

called *prostaglandins*, which cause the uterus to contract in order to help expel the endometrium.

To help relieve cramps, get good exercise: long walks, swimming, or deep-breathing exercises; take a warm bath to relax your body; and try placing a heating pad on your abdomen.

Menstruation is a perfectly normal, healthy body function, so continue your usual activities (showers, sports, etc.).

It's a good idea to keep track of when your periods start and how many days they last. Most teens will go through puberty without problems; but if you need to see a doctor, you will probably be asked about your cycle.

The miracle of menstruation may eventually allow you to experience the miracle of conception and birth of your own children! This should occur within the lifetime relationship of marriage in order to prevent sexually transmitted diseases due to multiple partners, to provide the strongest possible union between you and your spouse, and to create a stable home for your child.

Feminine Protection

There are many types of feminine protection products which can be used once menstruation begins. The two main types are *pads* and *tampons*. Pads, or sanitary napkins, are worn inside your underpants (most have adhesive backing to attach securely), but outside your body. Change pads every two to four hours when menstrual flow is heavy and every four to six hours toward the end of your

"period," to avoid developing an odor from the fluid. Dispose of the used pad by folding it, wrapping it in toilet paper or disposal pouch, and placing it in a disposal can. Do not flush it down the toilet. Carry a wrapped pad in your purse or put one in your locker, just in case.

Tampons are inserted into the vagina and absorb menstrual fluids inside the body. We do *not* recommend tampons for young girls, nor is it wise to wear them overnight. Prolonged tampon use has been associated with Toxic Shock Syndrome.

Caring for Your Body

Because of major changes in your body, your sweat glands are beginning to produce more sweat than ever. To avoid developing an unpleasant odor, take a shower or bath every day and after physical activity, such as gym, dance, or sports. After bathing, use a deodorant and, of course, dress in clean clothes.

The oil (sebaceous) glands on your face, back, and chest also become more active during puberty. If this oil blocks your skin pores and combines with bacteria, pimples ("zits") can develop. Keeping your skin clean is the best way to prevent or lessen pimples; wash your face at least twice each day. Oil glands are also active in your scalp; frequently shampoo your hair to keep it fresh.

Gently brush your teeth, gums, and tongue at least twice each day to keep them healthy. Eat balanced meals and exercise *every day*—try running, swimming, rope jumping, skating, climbing stairs, bicycling, fast walking or aerobics.

Celebrate Your Life!

You are in a *very exciting phase* of your life! Your future, with all of its promise, is just beginning to unfold. You are becoming a woman; you are learning about your own sexuality. Your sexuality, including your fertility, is a marvelous gift, a precious part of who you are as a person. As you are going through puberty and experiencing the onset of your periods, reflect on the *incredible ways* your body is adjusting into womanhood so that *at the right time* in your life, you will have the capacity to become pregnant and bear your children. The proper stable environment for sexual expression is a loving and committed marriage.

This is a time of your life when many important decisions must be made. The mark of true maturity is making wise decisions. By understanding your body and how it works, you will understand yourself and your life-giving potential better. Recognize the tremendous responsibility you have to protect and save your beautiful gift of sexuality. You can use this gift in the most positive and wonderful ways in a life-long committed relationship. Rejoice in the gift of your sexuality and protect it. You are of incredible value and dignity. Respect yourself and others will respect you, too!

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Post Office Box 19173
Birmingham, Alabama 35219-9173
(205) 945-8322