

Information Please®

girls' Almanac



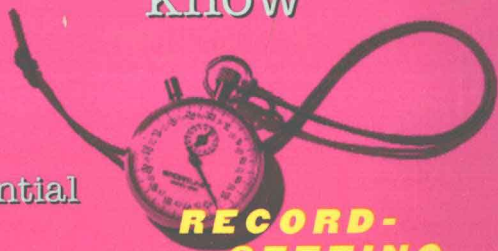
**FASHION
FLASH**

WHAT'S HOT,
WHAT'S NOT

Ingenious and Influential

Women

YOUR BODY
things
you should
know



**RECORD-
SETTING
SPORTS
SPECIAL**

GIRL TALK about dating

MARGO McLOONE and ALICE SIEGEL

The Information Please[®] Girls' Almanac



ILLUSTRATION CREDITS:

Body and Mind: *Brain, Chromosomes, Female Reproductive System, Female External Genitalia, Bananas* Laurel Cook Lhowe *Moon Cycle, Mother and Child* Sara Mintz Zwicker *Bathtub* Lynn Michaud *Garlic* Chris Costello **Calendar:** *Snowdrop, Violet, Daffodil, Sweet Pea, Lily of the Valley, Rose, Water Lily, Calendula* Laurel Cook Lhowe *Poppy, Morning Glory, Chrysanthemum, Poinsettia* Chris Costello **Crackerjack**
Kids and Careers: *First Prize* Sara Mintz Zwicker *Julia Child* Rosemary Fox **Dating and Mating:** *Wedding Cake, Wheat, Daisies, Mule* Sara Mintz Zwicker *Children Sipping Straw, Ivy, Hand with Ring* Lynn Michaud
Fashion and Dress: *Camisole, Jeans Pocket, Wardrobe, Bra, Pillbox Hat, Poodle Skirt, Hippie, Perfume Bottle* Sara Mintz Zwicker *Long Top over Leggings, Belly Bag, Gloves, Bike Shorts with T-Shirt, Egyptian* Lynn Michaud **Girl Talk:** *Eleanor Roosevelt* Rosemary Fox *Corn* Lynn Michaud *Topsy-turvy Doll* Sara Mintz Zwicker **Invention Convention:** *Grocery Bag, Pizza, Beaker* Sara Mintz Zwicker *Bacteria* Laurel Cook Lhowe
Making Connections: *Cut-out Dolls, Record* Sara Mintz Zwicker
Name Calling: *Hillary Rodham Clinton, Harriet Tubman* Rosemary Fox *Madonna* Sara Mintz Zwicker **Sports Special:** *Sneakers, Field Hockey Sticks* Lynn Michaud *Roller Skate* Chris Costello **Women of Influence:** *Susan B. Anthony Dollar, Crown* Sara Mintz Zwicker

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The Information Please® Girls' Almanac

*Margo McLoone and
Alice Siegel*



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DEDICATIONS:

For girls everywhere.

For my children, Andrew, Howard, and James. But especially for George. — A.S.

For my mother, Kathryn Daly, and my sister, Mary Kaye, who are the most extraordinary women I have known. — M.M.

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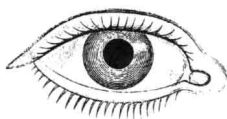
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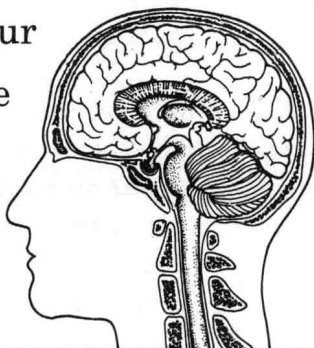
Body and Mind

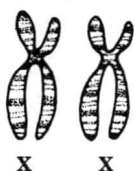
EVERY HUMAN BODY IS UNIQUE.

How is your body different from boys' bodies on the inside and on the out-



side? What's it like growing up female in your culture and in other cultures? How does your mind affect your body and what can you do to feel good about your body? You'll find the answers to these questions and more in this chapter.





Three out of four human sexual functions are female: menstruation, gestation, and lactation. One human sexual function is male: impregnation.

WHAT ARE LITTLE GIRLS MADE OF?

What are girls made of? Surely not sugar and spice and everything nice. Different combinations of the X and Y chromosomes make boys boys and girls girls. A girl is a girl because she has two powerful X-chromosomes. The X-chromosome is the largest of all chromosomes. Males have one X-chromosome and one Y-chromosome. Y is often the smallest chromosome. The egg, which carries all the genetic messages a child will ever receive, is several hundred times larger than the sperm that fertilizes it. Female is the original sex; every fetus begins as a female.

FEMALE EVENTS

The female body is incredible. The following list describes the events in a female's body that enable her to bear children. There are no counterparts for males. Let's explain:

- At birth, a female child has about 400,000 immature eggs, or ova, in her ovaries.
- During puberty the eggs begin to mature. Each month one egg ripens and leaves the ovary. It passes through the fallopian tube where, if not fertilized by a sperm, it disintegrates. The uterus, which has built up tissue and blood for the egg, sheds its lining about a week after the egg disintegrates. This is the event known as the menses, or menstrual period.
- *Gestation* begins when an egg that has been released from the ovary is fertilized by a male's sperm. The result is pregnancy and the eventual birth of a child.
- *Lactation* is the production of milk in a woman's

breasts to feed her newborn child.

- **Menopause** is when a woman's ovaries gradually stop functioning. This marks the end of her child-bearing years.



Female Reproductive System

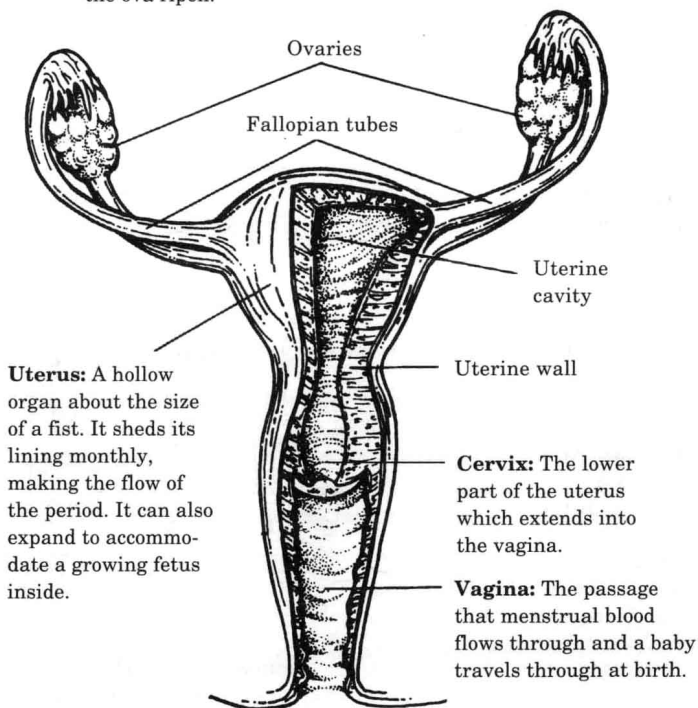
Internal:

Ovaries:

The organs that hold the ova, or eggs, and where the ova ripen.

Fallopian tubes:

The passageways from the ovaries to the uterus traveled by the ripened ova.



Uterus: A hollow organ about the size of a fist. It sheds its lining monthly, making the flow of the period. It can also expand to accommodate a growing fetus inside.

Cervix: The lower part of the uterus which extends into the vagina.

Vagina: The passage that menstrual blood flows through and a baby travels through at birth.

PMS: MYTH OR FACT?

Even though girls and women have been menstruating since the beginning of time, premenstrual syndrome—PMS—was first diagnosed in 1931. A gynecologist named Dr. Robert Frank came up with 150 symptoms that women may experience the week before their periods. These symptoms ranged from forgetfulness and clumsiness to headaches and bloating. Because many females experience some of these symptoms PMS can wrong-

Female Reproductive System

External: Vulva

Mons:

A pad of tissue covering the pubic bone on which pubic hair grows.

Clitoris:

A small, elongated organ whose sole function is sexual, the shaft of the clitoris is attached to the pelvic bone. The tip is visible under the minor lips. Filled with many nerves, it is the most sensitive part of the female body.

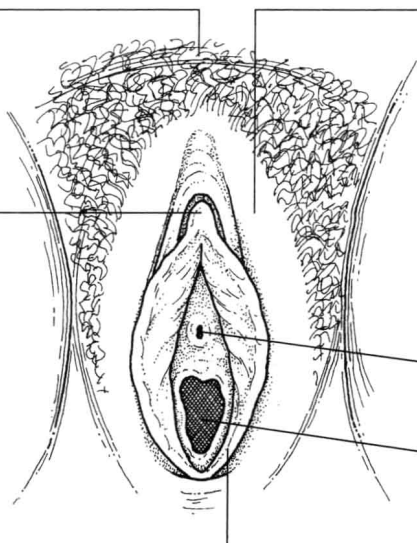
Outer lips:

Two separate folds of skin called labia majora. They have pubic hair on the outside; the underside is hairless and contains oil glands.

Urethral opening

Vaginal opening

Inner lips: Two folds of skin inside the outer lips. These are called labia minor. They are also hairless and have oil glands.



fully stereotype women as irrational and unstable.

Premenstrual symptoms might include menstrual cramps, bloating, headaches, and weight gain from water retention. Some girls and women experience some of these, some experience all of them, and some do not experience any of them, but when symptoms do occur, they do so at regular intervals. A recent psychological study states: "The premenstrual mood change appears to be of the same order as afternoon lassitude, hurt feelings, or Monday morning blues....Women readily cope with premenstrual mood changes and are sometimes not even aware of them."

FROM GIRL TO WOMAN: HOW YOUR BODY CHANGES

The passage from girl to woman is called puberty. It begins for girls anywhere from age 8 to 16; the average age is 11. What happens to your body during puberty?

- You experience a growth spurt
- Your internal reproductive system matures: your ovaries and uterus grow larger
- Secondary sex characteristics appear: budding breasts and the growth of pubic hair
- Fat to muscle ratio increases
- Your voice deepens
- You begin your menses or uterine bleeding. The first menstrual periods are often irregular and infertile. You may menstruate once, then not again for several months. Your period occurs every 25 to 35 days; bleeding lasts 3 to 7 days. (The cycle begins on the day menstruation begins.)



Estrogen production increases around the twelfth day of the cycle. After the egg drops and is not fertilized, estrogen decreases and progesterone increases. Both decrease a few days after menstruation begins.

Religious ceremonies like the Jewish Bat Mitzvah and the Christian confirmation are the only rites of passage for American girls. A debutante ball is a welcoming of girls into "society."



rites of passage in america

Getting your period (menstruation) is a sign of maturity or coming of age—a cause for celebration. In America, coming of age ceremonies or celebrations are rare because girls are raised to think they must keep their periods a secret or talk about menstruation in code words. Many American women are now calling for a change in thinking about this natural sign of femaleness to help girls feel proud instead of embarrassed about their menstrual cycle.

Native American Ceremonies

- Among the Navajo there is a coming of age ceremony called *kinaalda*. Young girls run footraces to show their strength. They also bake a huge cornmeal pudding for the whole community to taste. During the ceremony girls wear special clothing and arrange their hair to imitate the goddess Changing Woman. Girls then reenact Changing Woman's encounter with the sun. In this skit, the beauty, skill, and labors of the goddess are honored.
- The Nootka Indians of the Pacific Northwest consider a girl's first period a time to test her physical endurance. She is taken way out to sea and left there. She must then swim back to shore on her own, where she is greeted and cheered by the whole village. The Nootka believe that physical endurance builds character.
- The Mescalero Apaches consider the female puberty ceremony the most important celebration in their tribe. Each year an eight-day event honors all the girls who started their period that

year. It begins with four days of feasting and dancing. Boy singers recount the tribe's history with songs—64 different ones—each night. A four-day private ceremony follows, in which the girls reflect on the changes in their bodies and their passage to womanhood.



AROUND THE WORLD

Australia

Among the Aborigines of Australia, a girl is treated to the tradition of “love magic” when she gets her first period. The women of the tribe sing and teach her about the female powers and the physical changes that mark womanhood. After the love magic, the girl retreats to a secluded hut built by her mother or grandmother. After a few days of being alone, the girl is taken to a river where all the women splash and dunk her while her mother burns the seclusion hut. The girl's body is then decorated and she returns to the tribe, where she is matched with a husband.

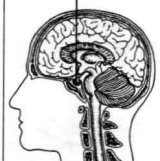
Japan

When a Japanese girl gets her first period, her family throws a big party. Family and friends are invited but they are not told why they are celebrating. When the girl's family brings out a tray bearing either a pear decorated with leaves, a candied apple, or red-colored rice and beans, the secret reason for the party is clear to the guests.

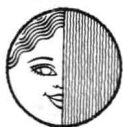
Micronesia

The tribe of Ulithi call a girl's rite of passage *kufar*. When a girl first notices blood flow, she must go to the menstrual house. She is joined by the

PITUITARY GLAND



The time of your first period is determined by the brain's hypothalamus. It stimulates the pituitary glands which regulate your ovaries.



The menstrual cycle is closely tied to the moon's cycle. It is a natural and rhythmic reminder of female body functions.

women of the village who bathe her and recite magic spells over her which are meant to help her find a mate. Within a month of her first period, the girl goes to live in a private hut built for her near her parents' house. She lives there until she is married, but she must always return to the menstrual house during her period.

Nigeria

The Tiv tribe literally mark a girl at the time of her first period. Four lines are cut into her abdomen. The remaining scars represent her womanhood and are thought to make her more fertile.

Sri Lanka

When a girl gets her first period in Sri Lanka, the exact time and day are noted. An astrologer is consulted who predicts many things about the girl's future based on the time and the alignment of the stars. The family then prepares their house for a ritual bathing. They whitewash the house, bake oil cakes, and put the girl in a small room where she is allowed to eat only certain foods, like rice and vegetables. A pot full of herbs is prepared and the girl is taken outside where it is poured over her head; the pot is then smashed and broken. Then the women of the family wash her hair and scrub her all over. She then puts on new white clothes from her underwear to her shoes. Printed invitations are sent for friends to attend a party where gifts and money are presented to the girl.

Zaire

When the firstborn daughter of a Mbuti Pygmy family gets her first period, she is sent to live in a menstrual hut built especially for her. Only girl-



friends and women are allowed in the hut for the year she lives there. The older tribeswomen teach the girl how to avoid getting pregnant. Her friends bring her palm oil and meat to fatten her because fatness is prized in women. While the girl is in the hut, her feet are not allowed to touch the ground. Her feet are wrapped in leaves when she walks. At the end of her stay in the hut, she is painted in white clay and treated to a tribal ceremony called *elima*. At the close of the ceremony, she and her friends run through the forest singing to proclaim her womanhood.

MENSTRUAL TABOOS

Throughout history, all over the world, many societies have considered menstruation unclean. As a result, women have been confined during the time of their periods. In primitive societies, similar rules often apply: A girl who has her period must not see the sun or touch the earth, and her contact with men, animals, and food must be restricted. Primitive people believe that a woman's menstrual blood poisons the other sources of life on earth. Here are some examples of menstrual taboos:

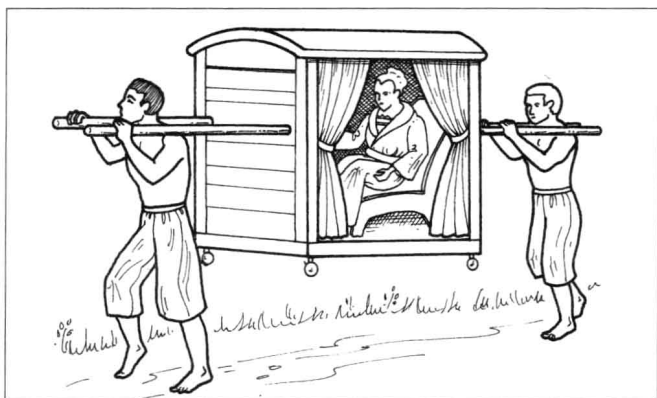
- There is a tribe in Borneo that puts young girls in dark cells set up on posts. After a girl completes her first period she is released from the cell. Sometimes girls have to remain in the cells for many months.
- Among tribes in South America, menstruating girls lie suspended in hammocks with their faces covered so as not to see the sun.
- In New Ireland, menstruating girls are placed in dark narrow cages which are raised above the ground.

It is not unusual for menstruation to stop because of emotional stress such as shock, fear, or depression. For example, women in concentration camps did not menstruate. Menstruation will also stop if your body weight drops dangerously low. This is common among anorexic females.

- In South Africa, some tribes do not allow women to use the same paths as cows for fear that menstrual blood will kill the cows!

WOMEN THROUGH TIME

In the Bible, Eve lived in the Garden of Eden. She was the first woman of Judeo-Christian history. But we are all daughters and sons of a woman who lived about 200,000 years ago in Africa. Scientists have isolated one DNA “fingerprint” that is common to the whole human race and it is female; one woman is the original gene font for the whole human race.



Early women were powerful, strong, and free. They controlled their bodies and those of their children. They were the leaders, the wise women, the storytellers, the doctors, the magicians, and the lawgivers in their societies. Their power to create new life, and their menstrual cycles, were held in awe by their male counterparts. But since ancient civilization, being female has become, sometimes, something very different. Here are the ways some cultures have treated the female sex: