

- Mood swings
- Tenderness in the breast

If any of these symptoms seem severe, you should talk about this with a doctor.

### WHEN TO SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION?

You should go to a medical doctor if:

- A sudden change in your period occurs that does not have an clear cause such as extreme stress, illness or weight gain/loss
- Very heavy menstrual bleeding that lasts more than 7 days
- Bleeding between periods
- Severe abdominal pain that lasts for more than 2 days
- You think you might be pregnant
- A discharge from the vagina that is yellow, green or gray in color, thick and white and cream-like, foamy or has a strong or fishy odor

#### CONTACT INFORMATION:

[riht@uscrdc.org](mailto:riht@uscrdc.org)  
**U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants**  
 1717 Massachusetts Ave., NW  
 Suite 200  
 Washington, DC 20036  
 Phone: 202 • 347 • 3507  
 Fax: 202 • 347 • 3418  
[www.refugees.org](http://www.refugees.org)

### For more information about women's health on the Internet, please visit:

[www.womenshealth.gov](http://www.womenshealth.gov)

[www.4women.gov](http://www.4women.gov)

[www.omh.gov](http://www.omh.gov)

[www.girlshealth.gov](http://www.girlshealth.gov)

[www.youngwomenshealth.org](http://www.youngwomenshealth.org)

[www.girlhealth.org](http://www.girlhealth.org)

### For more information by phone, please call:

CDC National STD Hotline

1-800-227-8922

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

CDC National AIDS Hotline

1-800-342-AIDS (1-800-342-2437)

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

National Women's Health Center

1-800-994-9662

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services



*Information for this brochure was adapted from materials developed by:*

*The American Academy of Pediatrics: Puberty Information for Boys and Girls*

*The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Women's Health*

*Advocates for Youth*

*This brochure was developed with funding from the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement*



Photo credit: Rose McNulty

## What Every Woman Should Know about Her Body



[www.refugees.org](http://www.refugees.org)

*Protecting Refugees, Serving Immigrants,  
 Upholding Freedom since 1911*

### PUBERTY

Puberty is the time when the body changes from a child to an adult. Puberty occurs in girls and boys, usually between 9 and 13 years of age.

During puberty, girls begin to develop breasts; their hips widen, and they begin to grow hair in their genital area (between their legs), underarms, and legs. During this time, girls begin their menstrual cycle (commonly called a period). These changes are normal and healthy and help the young girls become women.

### MENSTRUAL CYCLE

Most girls begin their period or menstrual cycle between 9 and 16 years old. Having your period does not mean you can't do normal things like swimming, running, working, or any other physical activity. Being active may help ease some of the discomfort that may come with your period.

### WHAT IS A MENSTRUAL CYCLE?

When girls begin their menstrual cycle their ovaries release an egg each month. If sperm from a man fertilizes these eggs, it will grow inside the uterus into a baby. Each month the female body prepares itself to bear a fertilized egg by forming a thick layer of tissue and blood cells inside the uterus. If the released egg is not fertilized, the uterus lets the layer of fluid out. This is what is called the menstrual period.

### HOW LONG DOES A MENSTRUAL PERIOD LAST?

Most periods last 3 to 7 days. Usually the

menstrual cycle happens on a set schedule, usually on a 3 to 5 week cycle. After reaching puberty, a young woman may not have a regular cycle, but after some time the body will adjust and a regular cycle will begin.

### HOW DO YOU CARE FOR YOURSELF DURING YOUR PERIOD?

You will need to use some kind of sanitary pad or tampon during your period to prevent the menstrual liquid from soiling your clothes. Most women use either sanitary pads or tampons. What you use is your choice, but stay away from scented products which may cause or increase infections.

Sanitary pads are worn inside of your underwear. Sanitary pads stick to your underwear with a kind of tape. Sanitary pads should be changed often to prevent leakage, discomfort, and odor. In warm weather, sanitary pads should be changed as often as you visit the restroom. This will help you feel comfortable and dry.

Tampons are put into the vagina. Like sanitary pads, tampons should be changed often, at least every 4 to 6 hours.

The female body has a natural internal cleansing system, that means you should not douche or use inserts to "help clean" inside after your period. In fact, this practice can be harmful as it may increase infections and increase your risk of disease.

### WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN DURING YOUR PERIOD?

Some women have heavier periods than others do. This is normal. Every woman is different. During your period you will not bleed too much. You will only lose 1 to 3 ounces (30 to 90 ml) in your monthly cycle. This is about the size of the trial-sized lotion. However, if your period is very heavy, you should talk about it with a doctor.

Some women experience discomfort before, during, or after their period. This may include:

- Cramps
- Feeling swollen
- Feeling tired
- Headaches
- Backaches

