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For more information, please talk to your parents or
legal guardian, a trusted adult family member, your
school nurse, or your family doctor. You may hear
many things from your friends, or from older brothers or
sisters, but you need reliable information to address
any concerns you may have about your changing body.

YOUR CHANGING BODY



*A Catholic Booklet About Puberty
For Girls*

ATTENTION!

Dear Fifth Grader,

Congratulations on entering a new phase of growing up called "puberty." It's an exciting time in your growing up years. Know that it is natural for a young person to go through puberty - and almost everyone has questions.

This booklet is designed to help answer your questions and help you to become familiar with the outward physical changes and inner emotional changes that take place during these important years.

We hope you and your parent/guardian take the time to go through this booklet *together* so you will be prepared for and better understand how all these marvelous changes take place within your body - all as part of God's plan for you as you mature from childhood into adulthood.

You may have more questions than this booklet can answer, and that is ok, too. Just make sure you ask your parent or a trusted adult for additional information. Be patient with your body because going through puberty is different for each person. You are unique because God made you that way.

The most important thing for you to remember is that these physical and emotional changes going on within your body are natural, occur over many years, and are necessary for you to become a fully grown woman.

Think of this time as a special opportunity to learn more about your body, and to experience how God designed your amazing body so that it grows up with you.

Be proud of who you are becoming. God has wonderful plans for you.

The Diocese of Joliet Family Life Committee

Third, such touches and intimate sexual activity may result in consequences that could change your life. Intimate sexual activity is part of the mechanism of human reproduction and sometimes results in a pregnancy (conception of a new baby) before you are mature enough physically and emotionally. Also, you could contract diseases and infections that will not go away on their own if the other person is carrying those germs. Remember, intimate touch is something you want to save for marriage.

"For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith, goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love."

(2 Peter 1:3-7)

Conclusion

Going through puberty and becoming a young woman can be a confusing and exciting time! It is good to have someone to talk to who has gone through these changes already so they can answer your questions. This could be your mother, a trusted family member, teacher, doctor, or nurse. Puberty is a journey that should be taken one day at a time. Remember, if you fail to do what is right, prayer, regular participation in the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Reconciliation can give you strength to try harder.

"... as he who called you is holy, be holy yourself in every aspect of your conduct, for it is written 'Be holy because I am holy.'"

1 Peter 1:15-16



Making Good Decisions

A part of becoming a young woman is making good decisions.



Your body is God's gift. You should cherish it, care for it, and keep it a temple for the Holy Spirit. This means you should take care of yourself, keep your body healthy, and wait until marriage to share the gift of sexual intimacy. Self-control is an important virtue to help you be ready to fulfill God's plan, which may include the Sacrament of Marriage and the creation of a loving family.

"Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

(Philippians 4:8)

You will want to keep yourself pure and worthy of your future husband. That includes not pleasing yourself through masturbation (rubbing or stimulating yourself), which is a sin. If you masturbate, you are focusing on sexual pleasure outside of its proper place in marriage.

You may be pressured by others to touch their private body parts (what is under a bathing suit) or to allow them to touch yours. If this happens, you should say no, leave immediately, and tell a trusted adult as soon as possible.

Intimate touches should only take place within marriage. Saving intimacy for your future husband is advisable for three reasons. First, and most importantly, your body is sacred. It was given to you by God to keep pure and holy. Keeping your body pure for the person you marry will be a special gift you save for that person. This will help ensure a positive relationship that will strengthen your marriage covenant.

Second, any kind of sexual touch outside of marriage is a sin.

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Introduction

The purpose of this booklet is to give an overview of what puberty is, the changes your body will go through, and when these changes will happen. You will also learn some tips about hygiene and more importantly about God's plan for you as you become a young woman.

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?"
(1 Corinthians 6:19)

What Is Puberty?

Puberty is completely normal and happens to everyone!

You may have heard this word before, but what does it mean? Puberty is the changes your body goes through to turn a girl into a young woman. It is part of God's plan for you to prepare you for your future as a mother, if you are called to the vocation of marriage.

Female hormones, chemical substances produced by your glands inside your body, are released and are the cause of all these changes. Puberty is completely normal and happens to everyone! For girls, this process can start anywhere from the ages of eight to sixteen years old. Every girl is different, so some will develop earlier than others. These changes can be exciting and overwhelming all at the same time, so it is important that you find a trusted adult to help you and answer any questions you may have. All of this is God's plan to prepare you for adulthood.

"So turn from youthful desires and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace along with those who call on the Lord with plenty of heart."

2 Timothy 2:22

Your genital area is another important area to keep clean. The pubic hairs that will begin to grow keep germs and dirt out of the vagina. The dirt and germs have to be washed out each day with soap that is free from strong scents or perfumes. Be sure to clean between the folds of the skin (also known as labia) in the genital area to be sure it is completely clean.

Along with keeping your genital area clean, when you use the bathroom, be sure to wipe from the front to the back. This is because bacteria can get into your vagina or the tube that leads to your bladder (urethra) and cause an infection.

Keeping your face clean and free from dirt and oil is another part of good hygiene. You may notice the glands on your face begin to secrete sweat and oil. Washing your face daily with a face cleanser will help keep your skin clean.



Because of your new hormones you might even develop pimples or "zits," which is called acne. Acne occurs in many boys and girls going through puberty and can even develop in adults! Some people may never get acne.

Being clean and practicing good hygiene will help keep your body healthy and will even make you feel better about yourself. Maintaining a positive body image can help you make good choices. Remember, you were created in God's image—be proud of it!

Emotional Changes

Along with making physical changes, the hormones in your body will affect your emotions. You may start to feel "mood swings." This is where your feelings change very quickly, so you may be happy one minute, and then sad or angry the next. It is important to realize that these mood swings are normal, and you can try to control them. Journaling, talking with friends, and prayer can help you sort out your up and down moods.

What Are These Changes?

Physical Changes

Your body will go through many physical changes. Some of the changes include:

- Growing taller
- Oil and sweat glands become active
- Breasts develop and get bigger
- Hips widen
- Hair grows under arms and in pubic (genital) region
- Vaginal discharge
- Menstrual periods

When you grow taller, you may feel like you grow inches over night! Your oil and sweat glands start to become more active. You will notice that your face or hair may be greasy, and you will start to sweat and have body odor.

(See Feminine Hygiene page 8)

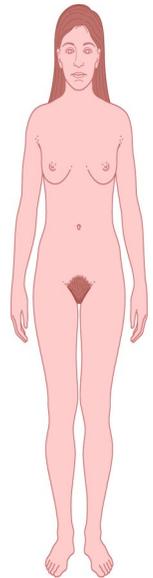
Your breasts will begin to develop. This is one of the most noticeable changes a young woman will go through. This development happens differently for each girl. Just remember that every woman will develop at her own time, and the size of your breasts does not make one woman more feminine than another.

You will grow hair in your pubic region, the triangle shaped area between your legs, to protect your genitals from germs. Be sure to keep the pubic area clean and dry to protect yourself from germs and bacteria.

The menstrual period is important and is discussed on page 7.

The Female Reproductive System

The reproductive system is located in your abdomen below your belly button. It is made up of two ovaries, two fallopian tubes, a uterus, vagina, and cervix. Responding to signals from your brain this system helps to release some of the important hormones and chemicals once puberty starts. God planned this system so perfectly to make sure a woman's body is ready to have a baby.



Dealing With Your Period

Since your period can come at any time, it is a good idea to keep some pads in your backpack, locker, and at home. This way, if you get your period at school, you can be prepared. There are all different sizes and absorbencies of pads, and different ways to secure them on your underpants. The way to choose the best ones for you is to start with a small box of “regular” flow pads. As you get your period, you might notice that the pad may not be big enough to absorb all of the blood. It might also be too big for you. You should then get a bigger or smaller size to better fit your needs. If you have questions about this, talk to your mother or a trusted female relative.

You need to change your pad at least every four to eight hours. This is to keep your genital area clean and free from moisture and bacteria. Also, if the pad is kept on too long, you might notice an odor coming from it. If you notice this, you should change your pad.

Tampons are a little different from pads because they are inserted into the vagina. These may be used in place of pads. They are good for girls who are active in sports because they fit inside the body and will not get wet or bunched up. If you are thinking about using tampons, ask your mother or a trusted female adult to help you. The box comes with a list of instructions to help you insert the tampon correctly and easily.

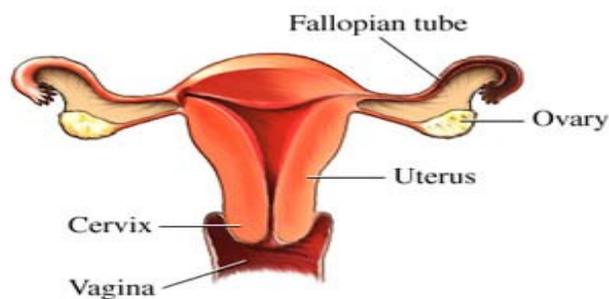
Feminine Hygiene

Keeping yourself clean is an important part of going through puberty and becoming a woman. As you go through puberty, you will notice the physical changes such as body odor and sweat. Regular showers and cleansing will keep these odors away, as well as any harmful germs.

Deodorant /antiperspirant is a product that is applied under the arms to control sweating and odor. Usually it is put on once a day, and comes in a variety of scents and types. Also, deodorant needs to be washed away each day so it does not clog your pores underneath your arms.

Ovaries: The ovaries are two small round organs that hold a woman's eggs. You are born with all of your eggs already in the ovaries. These ovaries also release hormones into the body. Once a month, an egg matures in the ovary and then is released through the fallopian tube, and into the uterus. This is called ovulation. Normally, the egg will go through the vagina and out of the body during menstruation. But, when the egg is fertilized by a man's sperm, the egg attaches inside the uterus and a baby begins to grow.

Fallopian tubes: The fallopian tubes are connected to the uterus and end near the ovaries. When an egg is released from the ovaries, the fallopian tubes guide it down into the uterus. Without these tubes, the eggs would never make it into the uterus.



Uterus: The uterus (also called a womb) is a pear-shaped organ that is hollow in the middle. The lining of the uterus is where the menstrual flow comes from each month. Also, this is where the fertilized egg grows into a baby.

Cervix: The cervix is the small opening from the uterus to the vagina. It stretches and opens during childbirth to let the baby pass through.

Vagina: The vagina is the passageway from the uterus (womb) that leads to the outside of the body. This also stretches during childbirth to let the baby pass through during birth.

Menstruation

The menstrual period, sometimes just called your "period," are the three to seven days each month (usually every 25-40 days) when a small amount of fluid flows from your uterus and out through your vagina. Most girls start having their period a year or two after their breasts and pubic hair start to grow.



The inside of the uterus grows extra layers of tissue each month. This happens because the uterus prepares itself for an egg to attach to it. If the egg is fertilized a baby begins to grow. The extra tissue gives the new baby nutrients and oxygen, and is how the baby survives inside the mother until it is time to be born.

The layers inside the uterus grow, which takes about a month to happen. If the extra layers are not needed (for a baby) then the layers will break down and shed off the uterus. This shedding causes your period. The extra tissue will travel out of the body through the vagina.

What comes out of your body once a month is blood, fluid, and extra tissue. The amount will differ from woman to woman. It can also be different shades of red, from bright red to a deep red or brownish. You might also notice clots of blood, and that is completely normal! The bleeding will last around 5-7 days, but can be shorter or longer.

You may also notice cramping right before or during your period. This happens as the extra layers are shedding off. You may feel this discomfort in your abdomen or your lower back.

Your period might not be predictable or "regular" the first few years. This is normal, as your body is still just getting used to all these new hormones. It will eventually become more regular, and you will have a better idea when to expect your period. You can also keep track of your period on a calendar. If you mark the days when you get your period, you will soon be able to see how long it lasts and how many days are in your cycle.

"...trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."

Proverbs 3:5-6