the menstrual fluid coming out of your vagina? There are lots of options. As you learn about them and try different things you'll be able to decide what works best for you.

Period Protection	Worn Inside or outside the body	Disposable or Reusable
 PADS	Outside	Disposable
LINERS	Outside	Disposable
 TAMPONS	Inside	Disposable
CUPS	Inside	Reusable
 MENSTRUAL UNDERWEAR	Outside	Reusable

Don't get caught by surprise

Before your cycle becomes regular, your period may happen unexpectedly. It's a really good idea to always be prepared – just in case – especially when you're not at home.

Below are some tips to make sure you're never caught off guard:

- Keep a pad or tampon in your **purse, backpack, locker** – or even just your pocket.
- Start **using a daily liner** a few days before your period is meant to start. It will help protect you by absorbing any spotting or light flow.
- If you get caught off guard, you can always use **rolled up toilet paper** until you can get a period protection.
- In case you don't have period protection on you, or can't afford it, you can always ask a trusted adult in your school to see if they have period products available.

And look out for others – have a pad or tampon on hand in case a friend is in need of period protection.

All you need to know about pads

Most individuals who menstruate start with pads to manage their period, as they're really easy to use. A pad is a piece of absorbent material that you stick to the inside of your underwear to absorb your menstrual flow.

Each brand of pads looks different but they share many similar features. For instance, check out what an Always pad looks like below. Remember, on most pads, the longer or wider part of the pad usually goes to the back.

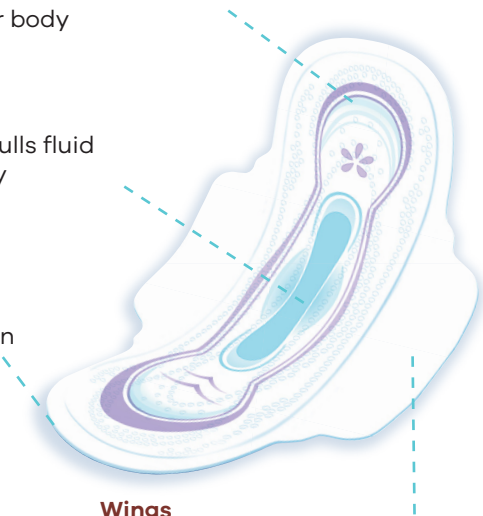
Hey, that shape looks familiar
that's because its contoured
to fit your body

Where'd it go?

An absorbent core pulls fluid
away from your body

Adhesive

for stay-put protection



Wings

Some pads have wings that wrap around underwear to help your pad stay in place and prevent from side leaks, enabling you to move freely

How to use a pad



1. Wash hands with soap and water before changing your pad.



2. Open the wrapper of your pad.



3. Detach the pad from its wrapper and, if the pad has one, the paper strip that covers the wings.



4. Attach the sticky part securely to the inside centre of your underwear. Wrap the wings around it. When done, wash your hands with soap and water.



Change your pad every 4 to 8 hours, or more often if your flow is heavy. Don't forget to use clean underwear every day; change them if they become soiled.

How to dispose of a pad

Trash it – don't flush it!



1. Fold the pad up & wrap it in the wrapper from your new pad, or in toilet paper if you don't have a wrapper available.

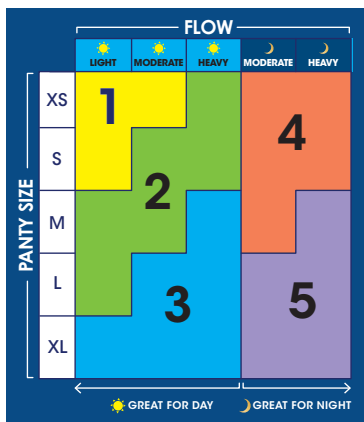


2. Put the wrapped up pad in the garbage and ensure the lid is closed once the product has been disposed.

Choosing a pad

It is important to choose a pad that will be the best fit for you. Pads have different shapes, lengths and level of absorbencies so you can choose yours according to your shape and flow.

The better it fits, the better it protects!

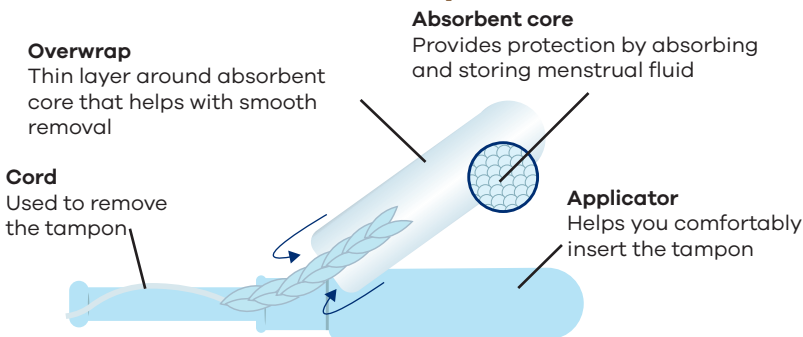


All you need to know about tampons

A tampon is a type of period protection made from soft materials that you insert in your vagina to soak up menstrual fluid before it leaves your body. Tampons can give you the protection and comfort you need to move freely, whether you're in class, on the field, or in the pool!

Keep in mind: Tampons go in your vagina (not your urethra). That means you can still pee while wearing a tampon, as the tampon does not go in the same hole as where your pee comes from!

Check out what a tampon looks like:



Which absorbency to choose?

Tampons come in different levels of absorbencies because everyone has different flows, that can change each day of their period!

💧 **LIGHT**

💧💧 **REGULAR**

💧💧💧 **SUPER**

💧💧💧💧 **SUPER PLUS**

💧💧💧💧💧 **ULTRA**

We recommend you start with using a regular absorbency tampon. If you find it's difficult to remove your tampon after 4-8 hours and there are still white parts on your tampon when you remove it, try switching to a lower absorbency. If you find you're having to change it very frequently, try switching to a higher absorbency.

Trash it – don't flush it!

Too many people still believe tampons, wrappers or applicators can be flushed in the toilet. This can cause the toilet to clog and is also harmful for the environment. Good habits make a difference. You can contribute to the care for the environment by not flushing your period products and disposing them in the garbage instead.



What's TSS?

TSS, or Toxic Shock Syndrome, is a rare but serious infection that can be fatal. It has been associated with tampon use. It's caused by a certain type of bacteria that may live on healthy skin, but become a problem if they grow too rapidly.

TSS is treatable, but the earlier you catch it the better.

Be aware of the warning signs:

- Sudden high fever (usually over 39°C)
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Sunburn-like rash
- Dizziness
- Muscle ache
- Fainting/near fainting when standing


Remove your tampon and contact a doctor if you have one or more of the above warning signs.


Although TSS is rare, here are a few ways to reduce your risk of getting it:


- Use the lowest absorbency necessary for your flow
- Use various forms of period protection throughout the duration of your period
- Look out for the warning signs above




How to use a tampon


1  Wash your hands well. Then unwrap the tampon. Find a comfy position. Most either sit on the toilet with their knees apart or stand with their knees slightly bent.


2  Take a deep breath and relax. Hold the applicator securely.

3  Find the little grip marks on the applicator. Hold them with your thumb and middle finger. With the string hanging down insert the plastic tube into your vagina at a slight upward angle. Gently slide the applicator inside your vagina until your fingers touch your body.

4  With your pointer finger, push the smaller plastic tube all the way in; this slides the tampon out of the applicator and into the right place.

5  To remove the applicator, keep your fingers on the grip marks and pull down gently, leaving the tampon inside you and the string hanging outside. If you got it right you should not even feel it! If it is uncomfortable, chances are it is not inserted far enough. Don't worry - either use your finger to push it in a little further, or gently pull it out and try again with a new tampon.

6  Congrats, you got it! Now get rid of the applicator. Place it back into the wrapper and throw it in the bin, NOT the toilet. Wash your hands after inserting the tampon.

7  To remove your tampon, gently pull the string of your tampon to remove it and dispose it in the bin. Once you're done, wash your hands with soap and water.

Top tips!

- Change your tampon every 4-8 hours or more often if your flow is heavy.
- Ensure that the last tampon is removed at the end of your period.
- Create a reminder to help you remember when to change your tampon.



FAQ's about tampons

Can I use a tampon at night?

YES! Insert a new tampon before you go to bed and replace it immediately when you wake up. If you sleep for more than 8 hours, use a pad instead.

Can I use tampons when I play sports or go swimming?

YES! Tampons will keep you protected through all your kicks, jumps, and dunks. And yes, you can even go swimming!

Do tampons hurt?

You shouldn't feel a thing! If it's uncomfortable, you probably did not insert it far enough, which is an easy fix. Use your finger to push it in a little further, or gently pull it out and try inserting a new one.

Are tampons easy to take out?

YES! The removal string is sewn on tight, so just pull it in order to remove the tampon and it will easily slip out! If you feel a strong resistance, the tampon might not be full yet. You might want to switch to a lower absorbent tampon for next time.

Am I old enough to use tampons?

As soon as you start having your period, you're old enough to use tampons and your body is ready. Just make sure you feel ready.

Do I need to wear a pad and a tampon?

No. Tampons are designed to work on their own. But while you're getting used to tampons, you can use a daily liner as well.



Discharge & daily liners

Discharge

You've probably noticed that your underwear sometimes gets stained with a creamy white/yellowish fluid. This discharge comes from your vagina and is **natural**. It is a sign that your body is functioning properly. It helps prevent the vagina from drying out and protects it from infections.

The amount of vaginal discharge can vary during the menstrual cycle as hormone levels in the body change. But if your discharge is significantly different than usual, has a bad smell or you experience itching in your vaginal area you should talk to a trusted adult and go see a doctor.

Daily liners

While vaginal discharge is natural and healthy, it might make you feel less fresh or uncomfortable. That's where a daily liner can help! It's an absorbent liner that you simply stick in the inside of your underwear. Unlike pads (which are designed to be used only during your period) daily liners are designed to be worn every day.

Daily liners are perfect for:

- Keeping your underwear clean
- Absorbing vaginal discharge
- Absorbing perspiration
- Extra protection when you're getting used to tampons
- Protection for light period days or spotting

What do I do with it after it has been used?

To dispose of your daily liner, treat it like a used pad - wrap it up and then put it in the garbage. Never throw it in the toilet.

Premenstrual syndrome & period cramps

PMS

Between ovulation and the first day of your period, your hormone levels go up and down. These fluctuations can sometimes make you feel more emotional and cause physical symptoms. These symptoms are usually called Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS).

Common PMS symptoms you might experience:

- Feeling swollen or bloated
- Change in appetite
- Breast tenderness
- Abdominal cramps and feeling nauseous
- Acne or skin rash
- Mood changes: feeling sad, tearful, tired or irritable
- Headaches

How to deal with PMS

- Chart your symptoms and be aware of when you may experience them
- Get enough rest
- Exercise
- Take time for yourself
- Practice deep breathing exercises
- Eat foods rich in fibre and low in sugar and fat
- Listen to your body

Period cramps

Cramps can occur just before or during your period when the muscle of your uterus contracts to make the lining of your uterus leave your vagina as menstrual flow.

How to treat them

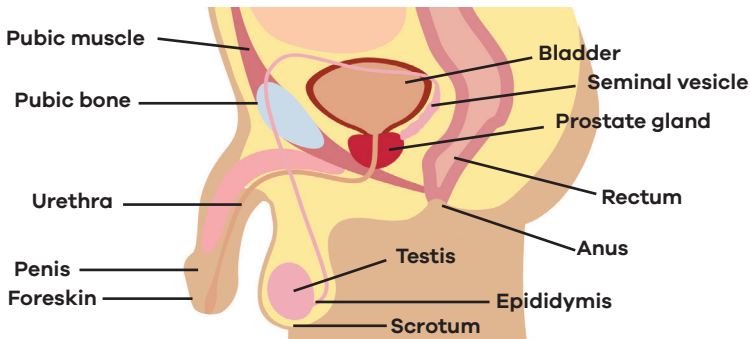
- Moderate exercise and stretching
- Use a hot water bottle or warm towel on your belly
- Take a warm bath
- Practice deep breathing exercises

How to help someone with PMS and cramps

- Do not tease by saying "oh, it must be that time of the month again".
- Remember that not everyone feels the same and how they feel can change from one period to another - try not to make assumptions about their feelings.

What happens in bodies with male sex organs

During puberty, your brain will signal to your body to make more androgens (reproductive hormones), especially testosterone. Testosterone does a lot of things: it makes your penis and testicles grow bigger, causes the growth of pubic hair, causes more frequent erections, and encourages the testicles to start making sperm.



Erections

Erections are when the penis becomes harder and sticks up because parts of it fill up with blood. This happens throughout life, even as babies, but at puberty, they become more common and may happen randomly for no reason at all. Sometimes spontaneous erections can make you feel embarrassed – just remember they are natural and will occur less as you get older.

ERECT PENIS



Sperm

Sperm are the reproductive cell that can fertilize an egg to create a pregnancy. Sperm are made in the testicles, which hang outside your body in a sac (scrotum), just beneath your penis. The testes make a lot of sperm – about 1,000 sperm per second. Sperm are stored in the epididymis, which is the tube you can feel at the back of each testicle.

Sperm are best produced **at a cooler temperature** than normal body temperature. Because of this, the scrotum and testicles hang outside your body to stay cool. If you are cold, your scrotum shrinks to pull the testicles in closer to your body for warmth. When it is very hot, they may hang lower.

Ejaculation

Sperm are released from the epididymis and move through the sperm ducts toward the penis. Along the way, sperm mix with fluid produced by the seminal vesicles and prostate gland, so they can move more easily. The sperm and this fluid are called **semen**. It is whitish and sticky.

Semen leaves the penis through the urethra. This is the tube that runs through the middle of your penis. Urine also leaves the body through the urethra, but never at the same time as semen.

When semen spurts out the penis, it's called an **ejaculation**. It happens when muscles at the base of the penis start to expand and contract. This pushes the semen through the urethra and out through the tip of the penis.

Remember – Even if your body is now ready to fertilize an egg, it doesn't mean you are! It's important to know why you get erections and what is happening inside your body. There are many other external factors to be considered and these include age, readiness, and much more!

FAQs

Do individuals stop having erections when they get older?

No, healthy individuals of all ages with a penis can get erections. They occur more commonly during and after puberty.

Does it matter what size your penis is?

Not at all! Penises do vary in length and shape from person to person.

What is circumcision?

This is a minor surgical procedure, usually performed soon after birth, which removes all or part of the foreskin of the penis. A circumcision is not usually considered medically necessary, but it may be performed for religious or cultural reasons, or because it makes it easier to keep the penis clean, as it helps to prevent the growth of bacteria. Those individuals who are uncircumcised should wash under the foreskin every day. Remember – circumcised or not, the penis works the same.

What are wet dreams?

Sometimes you can ejaculate when you are asleep. This is called a nocturnal emission, more commonly known as a “wet dream”. Usually they happen without disturbing your sleep – you may just notice that your pajamas or sheets feel sticky when you wake up. This is natural. You will experience them less frequently after your body has gone through puberty, because as you grow older you’ll start having more control over your body. If you have a wet dream, be sure to change your pajamas or sheets.

Staying confident

Your brain is changing too!

While changes to your body are more evident, there's a lot of changes happening to your brain, too! You develop new, stronger emotions and these changes can affect your confidence. This is normal and there are supports available to help with these thoughts. Talk to a teacher, your doctor, or a trusted family member.

What is self-confidence?

Self-confidence is a feeling of trust in ourselves, in our abilities and in our judgement. When we feel confident, we believe in ourselves and our choices. Confidence helps us to be positive and face challenges head on.

Why is self-confidence important?

Self-confidence is important because it helps us lead happy and successful lives where we feel fulfilled. It helps us achieve our goals, enjoy healthy relationships and foster our personal growth.

Can we build self-confidence?

Yes! While there are some factors that influence how confident you feel that you can't change, like how you are treated by others, there are plenty of things you do have control over like:

- The choices you make
- The risks you take
- How you think about and respond to challenges and setbacks

Be a team player

Joining a team or a club can improve self-confidence as you experience the support of working towards a shared goal with others. You'll practise skills again and again and learn through failure – all while making friends and having fun!

Learn to love the skin you're in

Going through puberty and experiencing changes to your body can be hard on your self-confidence but remember that everything you're going through is normal and our bodies come in all kinds of shapes and sizes.

Build your brain power & embrace the growth mindset

Your brain is like a muscle, so you need to exercise it. When you take on challenges and practice until you overcome them, neurons in your brain create new and stronger connections. And when your brain gets stronger, your skills do too.


The attitudes and beliefs we have about ourselves are often referred to as a mindset and they can shape our view of the world. A psychologist named Carol Dweck describes two types of mindsets that can have a big impact on how we live our lives: a growth mindset and a fixed mindset.

What is a fixed mindset?

With a fixed mindset, we assume that basic qualities like our intelligence and talents are fixed traits that we have no control over. We'll say things like, "you either have it, or you don't" and will stop trying when faced with a challenge.

What is a growth mindset?

With a growth mindset, we believe that new abilities can be developed through practice. We just have to keep trying and learn from our mistakes. On average, people with a growth mindset do better in the face of challenges and are generally more successful.

Growth Mindset		Fixed Mindset	
CHALLENGING YOURSELF	Embrace challenges		Avoid opportunities
FACING CRITICISM	Learn from feedback		Ignore useful feedback
MAKING AN EFFORT	See effort as key to success		See effort as useless
OVERCOMING OBSTACLES	A misstep is a step forward		A misstep is a reason to give up
WHEN OTHERS SUCCEED	Find inspiration in their performance		Find inspiration in their performance



Embrace challenges as an opportunity to learn, grow and gain experience

- It's okay to feel scared; remind yourself of all the things you've achieved in the past.
- Break challenges down into smaller, more manageable steps so they don't feel so overwhelming.
- See learning as "brain training"! Like any other muscle, the brain can be trained. When we take on challenges and keep practising until we overcome them, our brain cells grow and make more connections.
- Never stop learning; set a new goal every time you accomplish an existing one.

Reframe failure



- Replace the word "failing" with the word "learning".
- Rather than seeing failure as "the end", try to see it as a stepping stone on the road to success.
- Remember that it takes time to learn!

Acknowledge and embrace your weakness as an opportunity to learn and grow



- Plan your goals taking into consideration:
 - Maybe you know that you tend to put things off until the last minute - try to plan around that by making modest goals and giving yourself a reasonable amount of time to accomplish them.

Learn to give and receive constructive feedback



- Think of feedback as a way to learn.
- Constructive feedback needs to be done with good intentions, because negative criticism can be harmful.
- If you have an area of weakness and someone is able to point that out to you, think of it as a gift that makes you aware of where you can improve.
- Don't be afraid to give constructive feedback to others, so that they also can learn and improve.



Be clear on WHY you're doing what you're doing, and remind yourself of that when the going gets tough

- Outline what your long-term goals or purpose are.
- Try to study and work with a purpose so you have the motivation to keep going.
- Remind yourself of your purpose whenever you need a motivation boost.



Look to others for inspiration

- Celebrate their achievements. If they can do it, so can you!
- Learn from their mistakes. Put yourself in their shoes for a moment and pretend that it was you making the mistake. What would you do? What would you be able to learn?



Update your language!

- The words we use affect how we think & feel and can make a huge difference.
- Try changing your language for an added confidence boost:

INSTEAD OF ...	SAY THIS ...
I can't do it!	I can't do it, YET!
I give up	I'll use a different strategy
I can't make this any better	I can always improve
I'll never be that smart	I will learn how to do this
I'm pretty good at science BUT I still don't understand some concepts	I'm pretty good at science AND I'm getting better every week

Practice I-D-E-A-L solution building

At times, it can be difficult to know what to think and how to act. Learning to make the right decision for you is an important part of growing up and feeling confident. To make decision-making easier, practice I-D-E-A-L solution building:



IDENTIFY the problem



DESCRIBE all the ways you might solve the problem



EVALUATE all the possible solutions



ACT on one of the solutions and try it out



LEARN if your solution solved the problem effectively

Visualize success

By picturing what you want to happen – whether it's acing an exam or being the first to cross the finish line - you make it more likely to happen. When you try it, visualize every detail, from what you're wearing, to how you feel. The more vivid your imagination, the better!

Practice gratitude

Being grateful for what you have and for what others have given you can help you improve your self-image. Try keeping a gratitude diary – write 3 things you're grateful for every day before bed.

Celebrate small wins

Be proud and celebrate all your achievements, even if they seem small - like getting that difficult homework done!

Don't compare yourself to others, you're unique

It's good to look to others for inspiration but don't compare yourself to them. We're all different and all have strengths and weaknesses so compare yourself to yourself and see how far you've come and how much improvement you've made.

Feeling confident isn't always easy, but when we give ourselves permission to make mistakes, are kind to ourselves and know that we can always count on our friends, we can feel like we can achieve anything.



Sex, gender & society

When a baby is born, everyone is excited to know if it's a boy or a girl. From this moment on, it can feel like our lives are mapped out in front of us, with society telling us that boys like certain things, and girls like other things.

But we don't have to be limited by what society says!

Let's start with a few definitions:

Biological sex: Your biological sex is based on the genitals you're born with and the chromosomes you have. At birth, most people are either male (with a penis) or female (with a vagina).

Gender identity: Our gender identity is our psychological sense of self. It's who we feel ourselves to be. Most societies have historically recognized two genders – male and female, relating to a person's biological sex – but gender is a continuum with many variations of how people feel about their gender, as well as how they express it. Everyone's gender identity is unique to them and should be respected.

Gender roles: A set of behaviours and attitudes considered by society to be 'acceptable' or 'desirable' for our sex or gender. It includes how we're expected to act, speak, dress, or groom. Gender role expectations can vary depending on the society and culture and can also vary over time.

Gender expression: This is the way we present our gender, through our actions, clothing, demeanor, and more. How we choose to express our gender might be different than our assigned sex at birth or it may be the same. There's lots of room for flexibility and your gender expression can change frequently throughout your life.

What is the relationship between sex and gender?

Sometimes a person's sex, i.e. their biological characteristics, and their gender, i.e. how they feel themselves to be, are the same. This is known as being cisgender. For example, if a person is assigned male at birth, and identifies as a man. Sometimes how a person feels about gender differs from their assigned sex at birth. This is known as being transgender. For example, if someone is assigned female at birth, and has a vagina, but identifies as a male.

What are gender stereotypes?

Gender roles can lead to harmful gender stereotypes about how people should act, look and feel. Historically, gender roles and stereotypes were more defined, but they can also still exist today.

There are 4 basic types of gender stereotypes:

- Personality traits — For example, the belief that females are generally believed to be more emotional, while males are believed to be more confident and dominant.
- Domestic behaviours — For example, the belief that females take care of the children, cook, and clean the home, while males take care of finances, work on the car, and do the home repairs.
- Occupations — The belief that some occupations or jobs are for females and some are for males. For example, historically, females were considered the caregivers, and males were considered household providers.
- Physical appearance — For example, the belief that females have long hair and wear make-up, while males have short hair and are taller and more muscular.

Why are gender roles and stereotypes harmful?

With gender roles and stereotypes come expectations and pressure. Expectations to act, look and feel a certain way, which doesn't necessarily align with who we are or how we feel. All of this can have a negative impact on our wellbeing - for example, if we feel we're failing to meet these expectations, or if we feel we're not recognized or accepted for who we are.

It's important to remember that we are all unique and neither our sex, nor our gender, defines who we are or limits what we can do.

However you identify, we must give ourselves permission to live the life we want to live, on our terms. We also must support others to live their life on their terms too.

How to eliminate gender roles & stereotypes

Talk about them

Talk with friends and family about the stereotypes you see. Help others understand how sexism, which is when people are looked down upon because of their sex or gender, and gender stereotypes can be hurtful.

Don't be afraid to speak up

If you notice something that makes you feel uncomfortable, whether it's on TV, in your everyday life, or in a magazine or on social media, don't be afraid to bring it up and discuss it. Sometimes we don't realize we're promoting a stereotype until it's pointed out to us.

Be a role model for others

By joining that sports team, leading a group task with confidence or taking dance lessons, we give ourselves the opportunity to show what we're capable of and can act as a role model for others who want to do the same.

Remember there is a whole world of possibilities regardless of your sex, gender identity and gender expression. Don't let society and gender roles limit you. Everyone is unique and that's your biggest strength – so be proud of yourself and always respect others' choices.



Staying healthy

Be active

Being physically active through sport or other physical activities is a great way to keep your body feeling healthy, while boosting your energy levels! It will help make your heart and lungs work better too. The key to enjoying it is to pick something you like.

For even more motivation, consider making it into a social activity with your friends and family.

Getting enough sleep is an essential part of staying healthy and happy. On average, you'll need between 8 to 10 hours per night.

Here's why your body needs sleep:

- To restore and rejuvenate
- To grow muscles
- To repair tissue
- To file away all your thoughts from the day
- To help increase your ability to learn more and pay attention.

Tips to getting enough sleep:

- Stick to a regular sleep schedule
- Avoid watching and using screens (e.g. TV, phone) one hour before going to bed
- Use a comfortable mattress and pillow
- Exercise daily

Eat well

Growing like you do during puberty requires a lot of energy and most of it comes from the food you eat. Each meal you should aim for half your plate to be made up of fruits & vegetables, and the other half from grains & proteins.

Visit the doctor

As you get older & start your period, you may want to start seeing a doctor. They can help you understand the changes you're going through and check everything is healthy. Talk to your parents or guardians about this.

Stay safe

During puberty, you're going through so many changes that everything seems possible, and this is great. Just remember to stay safe too.

- **Understand the risks of drug use** – legal and illegal substances affect your body and brain, can cause serious long-term damage, and even be life-threatening.
- Be aware that **harassment and bullying exist** – if someone tries to harm or intimidate you, seek support from a trusted adult.

Digital Identity and Growing Up Online

Your identity is what makes you, you! There are multiple parts that make up a person's identity, which makes human beings so complex. Parts of your identity can include your hobbies, beliefs, values, interests, relationships, communities, and more! Your digital identity is important to consider in an online or virtual space.

Your online identity is who you are on the internet, and your offline identity is who you are in real life, face to face. Offline, people see how you talk, act, and treat others at school, at home, and with friends. Online, people see what you post, comment, like, or share in games, apps, and websites. One big difference is that online you can choose what to show and sometimes use a username instead of your real name, but offline you can't easily change how others see you. The things you post online can stay there for a long time (**digital footprint**) and be seen by many people, while offline moments usually don't last forever. Even though they are different, your online and offline identities should both show respect, kindness, and responsibility.

Your digital footprint is the trail of information you leave behind when you use the internet, like the photos you post, the comments you write, the games you play, and the websites you visit. Just like footprints in the sand, digital footprints show where you've been online, but unlike sand, they can be hard to erase. This is important because other people, like educators, schools, or future coaches, might see what you've shared. Creating a positive digital footprint means posting kind messages, sharing appropriate photos, and making smart choices online so your footprint shows that you are respectful, responsible, and safe.

Another important part of growing up online is understanding cyberbullying. **Cyberbullying** is when someone uses technology, such as messages, games, or social media, to be mean, hurtful, or threatening to another person. It can happen anywhere online and sometimes continues from bullying that starts at school or in

person. Cyberbullying can look like sending or posting hurtful messages/images or spreading rumours or sharing embarrassing information.

Because online posts can spread quickly and stay visible, cyberbullying can feel overwhelming. That's why it's important to think before you post and ask yourself: Would I want someone to say this about me? Being cyberbullied can make people feel sad, worried, or left out, and is never a kind thing to do to someone.

Media Messages About Bodies, Puberty & Gender

Media messages about bodies, puberty, and gender are everywhere, including in games, videos, ads, and social media, but they don't always show real life. Many images are changed using filters, editing, or even artificial intelligence (AI), which can make bodies look "perfect" in ways that are not realistic or healthy. It's important to remember that the "perfect" body doesn't exist, and to talk to a trusted adult about media content that makes you feel self-conscious or uncomfortable. Puberty happens at different times and in different ways for everyone, and there is no "right" way to grow or look. People also express their gender in different ways, and it's natural to question, or experiment with, your gender expression. Online and in real life, people of all body shapes, sizes, and abilities deserve respect. It is important to question what you see online and not compare yourself to others, because media often shows a narrow and unrealistic picture of what people are really like.

Body Autonomy, Consent & Digital Spaces

On games or messaging platforms, the peers you're talking to, or strangers, may engage in conversation with you and ask you to say or do something you may not be comfortable with. Having body autonomy means that you are in charge of your own body and your own choices, both in real life and online. Online, consent means you can say no to sending or receiving messages, comments, or pictures that make you feel uncomfortable, even if they come from someone you know. Consent means giving a clear yes, no, or maybe, and understanding that you can change your mind at any

time. For example, before posting a photo of a friend, you should ask if they are okay with it, and if they say no, you don't share it. Just like offline, no one should pressure you to do something you don't want to do, and you always have the right to speak up, block, or ask a trusted adult for help. The most important thing to remember is: your body, your words, your choice—always.

Online Safety & Personal Boundaries

Online safety and personal boundaries help you make smart choices as you become more independent online. Some information should always stay private, like your full name, address, school, passwords, and location, because sharing these can put you at risk. Safe online interactions feel respectful and comfortable, while unsafe ones may include someone asking you to keep secrets, pressuring you to respond, offering gifts, or using too much flattery to gain your trust. These are red flags, and noticing them early is important. If something, or someone, online makes you feel confused, uncomfortable, or worried, it's okay to stop the conversation and talk to a trusted adult, like a parent, caregiver, teacher, or school counselor.

Digital Relationships & Communication

Digital relationships and communication are about how we connect with others using messages, comments, games, and group chats, and it's important to stay safe as our online world grows. Being kind and respectful online means using polite and appropriate words, thinking before you send something, and remembering there is a real person on the other side of the screen. But remember, sometimes people online may not be who they say they are. Strangers can pretend to be kids, use fake photos, AI influencers, or even **deepfakes** (real-looking but fake images or videos made by computers), so it's important not to chat privately with people you don't know in real life. Some apps and chats are not fully private, which means messages can be saved or shared, so never share personal information or photos of yourself. Misunderstandings can also happen online because you can't identify facial expressions or tone, so it's important to pause and ask questions before reacting. In group chats, everyone

has a responsibility to include others and speak up if someone is being unkind or left out. If anyone makes you uncomfortable, asks you to share your secrets or to keep secrets, or sends inappropriate messages, stop replying, save the messages, block or report the person, and tell a trusted adult right away.

AI, Algorithms & “Why Am I Seeing This?”

AI and algorithms help decide what you see online, like videos, posts, and ads, and it’s useful to understand how they work. An **algorithm** is like a set of rules a computer follows to guess what you might like, based on what you watch, click, search, or pause on. That’s why if you watch a few soccer clips or gaming videos, you might start seeing lots more of the same, and you might even get ads related to it. Seeing the same kind of content over and over can affect how you feel and what you start to believe, even if it’s not the full picture or it makes you feel worse. It’s also important to remember that not everything online is true, fair, or healthy, and some posts are made to grab attention instead of help you. Always be an active thinker, not a passive scroller: ask “Why am I seeing this?” and choose what you watch instead of letting the app choose for you.

Mental Health, Screen Time & Puberty

Mental health, screen time, and puberty are closely connected, especially as your body, brain, and emotions are changing during this stage of life. Spending a lot of time on screens can affect your sleep, mood, focus, and self-esteem, especially if you stay up late, scroll for long periods, or compare yourself to people online. You might notice signs of digital overload like feeling tired, irritable, anxious, distracted, or having trouble sleeping or concentrating at school. Balancing screen time with offline activities, such as playing sports, going outdoors, drawing, reading, or spending time with friends and family, help your mind and body to reset. Creating routines and boundaries, like turning screens off before bedtime, taking regular screen breaks, and setting limits that work for you and your family, can support both your mental and physical health. Creating balance is part of self-care, and taking care of yourself includes being mindful of how you use technology.

Finding Reliable Health Information Online

Finding reliable health information online is important, especially when learning about puberty and your changing body. These tips can help you find safe and accurate information:

- **Check if a source is trustworthy:** Reliable health information usually comes from doctors, nurses, hospitals, schools, government health websites, or research papers, not from strangers online, magazines, influencers, or blogs/vlogs.
- **Be careful with videos and comments:** Random videos, comments, or trends on social media can be misleading, exaggerated, or incorrect, even if they sound confident or popular. Don't leave comments on social media posts that are inappropriate, rude, or misleading. Don't engage in negative conversations in the comments section from strangers.
- **Use school-approved sources:** Websites or resources recommended by your school, educators, or health class are made to be age-appropriate and accurate.
- **Ask trusted adults for help:** If you're unsure where to look or feel confused or worried, ask a trusted adult like a parent, caregiver, teacher, school nurse, or doctor to help you find answers.
- **Remember not everything online is true:** Just because something is online doesn't mean it's correct or healthy for you.

Laws, Rules & Responsibilities

Laws, rules, and responsibilities help keep people safe online, just like rules in school or sports help everyone play fairly. Some apps, games, and websites have age limits because they may include content or features that aren't safe or appropriate for kids yet. Families and schools also have rules about devices, such as screen-time limits or where devices can be used, to help protect your health, learning, and privacy. Most apps include tools to block, mute, or report someone who is being mean, unsafe, or inappropriate, and using these tools is a smart and responsible choice. It's important to remember that what you do online, like posting, messaging, or sharing, can have real world consequences for yourself and others. Rights come with responsibilities, and using technology wisely helps keep everyone safe.

Support Systems

During puberty, you don't have to cope with everything on your own. Talking to trusted people about your feelings can help them better understand what you're experiencing to provide you with the support you need.

Trusted adults want to help and support you, and they're glad when you come to them with questions or concerns. Many of these adults have gone through puberty themselves, so they often have valuable advice and insights that can be more helpful than tips from friends or others your age. Whether it's your parents, family members, or other trusted adults in your life, asking for advice shows maturity and helps you build important support networks.

Remember, reaching out for support is a sign of strength, not weakness. Having people you can talk to makes navigating puberty easier and helps you feel less alone during this time of change.

Finding Trusted Adults

While parents and caregivers are often important sources of support, you have many other trusted adults in your life who can help you. A trusted adult is someone who:

- Listens to you without judging
- Keeps your private information safe (unless you or someone else is in danger)
- Cares about your health, feelings, and well-being
- Makes you feel comfortable asking questions
- Respects your feelings and experiences

You Have Many Options for Support

Here are some examples of other trusted adults who might be able to support you:

1. At School: You spend a lot of time at school, and there are many caring adults there whose job it is to help students succeed and feel safe.

These adults could include:

- Teachers or Educational Assistants (EAs)
- School counselors or social workers
- Coaches or activity leaders
- Secretaries or librarians
- Principals or vice-principals

2. In Your Family and Community: Your extended family and community members often know you well and want to see you thrive. These adults may have different perspectives and experiences that can be helpful.

These adults could include:

- Grandparents, aunts, uncles, or older cousins
- Family friends
- Neighbours you know well
- Religious or spiritual leaders (Indigenous Elders or Knowledge Keepers)
- Youth group leaders
- Coaches, activity leaders, or community center staff
- Mentors from programs you're involved in

3. Healthcare and Professional Support: Some adults have special training to help young people with health questions, emotional support, or guidance.

These professionals are trained to work with kids and teens.

- Doctors, nurses, pharmacists, or other healthcare providers
- Therapists or counsellors (social workers, psychologists, family therapists, or other mental health professionals)
- Helplines (support services you can call, text, or use online chat)

When to Reach Out

A good time to reach out to a trusted adult can be when you have questions or concerns about your body, friendships, school, family situations, online issues, or anything else that's on your mind or feels important to you.

When you are ready to speak to a trusted adult, it's important to understand the difference between public spaces and private spaces before sharing personal information (details about your body, feelings, family, health, or anything that feels private to you).

- **Private spaces** – Areas where you can have conversations without others overhearing or interrupting (e.g., a closed office, an empty classroom or library, at home when other family members aren't around, or a quiet area away from crowds).
- **Public spaces** – Areas where people can more easily see and hear you, making them inappropriate for personal conversations (e.g., classrooms, hallways, playgrounds, or other crowded areas).

Here are some ways you can protect your personal information before sharing with a trusted adult:

- Ask to speak privately before sharing personal details
- Use general terms in public (“I have a health question”) and save specifics for private conversations
- Be aware of who might be listening nearby
- Trust your instincts – if a space doesn't feel private enough, ask to move somewhere else
- Some information (like your body, family situations, or personal feelings) is yours to share only with people you choose

Trusted adults will keep your personal information, questions, and concerns confidential (between you and them). However, if something you share suggests that you or someone else might be harmed or in danger, they may need to share that information with other adults who can help keep everyone safe. This is done to protect you and others, not to break your trust.

Tips for Starting a Conversation

Learning how to reach out and start a conversation with a trusted adult is an important self advocacy and communication skill.

Building these skills is a part of developing self-care and wellness strategies during puberty that will help you make informed decisions about your health and well-being throughout your life.

Sometimes it can feel hard to know how to begin talking to a trusted adult but taking that first step to reach out shows courage and maturity. Here are some ways to get started:

- Choose a good time and space: Find a moment when you and the adult can talk privately without distractions. Choose appropriate times and places - some topics need private spaces with trusted adults, not public areas where others might overhear.
- Start simple: You can begin with, "I have a question about..." or "I've been wondering about..." or "Can we talk about something?"
- Be honest about your feelings: It's okay to say, "This feels awkward to talk about," "I'm not sure how to ask this," or "I'm feeling nervous about this conversation."
- Write it down: If talking feels too hard, you can write a note or letter to give to the trusted adult. Sometimes writing down your questions beforehand helps you remember what you want to ask and get all the answers you need.
- Practice first: You can practice what you want to say in your head or with yourself before the conversation.
- Ask for privacy: You can say, "Can we talk somewhere private?" or "This is just between us, right?"
- Keep it casual: Find a time when you typically speak with the trusted adult and use it to discuss what you've learned in this guide. When you share what you've learned, it can be a more casual opportunity to ask them about their own experiences growing up.
- Be direct: Take a deep breath and just share how you're feeling. Many adults have experienced similar feelings at some point in their lives and can relate to you.
- Take your time: You don't have to say everything at once - conversations can happen over time and you can always continue the discussion later.

Other Support Services Available

Sometimes, you might feel nervous, uncomfortable, or unsure about how to talk to a trusted adult in your life, and that's completely okay! There are other anonymous (getting help or support without giving your name or personal details), confidential, and non-judgmental (listening without criticizing, blaming, or making you feel bad about your questions, feelings, or situation) support services available for youth—these are called “Helplines”. Helplines are a free phone, text, or online service that provides support, answer questions, and listens to young people who need help or someone to talk to. Many Helpline services are staffed by trained professionals who understand what young people go through, which might make you feel more comfortable.

Here is a list of Canada-wide helpline services that youth can access:

Kids Help Phone

- Call: 1-800-668-6868
- Text: CONNECT to 686868
- Get support through Facebook Messenger.
- Available 24/7.
- Services available in English or French. Interpreter services available in Ukrainian, Russian, Pashto, Dari, Mandarin or Arabic.

Kids Help Phone: First Nations, Inuit and Métis Support

- Call: 1-800-668-6868
- Text: FIRST NATIONS, INUIT or METIS to 686868
- Get support through Facebook Messenger.
- Available 24/7.
- Connect with an Indigenous volunteer crisis responder.

RiseUp – Black Youth Helpline (Powered by Kids Help Phone)

- Call: 1-800-668-6868
- Text: RISE to 686868
- Get support through Facebook Messenger.
- Available 24/7.
- Offers free wellness support from a professional counsellor for Black youth across Canada.
- Services available in English and French.

Hope for Wellness Helpline

- Call: 1-855-242-3310
- Get support through the online chat.
- Available 24/7.
- Offers immediate help to all Indigenous people across Canada.
- Provides counselling and crisis intervention support.
- Services available in English and French (online and phone), and Cree, Ojibway, and Inuktitut (via phone).

Naseeha – Muslim-Focused Mental Health Help Line

- Call: 1-866-627-3342
- Available 7 days a week from 9 AM – 9 PM PST or 12 PM – 12 AM EST.
- Offers support for Muslim and non-Muslim youth who are navigating life's challenges, providing a safe zone for them to talk and get the help they need.

9*8*8 Suicide Crisis Helpline

- Call: 9-8-8
- Text: 9-8-8
- Available 24/7.
- Offers support for anyone worried about themselves or worried about someone else struggling with suicide-related concerns.

National Eating Disorders Helpline

- Call: 1-866-633-4220
- Get support through the online chat.
- Available Monday to Thursday from 9AM to 9PM, Friday 9AM – 5PM, or Saturday and Sunday from 12 PM – 5 PM EST.
- Offers counselling, information, and support for those dealing with or affected by eating disorders or disordered eating.

Remember:

- Everyone experiences puberty differently, and it's normal to have questions about the changes happening to your body and emotions.
- Different trusted adults might be helpful for different types of questions or problems.
- It's okay if the first person you talk to isn't the right fit – you can try talking to someone else. Don't give up!
- Having multiple trusted adults in your life is healthy and normal. You deserve to have many people who support and care about you.
- The trusted adults in your life want to help you navigate puberty successfully and feel comfortable during this time of change.
- It's okay to feel nervous or awkward when talking about puberty topics – these feelings are completely normal.
- Asking questions about puberty, your body, or your feelings is a sign of taking care of yourself, not something to be embarrassed about. Reaching out for help or support shows you're learning and growing.
- Using helpline services doesn't mean you can't also talk to trusted adults in your life. Use whichever approach feels most comfortable to you at that time.
- Helplines can be an additional source of support and can help you figure out how to start a conversation with the trusted adults around you.

Where to get more info

We've covered a lot in this guide, but you may want to know more.



always.com/en-us/tips-and-advice is full of information.



Don't be afraid to talk and ask questions to your friends, family and teachers!

At Always, we believe that every child has the right to be able to manage puberty and their period with dignity and that no child should have to miss school and the things they love because of their period.

If your family is struggling to afford period products, if you're finding things overwhelming or are dealing with anxiety, speak to your teacher, your doctor, a trusted family member or trusted adult.

Now that you know how your body and brain work and have tips to stay healthy and confident, go out & enjoy this journey.

You have limitless possibilities ahead of you!

always