

A Girl's Guide to Growing Up!



Written by: Aisha Ijaz & Sheena Hadi
Designed by: Sadaf Abde Ali
Illustrated by: Syed Salman Nasir
Design Editing by: Mariam Sheikh
Printed by: Sardar Sons Printers

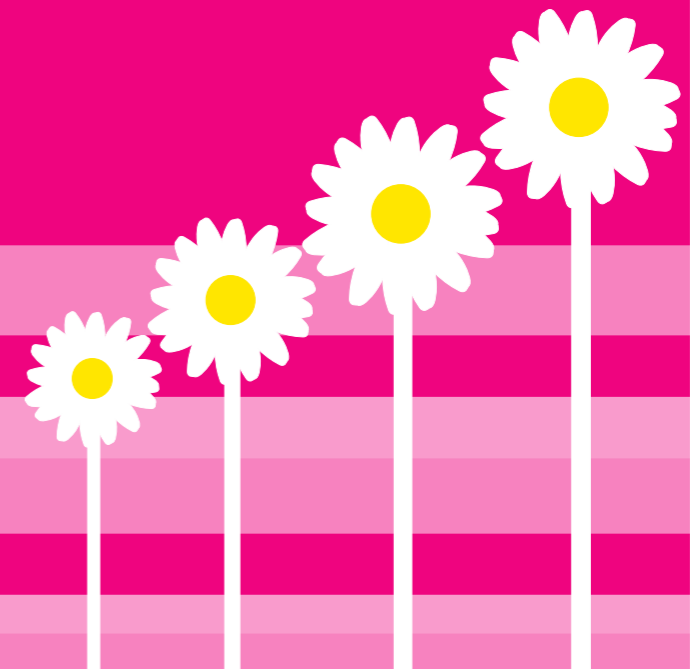
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Aahung, Sasi Homes, G-18/6,
Block-8 Kehkashan, Clifton, Karachi
Phone/Fax: 5870244, 5821654, 5867373, 5838114
Email: info@aahung.org, Website: www.aahung.org



A Girl's Guide to Growing Up!

Aahung is a non-profit organization that has been working to improve the sexual and reproductive health and rights of the people of Pakistan since 1995. Aahung's programs for youth and children focus on developing skills that enable the children to better protect and care for themselves, build self esteem and confidence, challenge gender stereotypes, enhance body image, and improve communication skills and assertive behaviour.



A Girl's Guide to Growing Up!

Growing up and becoming a young adult can be both exciting and scary at the same time. Your body and emotions are going to change at an amazing pace and sometimes the changes can be intimidating or confusing. When these changes start to happen, it may be hard for you to understand and adjust to them. What makes it harder is that nobody talks about the changes very much.

"A Girl's Guide to Growing Up!" can be very helpful to you because it's going to give you all the information you need to understand what is going to happen to your body as you make the transition into becoming a young adult. Because growing up can be challenging and complicated, the guide might not be able to solve all your problems or answer all your questions, but when you know more about what is happening to you, you will be a lot more confident about your changing body and mind and better prepared to take care of yourself. If you still have unanswered questions after you are done reading, talk to adults you can trust - your mother, grandmothers, sisters, cousins or older friends are all great sources of information. You'll find that if you're not embarrassed about asking questions, they won't be as embarrassed about giving you the answers.

So let's get started and find out how special you are!

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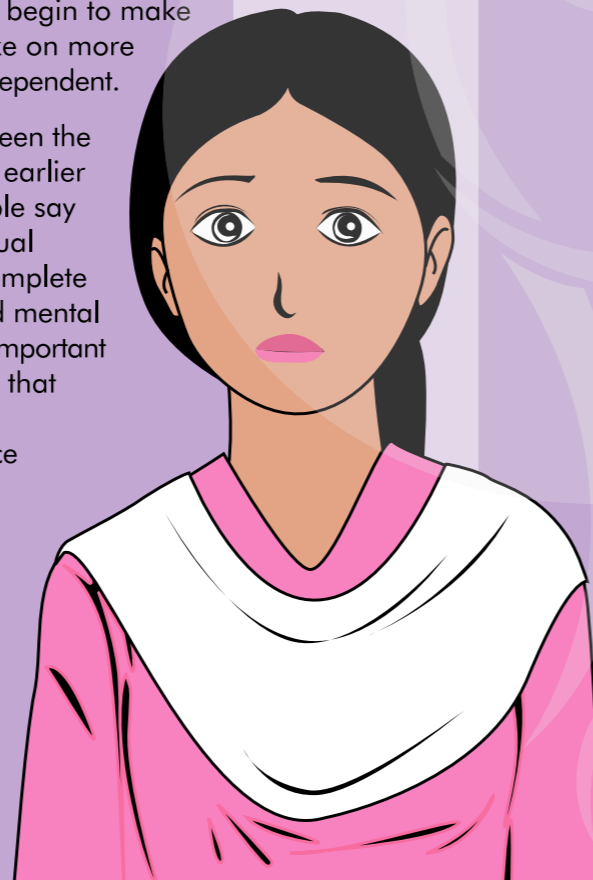
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What is Puberty?

As part of growing up you will go through puberty. Puberty is the time in your life when your body changes from that of a young girl to that of a woman. These changes are caused by chemicals in the body called hormones. Because there are so many changes that happen during puberty, you may feel like your body is out of control. In time, your hormones will balance out and you will feel better.

Not only does your body change, but your emotions change too. How you think and feel about yourself and your family and friends may change. As you go through puberty, you will begin to make important decisions for yourself, take on more responsibilities and become more independent.

Although puberty usually starts between the ages of 8 to 15 in girls, it may start earlier or later. While you might hear people say you've grown up, puberty is a gradual process that takes many years to complete as there are physical, emotional and mental changes involved in the process. The important thing to remember about puberty is that it occurs at a different pace in each individual and everyone's experience of puberty is unique.



How Will My Body Change?

The following are some of the changes your body will go through during puberty:

Breasts

As your body develops you will start to take on the shape of an adult woman. In most girls, this development starts with breast growth. When your breasts start to develop, you may notice small, tender lumps under one or both nipples that will get bigger over the next few years. Some girls have breasts that grow quickly, and for other girls this may take longer.

When breasts first begin to develop, it is not unusual for one breast to be larger than the other. By the end of puberty, both breasts should be about the same size, but it is common for there to be a difference in size even in adult women.

My First Bra

Your breasts may be sore, tender and sensitive as they grow. Wearing a bra may give support to your breasts and help protect them if they are sensitive or sore. It may also help you feel less self-conscious about your breasts. Some girls feel that wearing a bra for the first time is exciting whereas other girls feel embarrassed, especially if they are among the first of their friends to need a bra. If the people around you make a bigger deal of your first bra than you would like, try to remember that they do not mean to embarrass you, they are just proud of how much you have grown!



Hair

Soft hair will start to grow in the pubic area (the area between your legs) and then the armpits. At first the hair might be scattered and light coloured but as you continue through puberty, it is normal for it to start getting darker, thicker and longer. The hair on your legs and arms may also become thicker and more noticeable.

There are many reasons why some women decide to remove their body hair. Some feel it looks nicer, others feel cleaner with no hair and some women do it because it is part of their religious beliefs. Whether you choose to remove body hair or not, it is important to remember that getting rid of body hair doesn't make you more hygienic.

Hair Removal

Depilatories

How they work: Depilatories are creams or liquids that remove hair from the skin's surface. They work by reacting with the protein structure of the hair, so the hair dissolves and can be washed or wiped away.

How long they last: Several days to 2 weeks.

Pros: Depilatories work quickly, are readily available at pharmacies and supermarkets and are inexpensive. They work best on the leg and underarms; special types may be used on the face and chin.

Cons: Applying depilatories can be messy and many people dislike the odour. If you have sensitive skin, you might have an allergic reaction to the chemicals in the depilatory, which may cause a rash.

Tips: Read the product directions carefully and be sure to apply the depilatory only for the recommended amount of time for best results. If you have very sensitive skin, test a small patch of skin first to make sure you don't have a strong reaction to the cream.

Shaving

How it works: Using a razor, you remove the tip of the hair shaft that has grown out through the skin. Some razors are completely disposable, some have a disposable blade and some are electric. If you are shaving make sure you use a clean razor and don't share it with anyone else



because it may contain germs and cause infections. While many people think that shaving increases hair growth, in fact, there's no change to the hair follicle at all. While hair growth may appear to increase, this is usually because of the way in which shaving cuts the hair at an angle which makes it look thicker and feel coarser.

How long it lasts: 1 to 3 days.

Pros: Shaving is fairly inexpensive. All you need is some warm water, a razor and shaving gel/cream or soap. Shaving is a do-it-yourself endeavour, resulting in smooth, hairless skin.

Cons: Razor burn, bumps, nicks, cuts and ingrown hairs are some of the side effects of shaving. Ingrown hair occurs when hair is cut below the level of the skin. When the hair begins to grow, it grows within the surrounding tissue rather than growing out of the follicle. The hair curls around and starts growing into the skin, and irritation, redness and swelling can occur at the hair follicle.

Tips: Look for blades that have safety guard wires - they minimize nicks and cuts. Also, you'll get a closer shave if you shave in the shower after your skin has been softened by warm water. Go slowly, change your blades often to avoid nicks and use shaving cream/gel or soap to soften the skin.

Waxing

How it works: A sticky wax is spread on the area of skin where unwanted hair is growing. A cloth strip is then applied over the wax and quickly pulled off, taking the hair root and dead skin with it. The wax can be warmed or may be applied cold. Waxing can be done at a beauty parlour or at home.

How long it lasts: 3 to 6 weeks.

Pros: Waxing leaves the skin smooth and is long lasting. Hair re-growth looks lighter and less noticeable than it does after other methods of hair removal, such as shaving.



Cons: The biggest drawback to waxing is the pain when the hair is ripped out by the root. You may notice temporary redness, inflammation and bumps after waxing. Professional waxing can be expensive compared to other hair removal methods.

Tips: For waxing to work, hair should be at least 1/4 of an inch long. Waxing works best on the legs, arms, underarms and eyebrows. If you are waxing using re-usable strips of cloth make sure they are new or properly washed to prevent infections.

Menstruation

The menstrual cycle, or period, as it is commonly called, eventually prepares the body of an adult woman for pregnancy. Most girls get their first period between 10 and 17 years of age. One way for you to predict when you will begin your period is to ask your mother, grandmothers or sisters, as women within the same family tend to begin their period around the same age.

During the process of menstruation, blood and tissue is shed from your uterine walls about every 4 weeks, although it varies from person to person. It is important to remember that the blood that is shed during menstruation is clean and like all other blood in your body. The bleeding occurs for anywhere between 2 to 8 days and can be associated with some discomfort in the form of cramps, backaches, breast tenderness, fatigue, headaches, bloating or moodiness.

What is used during one's period to catch the blood flow?

- ✿ Most frequently, women use sanitary napkins, or pads, to absorb the blood during their period. Pads are rectangles of absorbent material that you stick to the inside of your underwear. Some have extra material on the sides (called "wings") that fold over the edges of your underwear to better hold the pad in place and prevent leakage. Pads are disposable and when they become damp, they are wrapped up in paper and/or plastic and thrown away.
- ✿ Tampons also absorb menstrual blood, but they work from inside the vagina. A tampon is also made of absorbent material, but it's pressed tight into a small cylindrical shape. Some tampons have applicators, which are plastic or cardboard tubes that help put the tampon in place.

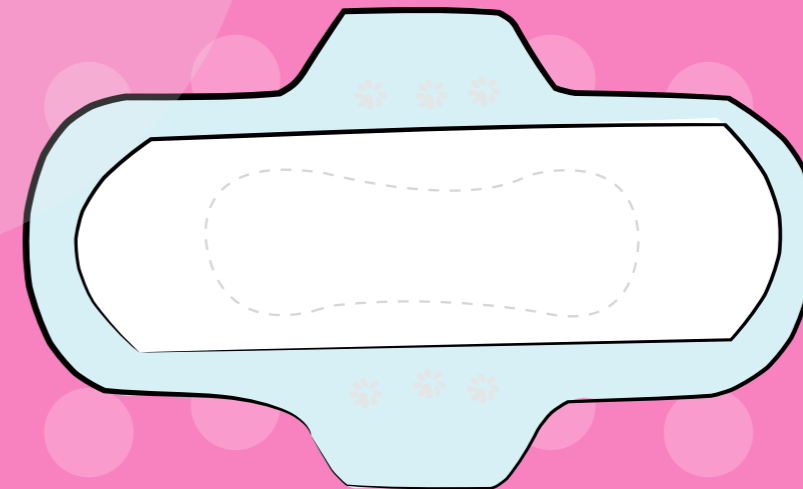
Other tampons can be inserted using your fingers. Tampons are not very readily available in Pakistan and are more expensive than pads.

What will happen when I get my first period?

Usually a first period is very light so you don't need to worry about it seeping through your clothes. It will probably be a few spots of bright red blood or a brown sticky stain that shows up on your underwear or when you clean yourself after urinating. If you are out in public and don't have a pad with you, don't panic! Hopefully, your mother or other adult relative will be close by and can supply you with a pad. If not, ask a friend, teacher or any other woman you feel comfortable talking to, if she has a pad. Remember, all adult women get their period so there is nothing to be embarrassed about!

What do cramps feel like?

Menstrual cramps are a pain around the area of the uterus that is below your belly button. Sometimes they can lodge in your lower back. Cramps are caused by the uterus contracting and you can get them just before and during your period. Some girls have few cramps, some have lots and then there are those who have none. The intensity of the cramps varies, and you may not get them every time you have your period.



Tips on How to Deal with Cramps:

Taking a warm bath/shower
Applying a hot water bottle to the abdomen
Exercising or taking a walk
Drinking lots of water
Getting enough sleep

I feel terrible before my period; what can I do?

Feeling emotional, irritable, tearful, tired and bloated before your period are all symptoms of pre-menstrual syndrome or PMS. Many women have this condition and sometimes just knowing about it and predicting when it will happen is enough to help you through it. Things that help lessen symptoms include:

- 
- ✓ Exercise
 - ✓ Eating fresh food
 - ✓ Avoiding processed food
 - ✓ Avoiding too much salt
 - ✓ Avoiding caffeine (remember that chocolate and cola also contain caffeine)
 - ✓ Eating regular small meals
 - ✓ Pampering yourself

Menstrual Irregularities

Regular menstrual cycles are a sign that you are in good health. In the beginning, it is common for girls to have irregular periods for up to 2 years. After some time, however, your cycle will become more predictable and you should be able to have a pretty good idea of when you are going to get your period and how long it will last. Try to remember that all girls have individual cycles and the length of time between one's periods, the number of days of bleeding and the amount of bleeding varies from person to person. In some girls, periods may occur every 3 weeks while in others it may be every 4 or 5 weeks. The important thing is that you have a regular period that doesn't go off schedule too frequently.

While there is no "normal" cycle when it comes to one's period, there are a few signs which all girls should be aware of because they indicate that they might be having menstrual problems:

- ✿ If you have turned 16 and have not had a period yet at all.
- ✿ If you have experienced a gap of more than 3 months between your periods or if you are frequently skipping months between periods.
- ✿ If your bleeding lasts for more than 8 to 10 days or occurs more frequently than every 21 days.
- ✿ If your cycle consists of very heavy bleeding where you soak through sanitary napkins/cloths within an hour.
- ✿ If you have any bleeding in between your periods (this can be in the form of spots of blood or heavier bleeding.)
- ✿ If you experience menstrual cramps that are severe enough to interfere with your everyday activities, such as going to school.

If you have noticed any of the above signs, there is no need to panic as menstrual irregularities can be caused by a number of physiological and psychological issues. However, since health issues can be involved, it is important to talk to an adult about the problems you are having, as well as see a qualified doctor.

Vaginal Discharge

About 6 months to a year before you start to menstruate, your body can start the production of vaginal discharge. The purpose of vaginal discharge is to clean and moisten the vagina and to prevent bacterial infections from occurring. The vagina will continue producing discharge throughout your life, particularly during the middle of the menstrual cycle (2 weeks after one's period begins), when you are pregnant or become excited in any way. Normal discharge is usually clear or white, has a very slight odour, and should not cause any discomfort, such as burning or itching.

What is abnormal vaginal discharge?

Keep an eye out for:

- Unusual increase in amount of discharge (Apart from the regular increase/decrease that occurs during your menstrual cycle)
- Change in texture: for example curd-like or frothy and watery
- Change in colour to grey, yellow, green or brown
- Change in smell: for example fishy or yeasty

The above might mean that you have an infection and should go see a doctor immediately. Most symptoms of abnormal discharge can be treated with simple medication.

Weight Gain

Girls going through puberty are supposed to gain weight and it is normal to put on 15 or more pounds during this period of development. The body starts making more fat so you can develop fuller breasts, hips, stomach and thighs. These changes help give the body the shape of an adult woman and the increased width of the hips occurs to ultimately allow you to experience greater ease during child birth, later in life. Eating healthy foods and exercising regularly may help you stay at the right weight for your size.

Face and Skin Changes

During puberty you may experience oily skin and notice you sweat more. This is because your glands are growing too. You may also develop acne (pimples) on your face, back, chest and neck. The blackheads, whiteheads or red bumps of acne affect nearly every teenager and many young adults. Acne happens because of the hormonal changes that come with puberty. If your parents had acne as teens, it's more likely that you will, too. The good news is that, for most people, acne goes away almost completely by the time they are out of their teens.

What can I do about acne?

To help prevent the oil buildup that can contribute to acne, wash your face twice a day. Don't scrub your face hard with a cloth - acne can't be scrubbed away, and scrubbing may actually make it worse by irritating the skin and pores. Try cleansing your face as gently as you can.

If you wear makeup or sun block, make sure it's labeled "oil free." This means it won't clog your pores and contribute to acne. When you are washing your face, be sure you take the time to remove all of your makeup so it doesn't clog your pores. If you have long hair that touches your face, be sure to wash it frequently enough to keep oil away. It can also help

to wash your face after you've been exercising or sweating.

If you look in the mirror and see a pimple, don't touch it, squeeze it or pick at it. This might be hard to do - it can be pretty tempting to try and get rid of a pimple. Playing around with pimples can cause even more inflammation by opening them up. Picking at pimples can also leave tiny, permanent scars on your face.



Puberty Characteristic	Age of Occurrence
Breasts grow in size	8-13 years
Menstruation begins	10-17 years
Pubic hair starts to develop	8-14 years
Underarm hair develops	2 years after pubic hair growth begins
Growth in height and width of hips	9.5-14.5 years
Oil and sweat gland production increases	Begins at the same as underarm hair growth

Hygiene

Tips for Good Menstrual Hygiene:

- * Use a sanitary napkin/pad to absorb blood (good idea to keep one on you at all times especially in the beginning as your cycle can be erratic.) Make sure you change your pad every 4-5 hours.
- * If cloth is used to absorb the blood then make sure it is properly washed, dried in the sun and then ironed as re-used cloth can harbor bacteria and cause infections.
- * Bathe regularly during your period as it is the best way to make sure the genital area stays clean. Bathing while you have your period does not cause any physical harm.
- * It is ok to play sports, walk, run and move around if you are not in any pain.
- * The kind of food you eat does not affect your period (hot/cold etc.) It is important to eat healthy and drink lots of water to prevent dehydration.
- * After using the toilet, make sure to wash the genital area from the front side towards the back side.

Tips to Keep Your Body Clean and Fresh:

- * Bathe or shower everyday, especially after you sweat.
- * Wash your face twice a day, in the morning and evening. This will also help to control oil production, which can result in pimples.
- * Wash your hair at least 2-3 times per week, or as often as necessary to keep it clean and oil free.
- * Use antiperspirant or deodorant under your arms to control sweating and odour. Puberty increases the amount of sweat produced by the body and results in the odour of sweat being stronger.
- * Wear clean underwear every day. It is best to wear cotton underwear that is not too tight to help ventilation and prevent infections. If underwear gets wet or soiled, it should be changed.
- * Wash your clothes regularly. The same bacteria from your skin can also live on sweaty clothes and keep the smell alive.

Why Do I Feel Different?

Puberty can bring with it a host of psychological changes that are often very confusing and disorienting. You tend to start becoming more concerned about what others think of you as you develop more independence from the home and rely to a greater extent on peers and friends. With so many changes occurring in your body, it is also common for you to become more self-conscious about how you look in comparison to others and to start to develop insecurities about your body. While it is normal to compare your body to that of your peers, you should try to remember that everyone goes through puberty in their own unique way and that everyone's body looks different. The great thing about being "you" is that you are unique.

As hormone levels change drastically in your body, shifts in mood become very common as well. You may find yourself feeling insecure, overly agitated by your surroundings or easily angered by people and situations. In addition, you may experience new and confusing feelings towards relationships that you have never had to deal with before.

It may be difficult for you to deal with all of these new emotions and feelings and it is normal to be left with a number of questions and confusion about what is happening to your body and mind. Thus, it is important to seek answers to your questions and develop an understanding of the changes going on in the body. Going through puberty is tough and talking about what you are thinking and feeling may make it easier to get through. While some young people feel comfortable talking to family members about their anxieties, others prefer to talk to teachers, counselors, health care professionals or other trusted adults.

Discovering Who I Am

Adolescence is a time period when you start to develop your own sense of self and often begin to ask questions about who you are and what you would like to become. As you develop more independence from the home, it is natural that friends and peers start to play a more important role in your life. The increasing independence you crave, combined with your heightened sensitivity levels, may create some conflict at home.

Yet, you should try to remember that you are not the only one going through drastic changes. Parents and family members are present to witness the sudden changes that occur with the body and mind, and often parents have difficulty dealing with the speed at which such changes are occurring. Just as parents need to continue being a source of guidance without being overly repressive and controlling, you also need to try and remember that parents are used to making decisions for you from the time you were a completely dependent infant. It is the transitional period for parents and adolescents that tends to create conflict and problems. Young people want respect and independence, while parents are used to making decisions for them and cannot easily get used to the idea that they are not in complete control.

Surviving Puberty



Puberty can be one of the toughest parts of life. With the help and support of relatives and friends, you can sail through it, though. It helps to remember that you are not the only one going through this and that everyone goes through puberty. Puberty is a totally normal and healthy process and is nothing to be ashamed of. Here are some additional tips to help:

- ✿ Ask lots of questions. It is nice to know how and what your body is doing, how it will affect your life and how to keep it all in perspective. If you feel shy, remember that EVERYONE goes through puberty!
- ✿ Look for more information about puberty in your library and/or bookstores or directly from a responsible older person you trust.
- ✿ Respect your body, eat nutritious foods and get plenty of exercise.
- ✿ Accept your body and the changes it is going through. Remember that everyone goes through those changes, but that you are an individual. Try not to compare yourself to anyone else.
- ✿ If you feel sad, confused or totally weird, talk to somebody. Believe it or not, you already know someone you can talk to about your personal feelings and the changes you are going through.
- ✿ Give your parents a chance. They can really give you a lot of support and information if you let them in.

Emotional Changes You May Experience During Puberty:

Feeling closer to, and more dependent on peers and friends.
Feeling less close to, and less dependent on family members and elders.
Feelings of anger and frustration.
Frequent mood swings.
Feelings of confusion.
Feelings of attraction to the same or opposite sex.
Feelings of insecurity about one's physical appearance and talents.
Feeling curiosity towards one's body.
Feelings of bitterness towards rules and regulations, especially those that are set forth by family.
Feelings of being an independent adult as well as a dependent child.
Feeling the need for privacy.
Feelings of low self-esteem.



Myth or Fact?

I will have my period all my life - Myth

Women have their period from the time it starts until they go through menopause, which is when the period stops permanently. This usually occurs between the age of 45 and 55 and means that a woman can no longer become pregnant. Other than that, women also do not have their period during the 9 months of pregnancy.

It is normal for periods to be irregular - Fact

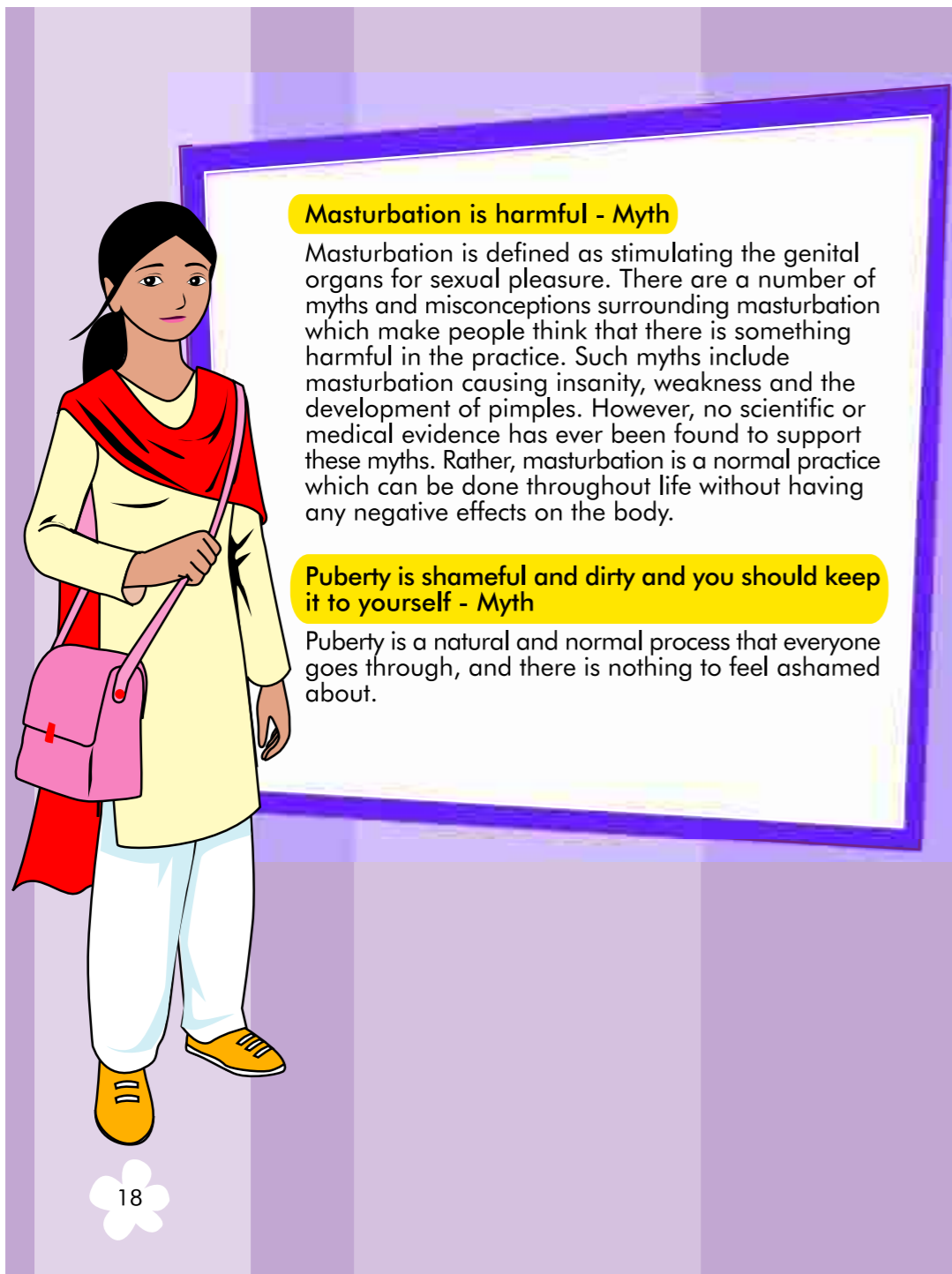
It is very common for women to get their period irregularly, particularly right after the onset of menstruation during puberty. Often it takes a number of years for the cycle to settle down and become more regular, and even then the length of time between periods may never settle down completely.

Bathing should be avoided during menstruation - Myth

Bathing does not stop or increase the flow of menstrual blood. It is important to bathe to keep yourself clean and to stay fresh.

All healthy boys and girls experience puberty and it is a normal part of life - Fact

Puberty is a natural and normal process and is a part of growing up for all boys and girls. Chemicals in the body, known as hormones, cause the body to change from that of a child to that of an adult. Because there are so many changes that happen during puberty, adolescents may feel like their body is out of control. In time, their hormones will balance out and their body will catch up.



A A H U N G

Apart from trusted adults, there are a number of resources that you can turn to if you want information with regards to puberty, your body and sexuality.

WEBSITES

www.goaskalice.columbia.com

www.sxetc.org

www.puberty101.com

www.kidshealth.com

www.plannedparenthood.org/health

Youth Help line

0800 22 444 (Toll-Free Number)

awaz@mail.comsats.net.pk