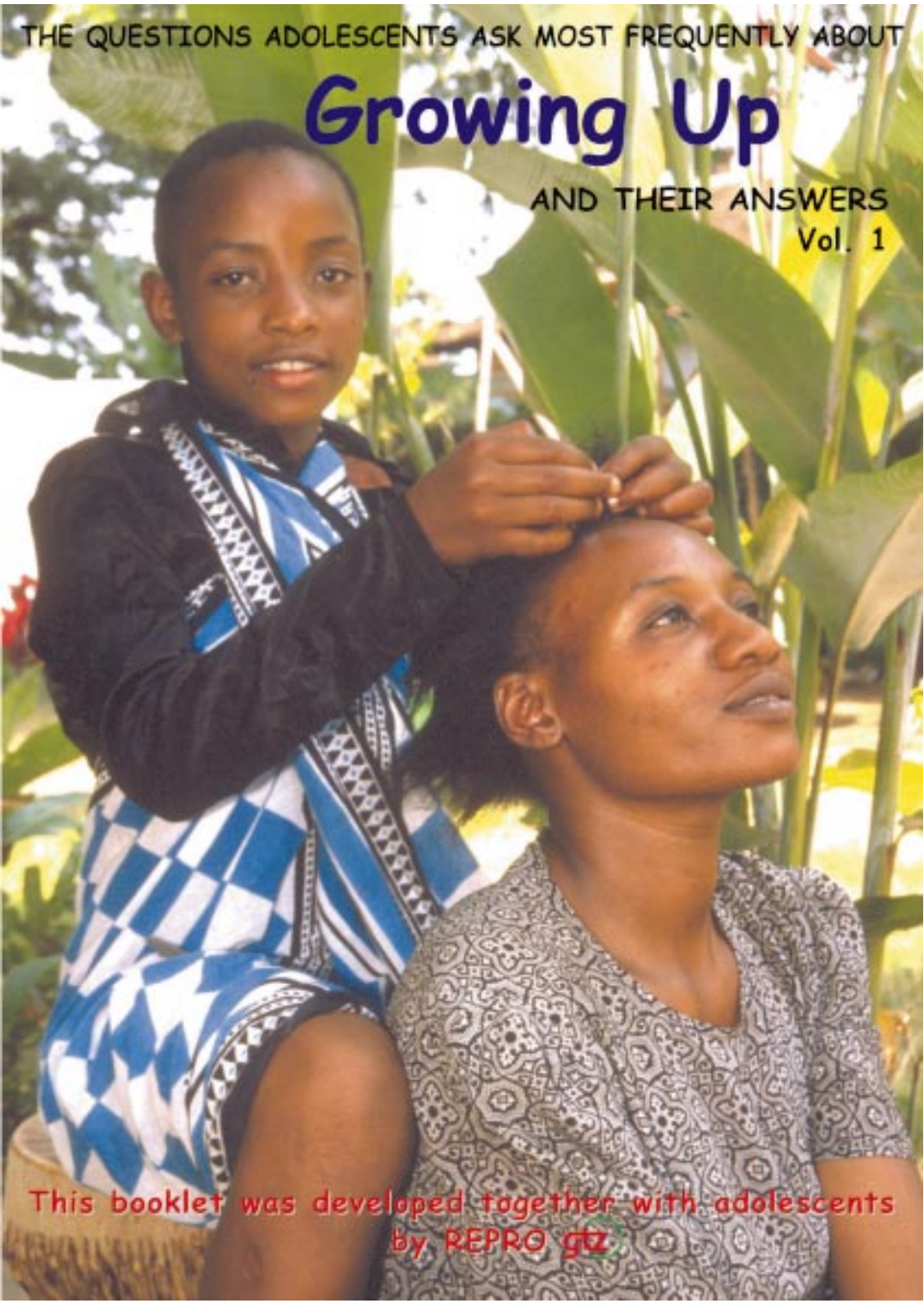
THE QUESTIONS ADOLESCENTS ASK MOST FREQUENTLY ABOUT

Growing Up

AND THEIR ANSWERS

Vol. 1



This booklet was developed together with adolescents by REPRO gtz

Recent studies in Tanzania show that a large percentage of adolescents are sexually active. At the same time they lack basic knowledge about the functioning of their bodies and the risks involved in becoming sexually active at an early age. This ignorance often puts them at risk. Unwanted pregnancies, hazardous abortions, as well as sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS are a real threat to uninformed youth.

This booklet has been developed in response to this situation. It is meant to provide youths with information on the most crucial facts and to guide them in becoming responsible decision-makers for their own lives. Without sufficient knowledge adolescents cannot make informed choices, and experience has shown that informed youth often choose the safer option!

All of the questions in this booklet have been collected in recent years by counsellors and researchers working with adolescents. The youth originate from different regions of Tanzania and their ages range from 11 to 20 years. Please note that none of the questions are made up by adults!

The booklet has been developed by a multi-disciplinary team of social scientists, medical doctors and education specialists. The adolescents were involved in all stages of the process. With the publication of this booklet, we hope to contribute to the prevention of avoidable hardship for adolescents, caused by their ignorance.

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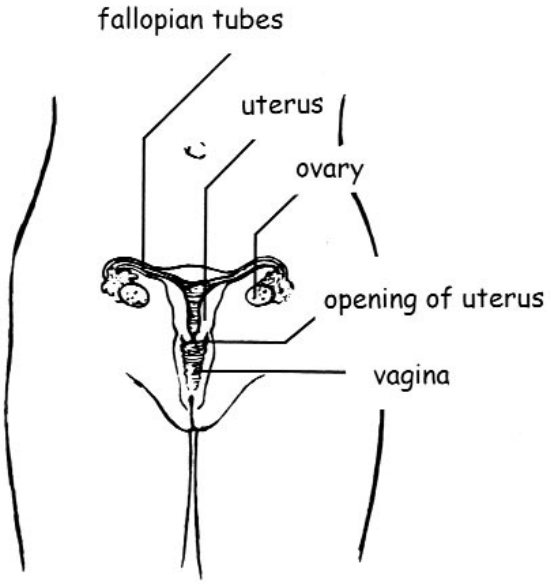
What external and internal genital organs does a girl have and what is their function?

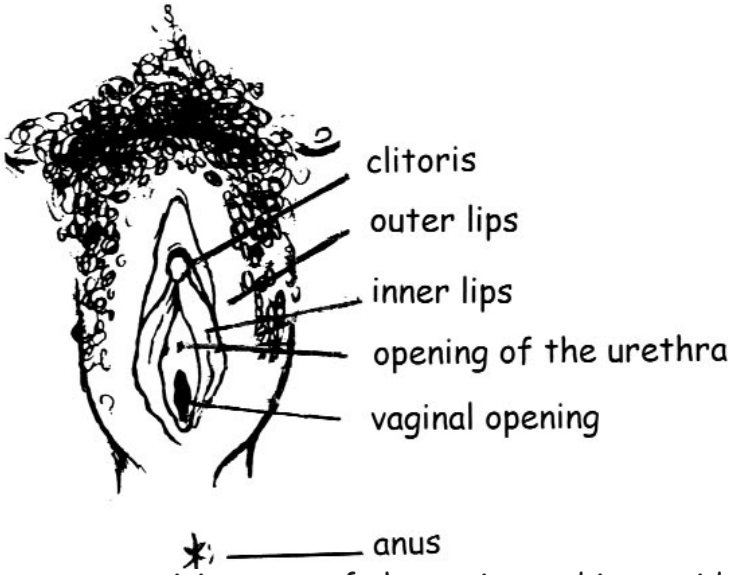
In the following picture you can see the internal genital organs of a woman:



If you look at the picture, which shows the internal reproductive organs, you will see the vagina, the uterus (womb), the ovaries and the fallopian tubes. The **vagina** is the canal between the uterus and the external genital organs, which we saw above. The vagina is where the

penis penetrates when having sex, menstrual blood passes through and babies are born through the vaginal canal. The average length of the vaginal canal is 7 to 8 centimetres. The uterus is normally the size of a small mango. A fertilised egg can settle in the lining of the uterus and it will grow there until delivery. During pregnancy, the uterus grows steadily in order to accommodate the growing baby. On each side of the uterus there is an ovary, which is about the size of a bean. Each month one egg ripens, either in the right ovary or in the left ovary, and from there it travels through the fallopian tubes. The fallopian tubes are the canals through which the ripe egg travels once every month from the ovary to the uterus. Also, the egg is fertilised inside the fallopian tube.

If you look at the picture, which shows the external genital organs, you will see the outer lips (labia majora), the inner lips (labia minora), the clitoris, the opening of the urethra (urinary canal), the vaginal opening as well as the anus. The outer and inner lips are folds of skin and they are there to protect the opening of the vagina. The clitoris is at the frontal marcation of the vagina. It



is the most sensitive part of the vagina and it provides sexual excitement to the woman when being touched. As we saw above, the vaginal opening is the opening through which menstrual blood passes. It is also where the penis penetrates during sexual intercourse and it is where the child passes through at birth. The opening of the urethra (urinary canal) is above the vaginal opening and that is where urine passes. The anus is where stools pass.

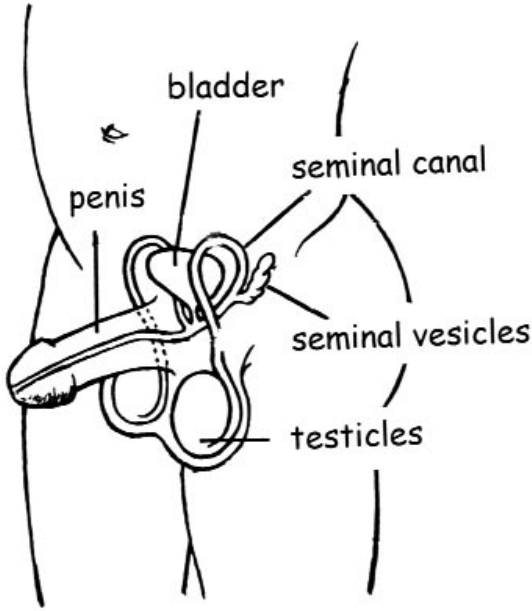
If you are a girl, you might want to use a mirror to have a look at your external sexual organs. Thereby you can get properly acquainted with your own organs.

Where does the bag of water (embryonic sac) surrounding a baby in its mother's womb come from?

The bag of water (embryonic sac) surrounding the baby during pregnancy is created within the uterus. This happens in the very beginning of the pregnancy, when the fertilised egg settles in the lining of the uterus. The bag of water is the place where the baby grows until it is born. The bag of water helps to protect the growing baby from hazardous outside influence and distress.

What external and internal genital organs does a boy have and what is their function?

In picture you see the internal and external genital organs of a boy. You see the penis, the seminal canals, the urinary canals, the bladder, the seminal vesicles and the testicles (testes). The penis is made of soft muscles and many blood vessels. If a lot of blood is pumped into these vessels, the penis hardens and erects. The penis is where urine, as well as sperm passes. If the boy feels sexual excitement, the penis becomes erect and sperm, together with seminal fluid, can be ejaculated. You can be sure that the liquid, which



is ejaculated during sexual intercourse, does not contain any urine, because the exit of the bladder is closed once the penis is erect. The two testicles are located in the scrotum and normally one testicle is slightly above the other one. The testicles are the place where sperm is produced and stored. The sperm pass through the seminal canals from the two testicles up to the opening of the penis. On their way out, they mix with seminal fluid, which is produced in the seminal vesicles.

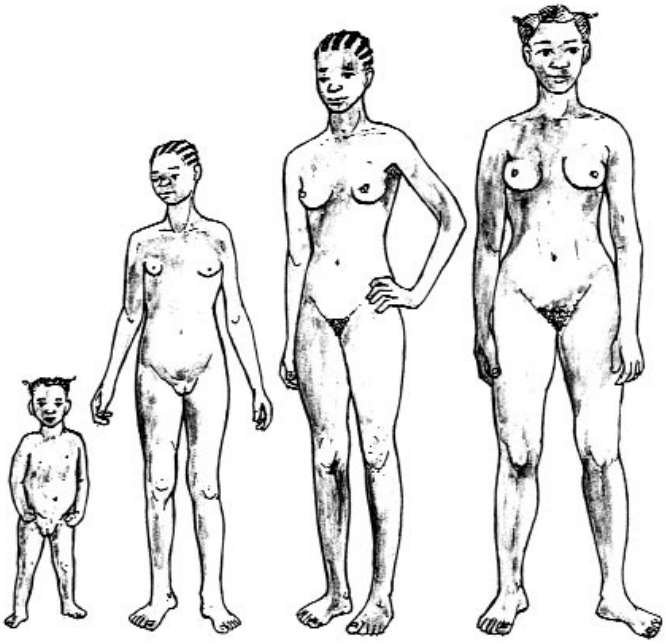
What is the normal size of a penis? And is it true that tall and fat men have big penises and short and skinny men have small penises?

The average size of a penis is 7 to 10 centimetres when not erected and an erected penis is 13 to 18 centimetres. The size of the penis has no relation to body size.

Also, during sexual intercourse the question of penis size is not the most important one. What is important is that both man and woman are in good health and that they have a caring relationship. Indeed, the length of the penis is not really important, because the most sensitive sexual parts of a woman are not inside the vaginal canal. Whether a sexual relationship is satisfying or not does not depend on the length of the penis!

What happens to the human body of girls as we mature and how does it feel when we finally mature?

There are a lot of physical changes a girl goes through when she matures. Among those are the following ones:



- You will grow faster, your hips will get wider and your breasts start to grow
- Your skin will become more oily, and you may get pimples on your face
- Hair will grow around your vagina and in your armpits
- You will menstruate for the first time

Along with these changes there are changes, which are not physical, for example:

- You start to develop sexual feelings, and your body will get excited when seeing a boy
- Your interest in boys increases and you start to take more care of how you look

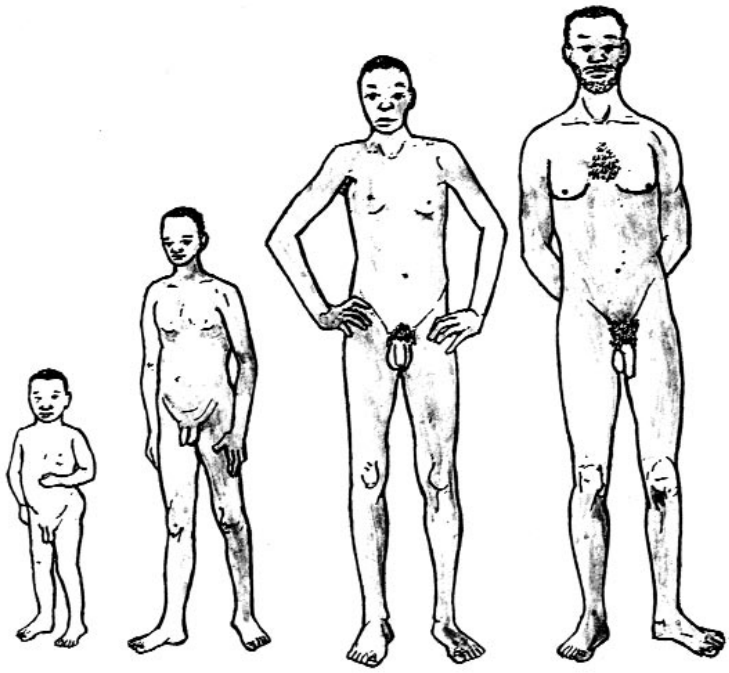
- You develop more self-confidence, you won't want to be forced to do certain things and you want to be seen as an adult person who can make her own decisions

All these changes are normal for adolescent girls, but remember that every girl goes through these changes at a slightly different time or with different intensity.

What happens to the human body of boys as we mature and how does it feel when we finally mature?

The physical changes a boy encounters are the following ones:

- You will grow taller and heavier, your hands and your shoulders will grow stronger and bigger, and your penis and testes will increase in size
- Your skin will become more oily, and you may get pimples on your face
- Hair will grow around your penis, in your armpits, and eventually on your face or on your chest
- Your voice will break and become deeper
- Your penis will erect more often, you may have wet dreams or ejaculate



In addition there are changes, which are not physical, for example:

- You will start to develop sexual feelings, and your body will get excited when you see a girl
- Your interest in girls will increase and you will start to take more care of how you look
- You develop more self-confidence, you won't want to be forced to do certain things and you want to be seen as an adult person who can make his own decisions

All those changes are normal for adolescent boys, but remember that every boy goes through these changes at a slightly different time or with different intensity.

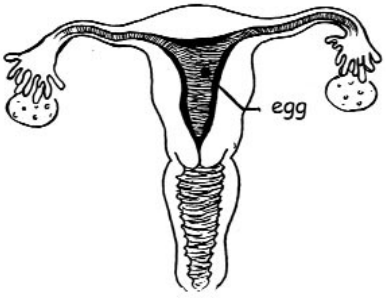
Why do girls start to menstruate when they grow up?

Menstruating, or having your period for the first time is a sign that the girl is growing up to become an adult. Girls menstruate for the first time some time between the age of 8 and 18. Having your first period, however, does not mean that you have to start having sex. Because if you have sex, you can also become pregnant!

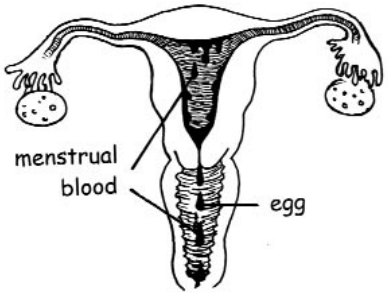
In the beginning your periods are likely to be very irregular. It is only after some time that you will have menstrual bleeding every month. Most frequently, the duration of a menstrual cycle is 28 days, however, some girls get their period after fewer or more than 28 days. The duration of the menstrual cycle may range from 21 to 35 days.

If you really want to understand, why a girl loses blood through the vagina every month, some explanations

about the menstrual cycle are necessary. The first day of your period is the first day of your menstrual cycle. After the period, one egg starts to ripen in one of the ovaries. At the same time the lining inside the uterus prepares itself for receiving a fertilised egg. Between the eleventh and the fourteenth day, the egg in the ovary is released and it starts to travel through the fallopian tubes until it reaches the uterus. A woman gets pregnant, if the ripe egg joins with a sperm in the fallopian tube. That is possible, if she has sex a few days before the egg is released or the day the egg is released. If the egg is not fertilised it will die and the lining in the uterus will break down and pass through the vagina. This is what the loss of blood is all about.



the egg reaches the uterus



the unfertilised egg leaves the uterus with menstrual blood

If a girl has sex with a boy and the egg is fertilised, she will not have her usual menstrual bleeding and that may be a sign that she is pregnant.

Many girls do not have very regular periods in the beginning. So if you do not always get your period after the same amount of days, don't worry. If you have never had sex with a boy, but still your period does not come as usual, it is very probable that this is just because of minor changes in your body. However, if you do not menstruate or if you are worried, you are advised to see a health worker.

If an adolescent girl only has sex during "safe days", can she avoid getting pregnant?

"Safe days" are days on which there is no egg ready to be fertilised. If a woman has sex only on such days, when no egg is ready to be fertilised, she can also avoid becoming pregnant. However, this requires that she knows exactly when the egg is ready to be fertilised.

As most young girls have very irregular periods, it is very difficult to know when there is an egg ready to be

fertilised. A girl's menstrual cycle can easily be affected by stress, sorrow, travelling or other changes in a girl's life. Even if a girl has had a regular period for some time, it may suddenly become irregular.

Therefore, counting days is not a safe way of avoiding pregnancy. Especially for girls there are no "safe days" from pregnancy, because their menstrual cycle tends to be even less regular than the one of adult women!

If starting your periods is a sign that eggs are produced in the body of a girl, why do you say that young girls are not ready to get pregnant?

It is true that starting your periods is a sign that your body is preparing itself for having babies one day. However, starting your periods does not mean that you have sufficiently matured for sex or for becoming pregnant. The vagina of an adult woman is very strong and stretchy, but a young girl's vagina is thin and can not stretch very much. The vagina of a young girl can therefore tear or burst during delivery. Also, the pelvic bones of a girl are still narrow and eventually too small for the baby to pass through at birth.

In addition, having a child is not only a question of physical readiness to be pregnant and give birth. It also involves being ready in terms of having a partner to share responsibility for the child, having a sufficient income for taking care of the family and having a place to stay. In many cases having a child early hinders a girl from continuing her education, which closes down a lot of opportunities for her.

Having monthly periods is therefore only a sign of approaching adulthood. It does not mean that your body has fully matured and it does not mean that you have arranged your life sufficiently for becoming a parent.

Do boys get periods like the girls?

No, boys don't get periods like girls. Starting the periods is one of the signs that a girl is approaching adulthood. For boys, one of the signs of approaching adulthood is having wet dreams. However, wet dreams do not follow a scheduled pattern or cycle, they occur randomly.

What exactly are wet dreams?

Boys get wet dreams while they are asleep. When having a wet dream, a boy dreams about a sexual relationship with a girl. His penis erects and the boy ejaculates a fluid, which is called seminal fluid, while the boy is still asleep. The fluid contains sperm and is mucus-like, sticky and whitish.

In order to have wet dreams it is not necessary that a boy has had sex with a girl before. Even talking or hearing about girls and sexual relationships is enough to build up a picture of sexual intercourse in a boy's mind,

which he will see in his dreams. Also, having wet dreams does not mean that the boy has to have sex with a girl.

What is sperm?

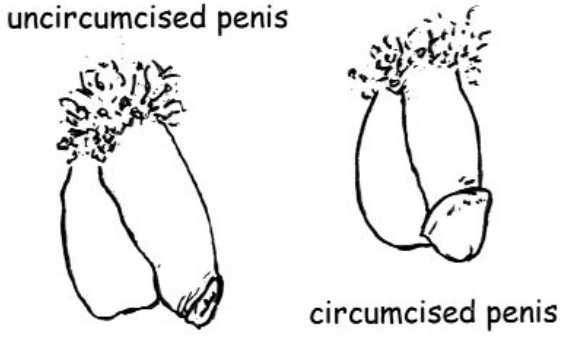
Sperm is produced in the testicles of a boy. They are so small that you can not see them with your bare eyes. You can only see them when using a microscope. In each ejaculation, a boy or man ejaculates millions and millions

of sperm. The sperm swim in a fluid which is called seminal fluid and which is produced in a vesicle separate from the testes. If you could see sperm, you would see that each sperm has a round head and a long thin tail.

Sperm is necessary to make a woman pregnant. A woman gets pregnant, if one sperm penetrates into an egg, which is ready to be fertilised.

Why are some boys circumcised?

In some religious groups and tribes boys are circumcised, meaning that the foreskin of their penis is removed. Some boys undergo circumcision when they are very young, others wait until they become adolescents. Some boys are not circumcised at all.



Besides religion, the reason, which is most often given for male circumcision is hygiene. It is true that it is easier to keep a circumcised penis clean than an uncircumcised one. But even if you are not circumcised, you can keep your penis clean by carefully rolling your foreskin back and gently washing this area. Circumcision may be advisable, if the foreskin of a boy is not large enough to pass urine easily or to clean the penis properly.

Remember that there is nothing wrong with being circumcised and there is nothing wrong with not being circumcised! But also remember, that circumcision has to be done under good hygenic conditions and using sterile instruments.

Why are some girls circumcised and what are the consequences?

In some tribes the clitoris and/or parts of the labia are cut or removed altogether. Often female circumcision is performed as the girl reaches adulthood to mark the transition from childhood to adulthood. Different tribes give different explanations, why girls have to be

circumcised. However, medically there is no reason to circumcise a girl.

Often female circumcision can be very hazardous for the girl who is being circumcised, and girls may die from its consequences. Possible physical consequences of female circumcision are the following:

- Severe bleeding
- Infections especially occur if instruments used for circumcision were not clean. Infections may spread to the inner sexual organs, and cause infertility or even death
- Urine and menstrual blood can be blocked inside the body of the woman and cause infections
- Difficulties and pain during sexual intercourse and childbirth due to the reduced size of the opening of the vagina

Female circumcision often has psychological consequences, where girls, for example, lose trust and confidence in their guardians or parents and they may suffer from feelings of anxiety, depression and incompleteness.

Why do adolescents start to talk about sexuality and why do they become interested in the opposite sex?

When boys and girls approach adolescence, many things change. There are changes in their bodies, but also in their mind and their heart. It is a very natural part of growing up that adolescents start to develop an interest in peers of the opposite sex. It is also normal that they start to talk about love and sexuality.

Adolescence is the time you can inform yourself about sexuality, about what goes on in your body and your mind, as well as in the mind of others. During

adolescence you can have a sound friendship with other peers, based on mutual respect, trust and honesty. However, that does not mean that you should start having sex. Talking about sex and actually having sex are two totally different things. Talking about sex is totally normal for adolescents and involves no health hazards. On the other hand, having unprotected sex can lead to unwanted pregnancy or being infected with a sexually transmitted infection, including HIV/AIDS.

Make sure you do not let others push you into having sex. If you feel for yourself that the time for having sex has come, make sure you protect yourself from unwanted pregnancies and the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases.

Why do adolescents start having a desire for sexual intercourse?

As you grow up, not only does your physical appearance changes, but also your thoughts and feelings. As an adolescent you develop feelings for peers of the opposite sex and you become aware of those sexual feelings. You can also feel it in your body. In boys, a

physical sign of sexual feelings is an erection of the penis. In girls, it is the wetness of the vagina. All those feelings are perfectly normal and a natural part of approaching adulthood.

But what should you do about your sexual feelings? Having sexual feelings or an erection does not mean that you must have sex. Sexual intercourse is only one way of expressing sexual feelings, but there are plenty of other ways. For example talking to each other, holding hands, cuddling, kissing and touching each other.

Once a girl or a boy has matured, how can he or she avoid having sexual intercourse?

Starting to feel attracted by the opposite sex is part of growing up. It happens to all adolescents, to some a bit earlier and to some a bit later. There is nothing you can do to avoid having these feelings. But you can learn how to react to having such feelings and how to deal with your urge to have sex.

It is most important for you to know that having sexual feelings does not mean that you have to have sexual intercourse. You can also express your feelings by talking to each other, holding hands, kissing, cuddling or touching each other. You may choose to masturbate or you can try to distract yourself by reading, studying or helping at home.

If the urge to have sex still persists, try to think about whether having sex in this specific occasion contributes to reaching your goals in life. Then think about the dangers of having sex at a young age, such as teenage pregnancies or being infected with a sexually transmitted disease or even HIV/AIDS. These

thoughts will most probably reduce your urge to have sex. If you cannot withstand from having sex, make sure you protect yourself with a condom!

How does it feel for a boy or a girl to have sexual intercourse before maturing?

When adolescents who had had sex before maturing were asked what they felt while having sex, they all agreed that they did not feel anything nice or special. They just did it without really liking it. And most of them said that they did it, because others did it and

because they felt pressure to also try it out. By postponing sex until you have matured into a responsible adult you do not miss anything.

Sometimes it is very difficult to say "no" to having sex because of pressure from others. Even if you feel that you are not ready for it, it is not always easy to say so. However, if you manage to withstand the pressure from others to have sex, you deserve recognition and you should be proud of yourself, because you are managing to follow your inner voice.

What can I do, if someone forces me to have sex?

In many cases young people are forced to have sex by people they know (e.g. older members of their family or a friend) and not by unknown people.

If you are violently forced to have sex, it is very difficult to get away. One of the things you can do to avoid being forced into having sex is to strongly say "no". When you say "no", also use defensive body language and show you are determined not to have sex. The fact that many of those who are forced into having

sex know the person who forces them, makes saying "no" more difficult. Do not hesitate to scream for help or try to run away, if you realise that the person is not yielding.

If it is possible to talk and discuss with the person who tries to force you, you can also try to use other arguments for denying sex. For example you can tell them that you like them, but that you are not ready to have sex. Ask them to understand your situation.

How can adolescents avoid becoming addicted to drugs (alcohol, tobacco, hard drugs)?

Many young people start to take drugs, because their peers take drugs and they feel pressurised to do the same. Others take drugs, because they think it is a way of solving problems. Think about your life and about how you would like your future life to be. You will realise very quickly that drugs will not help you to reach your goals.

One good way of avoiding drug abuse is to avoid groups or individuals who are using such drugs. Get involved in activities that will keep you busy, such as studying, doing physical exercise or helping at home. Other young people enjoy getting involved in religious activities, for example church choirs or youth groups at the mosque or the church.

If someone wants to convince you to take drugs, try to be strong. Tell the person why you do not want to take drugs. Explain that taking drugs will endanger your health and that buying them will cost money. In addition, taking drugs will hinder you from reaching the goals of your life. If you are convinced of what you are saying, the person will most probably not bother you anymore.

How can I get away from being addicted to drugs?

There are different reasons why people take drugs. The best way to stop taking drugs is to first find out why you are taking them. In some places there are even youth counselling centres where adolescents are assisted in their efforts to stop taking drugs.

Quite often it is not so easy to stop taking drugs, especially the very strong ones. But it is possible, if you are determined to do so and if you accept assistance from others (counsellors, friends, family members, etc.).

How can I help a friend who is addicted to drugs?

If you realise that a friend of yours abuses drugs there are a few things you can try. Talk to your friend at a moment when he or she is not drunk or high. Let your friend know that you are worried about him or her. Try to help him or her to avoid situations where your friend feels the pressure or the urge to take drugs. You can also help your friend by assisting him or her to seek help from outside.

Sometimes, people with drug problems are not ready to listen to your concerns and to receive your help. It may happen that the person gets angry with you or that your friendship cannot continue. But do not blame yourself. You tried to help and you did the best you could. Sometimes it is even better, if you terminate the friendship for your safety and the sake of your friend.

He or she might start to realise that there is really something wrong and subsequently decide to address his or her drug addiction.

Why do some people mature early while others become physically mature late?

Every person on earth is a bit different. Some are tall and some are short, some have light skin and some have dark skin. In the same way, every person has his or her own way and time to grow up. Remember that there is nothing wrong with maturing early or maturing late.

They all have the same age...

Is there any medicine for people who mature late?

The most important thing to know is that there is nothing wrong with maturing early or maturing late. There is no need to treat those who are a bit slower than others in becoming mature. They will become mature like everybody else, when their time has come.

If you are worried about yourself maturing too late, you can contact a health worker or a councellor for further advice.

Why do breasts sometimes hurt when they grow?

When girls grow up there are many changes in their bodies. Girls start to menstruate, they grow pubic hair, their voice changes, their hips become wider and their breasts start to grow.

When breasts grow the number of cells in the breasts increases. This prepares them for producing and storing milk once a woman has a baby. The increase in cells shows on the outside of the body as a swelling of the breasts. This process of adding new cells can sometimes be a bit painful, because it puts pressure on the many

nerve cells you have in your breasts. However, this pain is not an illness, it is perfectly normal and you should not worry if you feel a slight pain in your breasts as they grow. This pain disappears when the breasts reach their final size.

Why do girls sometimes get pains when they menstruate? What is the cause of such pains?

When you menstruate, it is because there is something happening in your internal sexual organs. The lining of the uterus, which was ready to receive a fertilised egg, breaks down if there is no fertilised egg to settle down. The muscles of the uterus start to contract in order to

move the lining of the uterus towards the opening of the vagina. The pains during menstruation are caused by these contractions of the uterus.

If these pains are very strong, if you lose much more blood than usual or if your period continues for many more days than usual, you might have a problem. In that case you are advised to seek assistance from a health worker.

How is it possible that we bleed from the vagina without being injured?

When a girl's ovaries mature and start the production of eggs, the girl's uterus also matures. A soft lining, which is made of blood vessels, develops in the uterus each month. This is how the uterus prepares itself to receive a fertilised egg.

If there is no fertilised egg, the lining of the uterus will not be used that month. It will break down and will pass out of your body through the vagina. What you see when you menstruate is therefore the lining of your uterus and it is not a sign that you have been injured.

How can I take care of the menstrual blood without others noticing that I am having my period?

Some girls are afraid that other people can see the sanitary material they use for absorbing their menstrual flow. This fear is in most cases not justified. If you use cotton rags for absorbing your menstrual blood, fold them well to cover your panty area. You can check with a mirror to see whether others might eventually see the absorbents. You will be relieved to see that the padding material stays close to the body and does not show through your skirt.

Whatever you use (cotton rags, pads, etc.) change it frequently enough to avoid staining and bad smells. Menstrual blood as such does not have a bad smell, however, if it gets into contact with air, it develops a stale odour.

Is there anything I can do to avoid having periods?

Actually, there is no way you can stop having periods once you have had your first menstruation. Girls start menstruating when they are teenagers and they continue to menstruate until they reach 45 to 55 years of age.

During all these years, there may be times when you do not menstruate. If you had sex and you do not have your period, you might be pregnant. If you haven't had sex, but suddenly your menstruation stops, it might just be that your menstrual cycle has not become regular yet. Other reasons for not menstruating are being sick (e.g. heavy malaria), being physically exhausted, not eating enough or being troubled.

What is the reason for having one's period for one day only or for losing very little blood only?

There are several reasons, which can cause very short and light periods. Some of those reasons are changes in the body due to being sick, doing unfamiliar work, a change of environment, changing of moods (deep sorrow or happiness) and changes in the food a girl is eating. Any of these changes can lead to a very short or light period for some girls.

You should, in any case, consult a doctor, if the intensity

of your menstruation changes drastically. A sudden change of menstrual intensity can be a sign of serious problems.

What is the reason for bleeding twice in the same month?

For many women, the menstrual cycle lasts 28 days. However, some women's menstrual cycle is only 21 days and for others it can last up to 35 days. Having a period twice a month means that blood will flow from your vagina twice in the same month. For example, if a girl starts having her period on 1st of July and if her cycle lasts 26 days, then she will have her period again the 27th of July. Thus, she will have had her period twice in the same month.

Sometimes women have menstrual bleedings in the middle of their normal cycle (for example after 14 days of a 28 day cycle). This can be caused by several reasons, as for example being sick, the use of heavy drugs, changing weather or a changing environment. It can also be due to light bleeding, caused by the ovulation process. If such bleeding continues to come

again and again before they are due, you are advised to consult a doctor in order to get clarification.

Why do I sometimes get in a very bad mood near my period and what can I do about it?

It is absolutely normal to sometimes be in a very bad moods near your period. This is caused by changes in the hormones in your body. Try to take it easy. It can be very helpful to keep yourself busy doing exercise, going for a walk or with any other activity which helps you forget that you are soon going to have your period. Or maybe it could be nice for you to have a warm bath.

Actually, there is no medicine to cure these bad moods. But for most girls they do not continue very long and many girls find their own way of handling these moods. It is already a big achievement, if you can acknowledge that your bad moods are due to your coming period. This shows that you are already coping with the situation in some way. If you suffer very much, try to find a counsellor or health worker who can help you to find a solution.

Do women ejaculate like men?

Women do not ejaculate. Ejaculation is something which happens to boys and men only. The body of a woman also does not produce sperm or seminal fluid. The ejaculation of a man when having sex is part of the process of making a woman pregnant.

When being sexually excited or when having sex, some fluid can develop in the vagina of the woman. This fluid is a sign that the woman is excited and also it makes it easier for the penis to penetrate into the vagina.

What can a boy do to avoid wet dreams?

Wet dreams are something, which happen to boys while they are asleep. Because you are asleep it is not possible to avoid such dreams. But maybe it helps to ask yourself why you want to avoid them, as wet dreams do no harm to your health at all and they are a sign that you are becoming an adult.

How come my penis is sometimes erect in the morning when I wake up?

It is true that this happens often to boys and adult men. There are many blood vessels in the penis and if a lot of blood is pumped into these vessels the penis becomes hard and erect. A sleeping person is very relaxed and blood can move very easily into the penis. The erection of the penis is therefore caused by the pressure of blood inside the penis. In addition, the erection of the penis when waking up in the morning can also be caused by the urinary bladder being very full.

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1. **Growing Up**
2. **Male-Female Relationships**
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4. **Pregnancy**
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