

CHAPTER ONE:

Welcome to Puberty

Welcome to the world of the teenage girl! If you're reading this book, it's probably because you're about to be a teenager and you're curious about the changes you are starting to experience. Becoming a teenager is quite a big deal. Your body and mind are going through lots of changes—some can feel strange, some exciting, and some maybe even a little scary.

This book can help you find answers to the many questions that you and other girls your age have about puberty. Of course, it's also a good idea to talk to your parents, other family members, a doctor or nurse, or other trusted adults about any concerns you have.



Pssst! Try not to be afraid or embarrassed to ask questions. Remember, all adults were once as young as you!

What is puberty?

Puberty is the time during which your body grows from that of a child to that of an adult. Your body changes in many ways. Puberty is also the time when you will start having menstrual periods.

Changes in your body:

- * You get taller.
- * Your hips get wider.
- * Your breasts grow.
- * You grow hair in new places.
- * You start having periods.



While all of these physical changes are taking place, your emotions and feelings might change too. It's not always easy to go through so many changes so quickly. Puberty can be exciting, confusing, scary, or no big deal—every girl has her own reaction, and each reaction is perfectly normal.

Does this ever happen to you?

- Your body seems to look different every week.
- Your feelings seem to change suddenly for no reason.
- You spend more time with new friends than with old ones.

How long does puberty last?

Puberty generally starts some time between the ages of 8 and 11. For some girls, it can last just a few years. For other girls, it can last 5 years or longer. Every girl is unique and will go through puberty in her own way.

How should I feel about puberty?

There is no one way you “should” feel at this time in your life. Different girls have different feelings about starting puberty. Your feelings may even change from day to day. How do you feel?

- * You're excited and can't wait to start seeing the changes in your body. You are eager to feel and look more grown-up.
- * You feel self-conscious about these changes and aren't quite ready yet. You may still want to be a child and don't understand why some of your friends seem in such a hurry to grow up.
- * You feel both ways. Some days you're happy about growing up and other days you wish your body wasn't changing so quickly.
- * You take it all in stride—and wonder what all the fuss is about.

All of these ways of feeling are normal and okay.





Why do my feelings change so much during puberty?

During puberty, most girls notice that the way they feel and think about things changes. You may become more self-conscious and concerned about how others see you. You may find that your friendships seem to be getting more complicated. You may notice that you and your parents don't agree on things as much as you used to.



It may feel like your mood can change in an instant and you don't always know why. One minute you feel like a child who wants to play, and the next minute you feel all grown-up, wanting more freedom and independence.

Does this ever happen to you?

- You're overcome by giggles that just won't let up.
- You don't know why you're crying and you can't stop.
- You're suddenly angry at someone and you don't know why.

Puberty is also a time when you may begin to think about the world and your place in it. You may start to read newspapers or watch the news, and you may become concerned about some issues in the world that worry you. You may notice something in your school or your neighborhood that troubles you. Can you make a difference, and, if so, how? These are all common thoughts and feelings that are part of being a teenager.

Some Ways You Can Make a Difference:

- * Help an elderly neighbor.
- * Read to a younger child.
- * Organize a bake sale fundraiser for a worthy cause.
- * Stop an act of bullying.
- * When you're old enough, volunteer at a local hospital, nursing home, soup kitchen, or animal shelter.



The changes you are experiencing occur for a variety of reasons. One reason may be that your hormones are changing; *hormones* are chemicals that control many activities in your body, including growth. These changes in your hormones can also affect your mood. In addition, your way of thinking is changing as your brain further develops.

And your life is probably changing too. You may have switched schools to start middle school or junior high. You may have more pressures and responsibilities now that you are getting older. You may have made new friends, started to think about romantic relationships, or gone through a family change like divorce. These are major transformations that are likely to affect the way you feel.

If you have special needs or a long-term illness, whether or not others know about it, going through the many changes of puberty can sometimes be challenging. You're certainly not alone. Whenever you find things especially difficult, you'll feel better if you express your feelings to your parents, the doctor, the school nurse, a counselor, or another adult you trust. It can also be helpful to talk to other girls your age—you'll quickly realize that you all have a lot in common!

Why do I look at my body differently?

Girls your age often find that they start looking in the mirror more often, spend more time in the shower, and think about their appearance more than they did before.

Ideally, you like what you see when you look in the mirror. But the reality is that most girls find something, any little thing, to criticize about their appearance. It's easy to fall into the trap of comparing yourself to other girls. You may think, "I wish I weren't so tall—the short girls get all the attention" or "I'm the only girl in my gym class who doesn't wear a bra yet."

Pssst!

When you don't feel you look your best, remember that everyone feels this way from time to time. It's a normal feeling because, after all, no one is perfect!

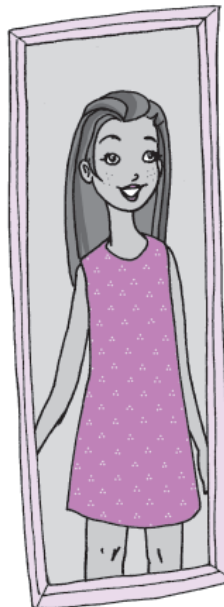


When you find yourself making these comparisons, try to remember that nobody has a perfect body, or face, or hair. Not even the fashion models you see in magazines or the stars you see in the movies. Although it's normal to find things about yourself that you want to change, it can also be harmful to be too critical of yourself. It can sometimes make you feel sad or lonely, and it can even affect your friendships.

So, try to remember the things you like about yourself and remind yourself of those things when you start to feel bad. "I may be shorter than most girls, but I'm really funny and easy to talk to." If you're having a hard time finding those good qualities in yourself, ask someone you trust—such as a good friend or an adult you look up to. You'll be surprised to hear how many wonderful things people who know you see in you.

Did you know that the photographs of women you see in most ads have been touched up quite a bit to make the women look thinner and taller and their skin smoother and unblemished? These women would look very different if you saw them in person. They would look more like everyone else—not perfect.

Stay focused on
your strengths—
and you'll feel
good about
yourself!





REAL GiRLS, REAL FEELiNGS

"When my older sister got her period, I thought she was really grown-up. Now that I have periods, it doesn't seem like such a big deal—just normal."
Age 12

"It seems like all of my friends are going through puberty before me. I really want to catch up." Age 12

"When I first grew breasts, I thought they were too big and I used to wear jackets all the time to hide them. Some of my friends asked me if I stuffed my bra. I'm starting to get better about my breasts now because other girls in my class are getting bigger too." Age 13

"My breasts seem smaller than everyone else's and some kids tease me about it. Sometimes it's hard to keep from crying." Age 12

"All of a sudden, my skin is breaking out. I never had a problem before. My mom is going to take me to the skin doctor to see what I can do for it." Age 11

"I hate being the tallest girl in my class. I'm even taller than the boys!" Age 10

