Sexual development can start around the age of 10 with pubic and underarm hair and breasts starting to grow.

Girls develop at different rates. Some girls may have their first period when they're 10, others may be 16. All these changes—known as puberty—take place over several years.
**HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT YOURSELF**

is much more important than how much you weigh or what you look like.

**My life would be PERFECT**
... if only I was
taller/thinner/
didn't wear glasses/
had perfect skin!

**It's not true!**

With all the bodily changes that take place during your teens, it's easy to become obsessed with HOW YOU LOOK.

You do a lot of growing during your teens so the amount of body fat and muscle you have will increase - your body needs it. As your body changes from a girl's to a woman's you'll get taller, your hips will get broader and your thighs and buttocks fatter.

If you are tall or have a large frame then you will weigh more than if you are short or have a small frame. Remember that you may also weigh more just before and during your period.

Most women who diet aren't overweight - the average British woman is a size 14. They're just not happy with their bodies - most women see their body as bigger than it actually is.

This means that many women have an unhappy and guilty relationship with food - denying themselves things they like, which they then crave, and counting every calorie.

It's okay to eat chips, cakes, chocolate and crisps - if you eat them occasionally and eat other foods as well that balance your diet. If you need to snack between meals go for fruit, nuts or cheese.

Many girls who want to lose weight

just cut down what they eat.
If you are overweight you are taking in more energy than you use up, so you need to exercise. Exercise can also firm up or slim parts of your body - cyclists have trim thighs.

Miracle diets don’t work as the weight just goes back on when you stop the diet. You need to eat a healthy balanced diet with lots of fresh fruit and vegetables. This 'diet' is what you eat every day for the rest of your life. If you eat healthily and make exercise a part of your life you can forget about 'dieting'.

Worried about what you eat?

Extreme worry about your weight can cause health problems. If you think your concern about what you eat is taking over your life then seek help.

All women have **BODY HAIR** though some remove it.

Pubic hair around the genitals appears first, then hair grows in the armpits, on the legs and sometimes on other parts of the body. Fair hair is much less noticeable than dark hair.

Some women choose to SHAVE or USE CREAMS to remove hair on their legs or under their arms and others don’t. Some people find underarm hair very sexy - it's a matter of choice.
BREASTS get a lot of attention in our society and many girls worry that theirs don’t measure up to the images around them.

Breasts and nipples tingle or itch while they’re developing, but this will stop once they’ve grown. Growth can be uneven so one breast may be bigger than the other. This will even out but many women have slightly differently sized breasts all their lives.

Breasts come in different shapes and sizes and can be soft or firm –

- small
- large
- XTRA LIFT
- petite
- or large
- Nipples may point up
- or droop downwards
- be dark
- or pale

These differences are all normal.

What bra size do I need? Use a tape measure to measure around your chest underneath your breasts where the bra strap goes, and add 5” to that number. Then measure the fullest part of your breasts. If the two numbers are the same then you need an AA-cup, if there’s a 1” difference an A-cup, 2” a B-cup, 3” a D-cup.

GENITALS are as individual as people’s faces – they all look very different.

Take a look with a mirror...

Everyone’s different!!

Like this!

clitoris
outer lips
inner lips
urethra
vagina
anus

The outer lips (labia majora) cover the clitoris and extend back to just in front of the anus. The outer lips are thicker and often hairy on the outside and are mottled and darker on the inside. When a woman is sexually aroused they open up to reveal the entrance to the vagina.

The inner lips (labia minora) join at the front in a small fleshy bump called the clitoris – its purpose is to give sexual pleasure. The inner lips are thinner. They vary in colour from light pink to dark brown. One outer lip may be bigger than the other or the inner lips may hang below the outer lips.

You may have heard about cervical smears. This is a test offered to all women aged 20 and above, every 3-5 years. A cervical smear test spots the warning signs before cervical cancer develops. It can be uncomfortable, but it doesn’t hurt and it only takes a couple of seconds.
**The Menstrual Cycle** is from the first day of a period until the day before the next period starts. The length of the menstrual cycle varies—it can be as short as 21 days or as long as 40 days.

The menstrual cycle is controlled by **hormones**. The hormone oestrogen causes about 12 to 20 tiny eggs to grow in one of your ovaries each month.

**Hormones** make the eggs grow and also thicken the lining of your womb. Usually one egg becomes larger than the others and goes into the fallopian tube that connects the ovary to the womb. This release of the egg is called **ovulation** and it happens around 14 days before a period is due. Oestrogen also makes you produce mucus to help sperm to live as long as possible inside you after sex.

If the egg is not fertilised it will die and hormone levels drop. Without these hormones the womb lining breaks up and with the egg is released through the vagina as a period.

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**Living with Periods**

Changes in hormone levels can affect your **moods**. You may feel:

- Energetic and sexy around the time you ovulate.
- Or moody, tearful or angry the week before your period is due.
- Breasts may become sore or a bit larger and you may get spots on your face just before your period. Eating lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, having a diet low in sugar and salt and taking regular exercise can help.

**Periods** may become painful about a year after periods first start. Some women are particularly badly affected. The pain is due to large contractions of the womb muscle. It's a very real pain, so Andrea isn't being neurotic.

For more information on periods, ask for **periods—what you need to know** (for 9-12 year olds) from fpa (address back page).

Women are born with about a quarter of a million eggs in each of their two ovaries.

Period blood is often thick and reddish brown and may have small lumps in it. It only smells when it comes into contact with the air. This is why you need to change your towel or tampon every few hours.

Your vagina is naturally self-cleansing so you don't need to use perfumed pads or special sprays (and these can cause irritation).

Sometimes girls can have problems with tampons. If you have two or more of the following: Being sick; a rash; sore throat; sudden fever; diarrhoea, stop using tampons and see your doctor right away.

**What you can do**

**HOLD** a hot water bottle against your stomach and take a painkiller such as aspirin or ibuprofen. The combined pill is very good for painful periods, but if you don't want to take this your doctor will be able to prescribe something else.

So if you get really bad **period pains** don't suffer in silence.

**It's fine! This always happens!**

-- Andrea, 15

At first my periods were fine but now the day I come on is just awful. I have really bad pains, feel sick and sometimes have diarrhoea. My GP said I should go on the pill but my mum's not keen and says I'm neurotic.