



**EVERYTHING**

**GIRLS**

**AGES**

**8-12**

**SHOULD KNOW**

**JANE MULLEN**

# **EVERYTHING GIRLS AGES 8-12 SHOULD KNOW**

Understand Puberty, Build Healthy Habits, Manage Emotions, Build Confidence, Make Friends, Handle Peer Pressure, and More!

**Jane Mullen**

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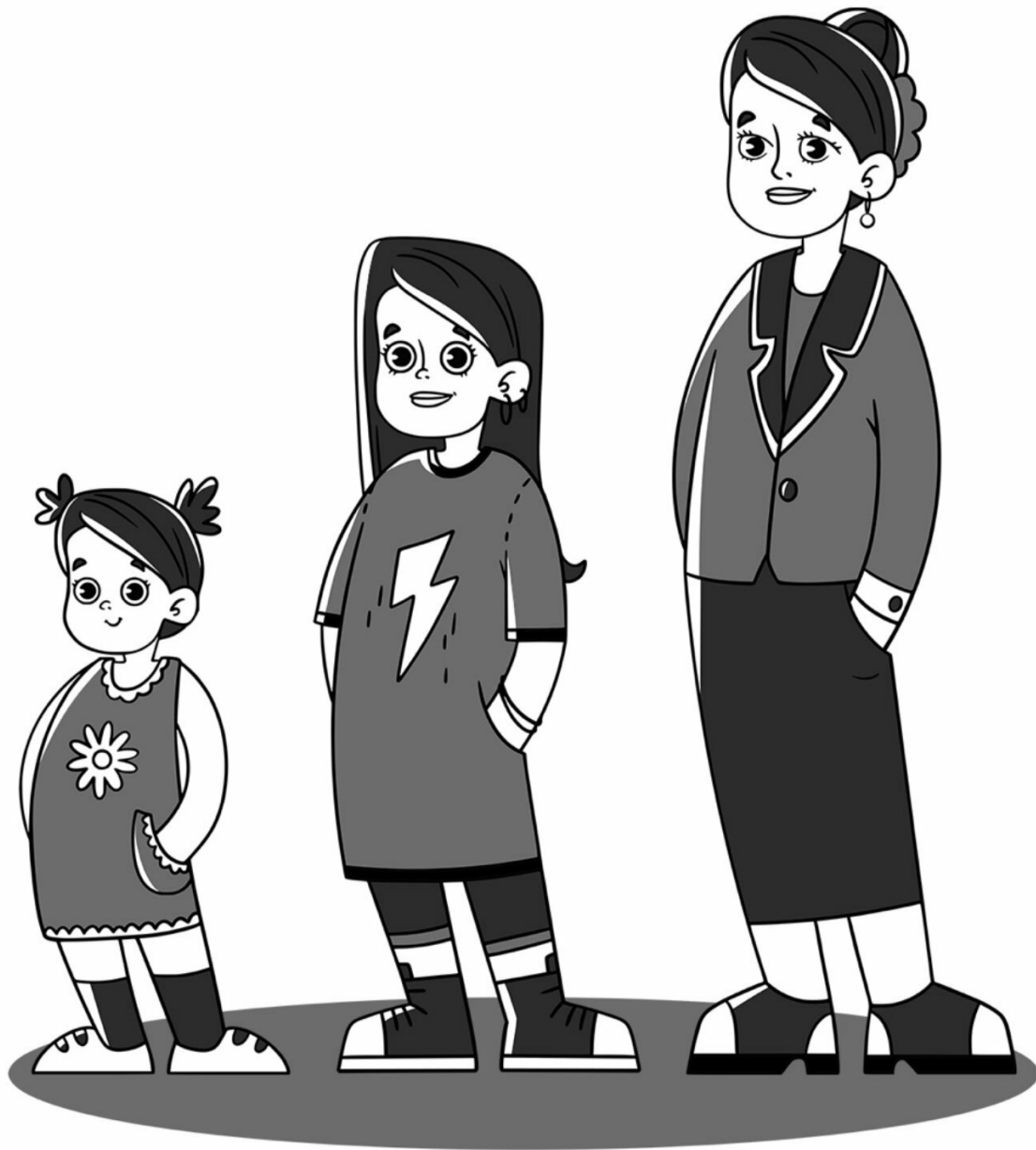
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# INTRODUCTION



Growing up can be a scary and overwhelming experience. As you get older, your body will go through a lot of changes, and your life will start to look different. Unlike in school, there is no clear path forward either; you won't get an award or certificate announcing that you have become an adult. The process looks different for everybody.

Growing up is a lifelong endeavor. It isn't like a storybook with a beginning, middle, or end. Becoming an adult is an ongoing story that will unfold over the course of many chapters throughout your life. There's no script to follow. The only thing you can do to prepare is to do your best and equip yourself with the right information.

It can be scary when you don't know what to expect. Don't worry, though! This book is written with you in mind, specifically for 8 to 12-year-old girls.

In this book, we will first address the physical changes that happen to your body during a process called *puberty*. Puberty is a journey that each person goes through in their early teen years. It is marked by a rush of hormones, causing distinct physical changes in your body and mind. Quite simply, puberty is a sign that you are growing into your adult body.

Additionally, we will explore the social changes that come with growing up. This will include a change in the dynamic between you and your family, friends, and peers. These ever-changing relationships are important to consider, because they have a significant impact on your life. However, we will also explore the importance of setting boundaries, avoiding peer pressure, and building – and maintaining – your self-esteem.

The later chapters will talk about the importance of personal hygiene and your physical and mental health. You will also learn a few tips for planning your future, balancing your hobbies with your education, and managing your time wisely.

It's normal to be nervous about growing up. Luckily, the more you understand something, the less scary it will seem. You're not alone in your experiences, and you deserve the right information, guidance, and respect.

Consider this book your general guide for growing up. You may finish it with more questions than you started with, and that's okay. You are lucky to live in a time where there is an abundance of information available. In fact, it's a good idea to share this book with a parent, guardian, or trusted adult. They may be able to answer additional questions that you may have.



# CHAPTER ONE: WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME?



There is more to growing up than driving a car, buying a house, or doing whatever you want whenever you want. One of the main stops along the journey to becoming an adult is puberty. Puberty is a process that happens in your early teens and signifies the point at which your body changes from that of a child to that of a young adult.

These physical and emotional changes can seem weird or even scary. However, knowing what exactly is going on will take much of the fear away.

Below, we'll go over a roadmap of the changes you can expect. You will start to understand *what's* happening in your body and *why* it's happening. In fact, you may notice that some of these things are happening already! However, keep in mind that everybody is different, and these changes will happen at different times for different people. With that in mind, don't worry if your peers seem to be growing up faster than you are!

Before we start, please note that the physical and mental changes listed apply to most kids and preteens who are female.

## PHYSICAL CHANGES DURING PUBERTY

Puberty is triggered by a boost in the hormones flowing throughout your body, which in turn brings about a cascade of specific changes, such as growing taller. The main hormones involved in puberty are testosterone and estrogen. Everyone has a mix of both, but testosterone is mainly common in males. Estrogen, on the other hand, is mainly found in girls.

For an girl, puberty usually begins between the ages of 8 and 13. You may have already started seeing some changes in your own body while waiting for others to kick in. The changes to look out for are:

- Breast development
- Increased body hair
- Oilier skin
- Change in body shape.
- Menstruation

Breast development is one of the earliest signs of puberty. This process will typically start around age 8 or 9, and you can tell because you will notice little “buds” growing around your nipples. Some girls begin developing breasts as early as age 7, while others start as late as age 13. Many factors, such as your genes, determine when your breasts will begin to develop.

For some girls, growing body hair is one of the first signs of puberty. You may notice hair sprouting up on different parts of your body, sometimes in the places where you least expect it! Hair will begin to grow on your legs and underarms, and a tuft of curly hair will grow between your hipline and vulva. You may notice hair on your belly button and upper thighs. While body hair is typically associated with boys, it is natural for girls to have body hair, too. There is nothing wrong with letting your hair grow out!

However, there is one part of the puberty journey that every teen hates: pimples! When your face

is dotted with pimples or blackheads, it's called acne. Acne is an extremely common skin condition that usually starts around age 12 and is caused by the oils on your skin clogging up your pores. This can be taken care of by washing your face once or twice a day. While there is no way to completely keep acne at bay, a regular cleaning routine is helpful and can help you feel good about yourself.

Remember, every teenager will get pimples, blackheads, or whiteheads. Acne is not a crisis; it's simply a natural part of puberty.

## GETTING YOUR PERIOD

Growing into your adult body means gaining the ability to become pregnant and give birth. One of the ways puberty prepares your body for pregnancy and childbirth is by changing its shape. You'll probably notice your waist becoming proportionally narrower while your hips will tend to become wider.

In addition to these physical changes, you'll also start to get your period. This is one of the key milestones in a girl's puberty journey. This is the beginning of menstruation, also called menarche (*meh-nar-kee*), which is a sign that your body is ready to have a baby.

You'll likely get your period between the ages of 11 and 14, with 12 and a half being the average age. Some girls get their periods as early as eight years of age or as late as 15. Menarche generally occurs two or so years after your breasts develop. In the months leading up to your first period, you will notice small amounts of milky, white fluid coming from your vagina.

When you notice blood coming out of your vagina, this is called a period. However, this is not the same blood that runs through your veins. Period blood is a mix of blood, mucus, and tissue from the uterus. It can be light pink, red, or even brown. Typically, if you see a red spot in your underwear, this is a sign that you are getting your period!

After each menstrual cycle has concluded, a total of two to three tablespoons of period blood will have come out of your body. The bleeding should last around seven days, tapering off at the very end. We will soon get into the different ways to manage your period flow and prevent it from becoming a mess.

A few key parts of your body work together to make a period happen, but hormones are the main cause of them. These chemical messengers send signals to the other parts of your body that it's time to start the menstrual cycle. These other parts of your body are the:

- Pituitary gland
- Hormones
- Ovaries
- Uterus

The age when you get your first period is based on a number of factors. One of them is the age when your mother or birthing parent first got theirs.

### **Menstruation Symptoms:**

When you are close to getting your period, there will be some signs and symptoms to look out for. Although these symptoms might be the result of something else happening in your body, they usually indicate that you are about to get your period.

The typical symptoms of your menstruation are:

- Abdominal Cramps
- Mood Swings
- Fatigue
- Bloating
- Acne

You may experience all or some of these symptoms a week before your period starts. Grouped together, these signs are known as “Premenstrual Syndrome,” or PMS. PMS is completely normal and can be handled in different ways.

Other symptoms include hunger pangs and cravings, such as the urge to scarf down a cheeseburger or sugary drink. You may also have irregular bowels, whether that be diarrhea or constipation.

Hopefully, the symptoms that accompany menstruation don’t scare you too much. It should make you feel better to know that every girl goes through the same thing, and there are plenty of things you can do to make yourself feel better before and during your period that doesn’t involve eating an entire box of chocolates.

## **The Science Behind Menstruation:**

To understand your period, you need to understand the complex science behind menstruation.

There are four main phases of the menstrual cycle:

- Menstruation
- Follicular Phase
- Ovulation
- Luteal phase

Menstruation is the first phase, and it is defined as the point when you get your period. You may have some of the symptoms described earlier in the chapter, such as cramps, mood swings, or bloating, which can show up before or during menstruation.

The menstruation and the follicular (*foh-li-cu-lar*) phase overlap, meaning that they take place at the same time. The follicular phase begins on the first day of your period. Your pituitary gland releases a hormone that tells your ovaries to produce follicles, which contain eggs or ova (the plural version of ovum.)

Shortly after, one of the eggs will mature while your body absorbs the rest. At this time, the lining of your uterus will get thicker, ready to nurture the mature egg. This process can last up to 16 days until the ovulation phase kicks in.

During ovulation (*ah-vyooh-lay-shun*), a mature egg is released from one of your ovaries. It leaves the ovary through your fallopian tube and eventually makes its way to the uterus. This is the phase when most women can get pregnant. During this phase, the mature egg waits for sperm

to fertilize it.

The final phase is the luteal phase, which is when the lining of your uterus stays thick. If the mature egg doesn't get fertilized, the lining will shed, and the cycle will start again.

## **Managing Your Period**

There are ways to manage your menstrual cycle while keeping yourself feeling healthy and mostly free of discomfort. For example, there are products you can use to prevent leaks that will allow you to go about your day as normal. There are a variety of products to choose from, depending on what you're comfortable with, your lifestyle, and your budget. What's even more exciting is that there are products made just for pre-teens and teens.

## **Creating a Period Kit**

Now that you know that there are different products you can use to manage your menstrual flow, you can start assembling your own period kit. Whether you're still waiting to get your period or you've had it for a while, a period kit is a fun way to prepare yourself.

A period kit can be a box, bag, or purse containing some or all the items you need before and during your period. Some basic items may include:

- Tampons, pads, pantyliners (or any product of your choice)
- Wet wipes
- An over-the-counter pain reliever
- An extra pair of underwear (just in case!)

Ask a parent, guardian, or trusted adult to help you assemble your period pack and discuss what you need – or if you're missing anything. You can also have some fun picking out or even designing a small bag to contain those items. Keep this in your backpack or locker around your "time of the month."

## **Speaking with a Trusted Adult**

Confiding in a trusted adult – such as a parent, guardian, relative, older sibling, or even a teacher – is something you should seriously consider during puberty. Even if you know the basic facts, you probably still have questions or want to better understand what you are feeling. A trusted adult can answer some of your questions and listen to what you have to say. If they don't have the answers you need, they can refer you to someone who does, such as a healthcare provider.

For example, you may have trouble managing the strong emotions that you feel during this time. Talking about them with someone who's already been through puberty can help you feel better, and they can probably give you tips on how to handle your mood swings.

# **EMOTIONAL CHANGES DURING PUBERTY**

Your body *and* your mind will change during puberty. Perhaps you notice that you're getting a little more snippy than usual at your parent or guardian for not allowing you to stay up late on a

weeknight or reacting more strongly when a classmate says something thoughtless.

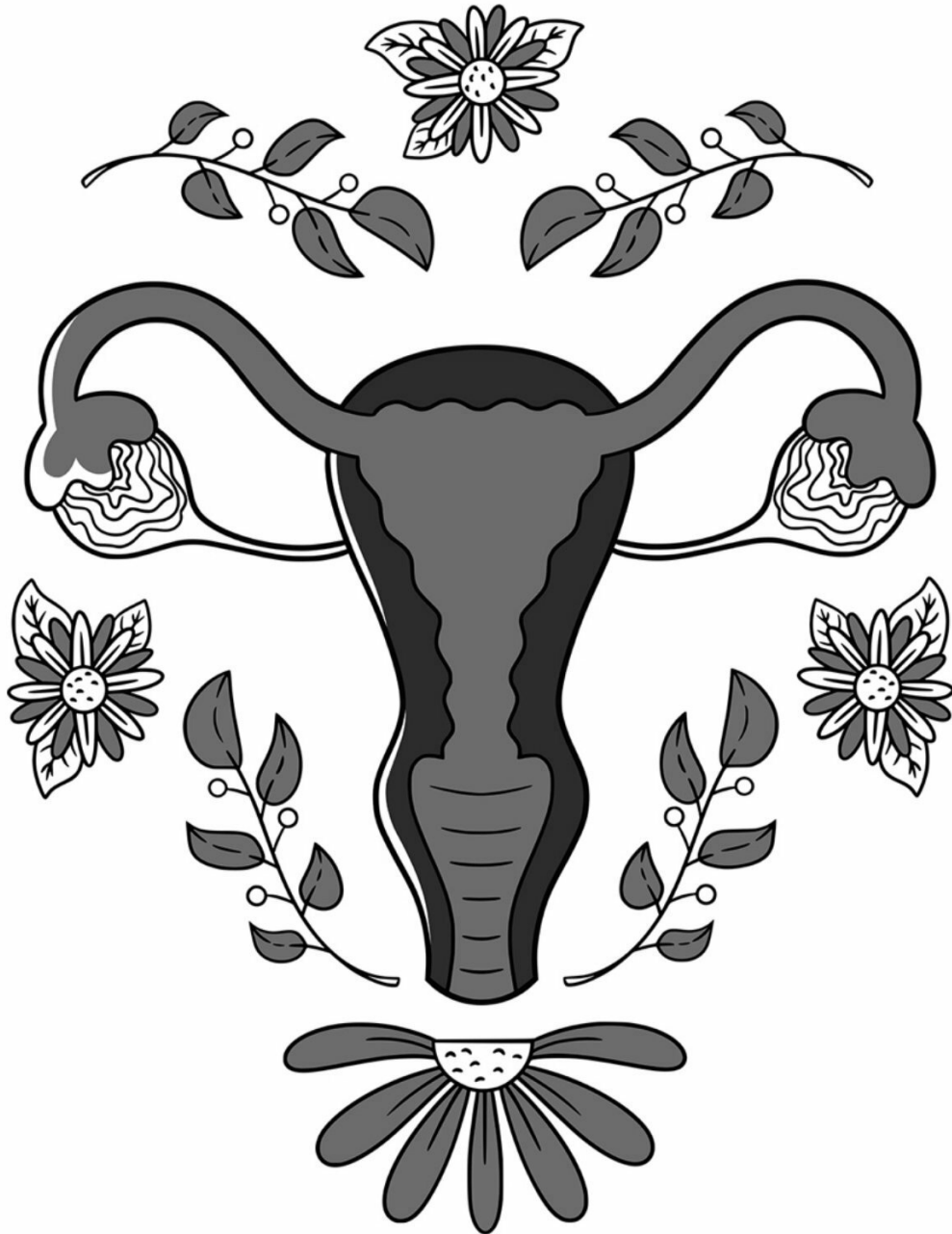
You may also notice that you daydream about kissing your crush. Developing intense romantic feelings is an emotional change that happens when you become an adult. However, you may also not experience any romantic attractions at all during this time in your life.

You'll likely start to prefer the company of your friends over your family, and you will definitely care more about what your peers think. "Fitting in" might seem like the most important thing in the world to you. Peer pressure will be something to watch out for during this phase, as it can help shape you as a person – for better or for worse.

You may also find that not only do you want to become more independent from your family, but you are eager to try new things. However, keep in mind that the more independent you are, the more responsibilities you'll have. It is good to learn how to take care of yourself, physically and mentally.

You will also become more aware of the world around you, developing strong opinions about the person you want to be or become. Your feelings will also get stronger, and your mood or feelings will change often. Remember, mood swings are normal! The only time you will need to worry is if your mood swings last for a long time and make it hard for you to do normal things, like getting out of bed or eating.

## CHAPTER TWO: LET'S TALK ABOUT PERIODS





Although we touched on it earlier, it's time to learn more about one of the main indicators that you are starting puberty – your period! This chapter covers the most basic things you need to know about periods and the menstrual cycle, including when you should get your period and how to take care of it.

## WHAT IS MENSTRAUTION?

Menstruation, also known as having your period, is one of the most important signs of puberty and will typically be the last to come. After your breasts have developed and hair has appeared on your body, your period should arrive.

The pituitary (*puh-too-uh-teh-ree*) gland in your brain tells the hormones in your body to do important things, like helping you grow into your adult body. A few years after you enter puberty, these hormones cause a lining to build up along the walls of your uterus.

You have two ovaries in your body, which will release an ovum (*oh-vum*) each month. The ovum, also called an egg, will attach to the lining of your uterus, waiting for sperm to fertilize it. The ovum and sperm have the “ingredients” needed to help a baby grow and develop, but one cannot create a baby without the other.

Like the egg, the lining along the uterus is important because it prepares your body for pregnancy. However, if the egg that is attached to the lining does not get fertilized, the lining will start to break down. When this happens, it will leave your body through your vagina, sweeping the unfertilized egg with it. This is your period or menstruation cycle.

## WHEN DOES MENSTRAUTION BEGIN?

It's important to keep in mind that girls will typically not get their periods until about 2 or 3 years after puberty has started. This means that your period can arrive as late as age 15. In addition, the entire period cycle itself is about 28 days (four weeks) long, which means you'll get your period about once a month; however, it can last either a few days longer or shorter, depending on many factors.

A few signs to keep in mind that indicate the arrival of your period include:

### **Cramps**

You may feel discomfort in your lower abdomen, located below your belly. This happens because your uterus squeezes, “cramping” up, in order to get the lining off the sides of the wall.

Cramps are just a sign that your period flow is moving along as it should. The pain from cramps can sometimes feel worse during the first few days of your period, but thankfully, they should get less painful as you get older.

### **Mood Swings**

You may also find that your mood is changing quite a bit right around the time you are about to get your period. Nothing is wrong with you; the culprit here is those pesky hormones!

Not only do hormones change your body and make it do certain things, but they can also affect the way you are feeling. This happens because hormone levels swing up and down throughout your period cycle.

### **Fatigue**

If you are feeling more tired or less energetic around the time that you are supposed to get your period, this is normal, too. Fatigue is yet another unpleasant symptom of menstruation that is caused by hormones. In the same way that they affect your moods, hormones can also zap your energy levels as well.

### **Bloating**

Your stomach may also feel swollen, and you may feel as if you have gained weight. This feeling is called bloating, and yet again, it's your hormones at work. Due to the rapidly changing levels of hormones, your body retains more salt and water, causing you to feel bloated.

### **Acne**

Another symptom of menstruation is acne. Your hormone levels may drop right before your period starts, causing your glands to release more oil. Extra-oily skin causes clogged pores, which leads to breakouts. These same hormones can also cause your skin to become more inflamed.

## **MANAGING MENSTRUATION**

Getting your period marks a major change in your life. However, this doesn't mean that you can't take charge of it. Managing your period is important to keep yourself healthy and feeling good.

Periods can be messy and inconvenient. Thankfully, there are things you can do to keep it under control so that you can live life normally. Below is a list of products you can use to help you manage your period.

### **Pads**

Pads are items that you can use to soak up the period blood flowing out of your vagina. They are one of the cheapest and most readily available ways to manage your flow, as they can be bought in stores or online. Pads are made of absorbent material and are designed to attach to the inside of your underwear, soaking up blood for 3 to 4 hours (depending on the heaviness of your flow).

Some pads come with "wings," which are tabs of sticky plastic that you can fold under the edges of your underwear. These "wings" help keep the pad from moving around too much.

Disposable pads can only be used once and must be thrown away. Reusable pads are a good choice if you're worried about trash piling up or if you're worried about the environmental

impact of disposable pads.

## **Tampons**

Tampons are another common item used for absorbing your blood flow during your period. They absorb blood from inside your vagina and are meant to be thrown away after using them.

Tampons are made of an absorbent material that is compressed into a tube shape. This tube is inserted into your vagina using your fingers or an applicator. If inserted the right way, you shouldn't be able to feel them at all.

Similar to pads, tampons can be found in different sizes. There are slender tampons that are good for those just starting their period with a lighter flow and larger sizes for heavier days. Most packages come in an assortment of sizes.

There are also reusable tampons, and although they have been proven to be completely safe, you are more likely to get an infection from them.

## **Discs and Menstrual Cups**

Menstrual discs and cups are other options if you feel that pads and tampons are too wasteful or uncomfortable.

These products catch blood during your period and can be worn for a longer time – up to 12 hours. Another cool thing is that they hold more blood than either pads or tampons. While both discs and cups both work the same way, there are some differences.

Menstrual discs are flat and small, making them a better choice for lighter flows, and are inserted further into your vagina than a cup. Menstrual cups have a curved cone shape with a soft nib at the end, which makes them easier to pull out.

## **Period Underwear**

Period underwear is another great option to ensure you remain leak-proof during your period. This underwear can hold as much blood as two tampons for up to 12 hours, and one of these can be reused anywhere between 2 to 5 years.

Most types of period underwear are made with a material that traps your blood flow, usually a type of microfiber. Keep in mind that this type of underwear needs to be washed separately from your other clothes.

## **Hormonal Birth Control**

Hormonal birth control is used to prevent pregnancy, and although the science is very complex, this pill basically causes your period to become lighter and shorter. Birth control is particularly helpful for girls with irregular periods.

However, there are some unpleasant side effects of hormonal birth control. They can include nausea, mood changes, and headaches. Also, you cannot buy birth control at a store like you would any of the above products. You will need to see a doctor and get a prescription for this medication.

# **MAINTAINING GOOD**

# HYGIENE

Taking care of your blood flow is only one part of maintaining good menstrual hygiene. Read ahead for some other good habits you can adopt that will keep you healthy and feeling your best.

## **Tip 1: Change your pads or tampons often.**

Whether you decide to use pads or tampons, it is a good idea to follow the instructions on the package. For example, if you are using a disposable pad, you should change it every 3-4 hours. This will not only keep you comfortable, but it will also prevent the build-up of bacteria and reduce odor.

Keep in mind that you may have to change your pad more often during heavier flow days, especially to prevent blood from leaking onto your clothes.

Reusable pads should be changed as often as disposable ones. It's vital to make sure you are washing your reusable pads correctly.

## **Tip 2: Use mild soap and water.**

Before and after changing your pad or tampon, it's important to wash your hands using mild soap and water. This will prevent bacteria from coming into contact with your vagina or genital area.

Keeping your genital area clean is also important. You can either use mild body wash and warm water to clean your vulva when taking a shower, or you can try flushable, hypo-allergenic wet wipes. Aim to clean your genital area at least twice a day, in the morning and evening.

## **Tip 3: Do not use strong soaps, sprays, or gels on your genital area.**

You may not have realized it, but your vagina is a self-cleaning system. For this reason, there is no need to clean it with soap and water. More importantly, you should keep strong soaps, sprays, and gels away from your genital area, even if these items are sold as a "feminine hygiene" product. Although you may be tempted to use them to control odor during your period, using them is neither necessary nor a good idea.

## **Tip 4: Wear comfortable and breathable underwear.**

Wearing underwear made with a breathable fabric, such as cotton, is a good way to keep your genital area free from infections and irritation all year round. However, wearing cotton underwear will especially come in handy when you have your period during the summer months. Typically, you can buy this underwear in bulk in a variety of sizes, patterns, and colors.

# TRACKING PERIODS AND CYCLES

Tracking your period every month is a good idea for a couple of reasons. First, when you track your period, you will know when to expect it and can avoid being caught off-guard. Although you will not be able to predict the exact date, you can know the certain timeframe and ensure that

you have all the products you need.

Tracking your period is also another way of making sure that you are healthy. Missing a period can be a sign that you need to see a doctor, so knowing which week you may get your period is a way to make sure that your body is working as it should. When you start seeing a gynecologist, they will usually ask you when you had your last period.

### **Calendar and Period Tracking Apps**

You may already have everything you need to track your period, such as a calendar or pen and pencil. With this method, you can mark the day(s) when you are expecting your period and then jot down when it actually happens.

If you have access to a smartphone, laptop, or tablet, you can also download an app that allows you to track your period. Simply enter the beginning and end dates of your period. Some apps also let you keep track of other symptoms and note whether your flow is light, medium, or heavy.

Whether you decide to write down notes or enter information on an app, you can track your period by recording the following information:

- The first date of your period
- End date
- The total number of days

Keep in mind that the typical menstrual cycle is about 28 days. It's normal if you see that your cycle is shorter or longer by a couple of days, though.

### **Body Temperature**

During the ovulation phase, your body temperature tends to rise. If a female adult is trying to start a family and wants to get pregnant, tracking the menstrual cycle in conjunction with body temperature is helpful. While a rise in your body temperature can tell you if you are in the ovulation phase, it is not a sure sign.

## **MANAGING CRAMPS AND SYMPTOMS**

As discussed earlier, menstrual bleeding is not the only sign that you are having your period. Cramps, bloating, and fatigue are other common symptoms, and they can be unpleasant, to say the least. If they're bad enough, they might even cause you to miss school and other activities. However, there are ways you can deal with these symptoms.

If your cramps, bloating, or fatigue get worse or make it hard for you to live a normal life, you should see a healthcare provider.

### **Drink Plenty of Water**

Drinking plenty of water will keep you hydrated, which can help relieve the bloating you may feel before and during your period. Water can also help with some of the fatigue that you may