

## Adolescent Hygiene Basics

Puberty causes all kinds of changes in your body. Your skin and scalp may suddenly get oily very easily. Every day it seems you have new hair growing in different places. At times, you seem to sweat for no reason — and you may notice there are odors where you never had them before. What should you do about it?

These bodily changes are a normal part of becoming an adult. Still, some of them can be a real source of anxiety. Who wants to worry about whether their underarms smell, anyway?

Read below for information on some hygiene basics — and learn how to deal with greasy hair, perspiration, and body hair.

### **Oily Hair**

The hormones that create acne are the same ones that can make you feel like you're suddenly styling your hair with a comb dipped in motor oil. Each strand of hair has its own sebaceous (oil) gland, which keeps the hair shiny and waterproof. But during puberty, when the sebaceous glands produce extra oil, it can make your hair look too shiny, oily, and greasy.

Washing your hair every day or every other day can help control oily hair. Dozens of shampoos are available in drugstores and supermarkets for you to choose from — most brands are pretty similar, although you might want to try one that is specially formulated for oily hair. Use warm water and a small amount of shampoo to work up a lather. Don't scrub or rub too hard — this doesn't get rid of oil any better and can irritate your scalp or damage your hair. After you've rinsed, you can follow up with a conditioner if you like; again, one for oily hair might work best.

When you're styling your hair, pay close attention to the products you use. Some styling gels or lotions can add extra grease to your hair, which defeats the purpose of washing it in the first place! Look for formulas that say "greaseless" or "oil free."

### **Sweat and Body Odor**

Perspiration, or sweat, comes from sweat glands that you've always had in your body. But thanks to puberty, these glands not only become more active than before, they also begin to secrete different chemicals into the sweat that has a stronger

smelling odor. You might notice this odor under your arms in your armpits. Your feet and genitals might also have new smells.

The best way to keep clean is to bathe or shower every day using a mild soap and warm water. This will help wash away any bacteria that contribute to the smells. Wearing clean clothes, socks, and underwear each day can also help you to feel clean. If you sweat a lot, you might find that shirts, T-shirts, socks, and underwear made from cotton or other natural materials will help absorb sweat more effectively.

If you're concerned about the way your underarms smell, you can try using a deodorant or deodorant with antiperspirant. Deodorants get rid of the odor of sweat by covering it up, and antiperspirants actually stop or dry up perspiration. They come in sticks, roll-ons, gels, sprays, and creams and are available at any drugstore or supermarket. All brands are similar (and ones that say they're made for a man or for a woman are similar, too, except for some perfumes that are added).

If you choose to use deodorant or antiperspirant, be sure to read the directions. Some work better if you use them at night, whereas others recommend that you put them on in the morning. But keep in mind that some teens don't need deodorants or antiperspirants. So why use them if you don't have to? Deodorant and antiperspirant commercials may try to convince you that you'll have no friends or dates if you don't use their product, but if you don't think you smell and you take daily baths or showers and wear clean clothes, you may be fine without them.

## **Body Hair**

Body hair in new places is something you can count on — again, it's hormones in action. You may want to start shaving some places where body hair grows, but whether you do is up to you. Some guys who grow facial hair like to let it develop into a mustache and beard. Some girls may decide to leave the hair on their legs and under their arms as is. It's all up to you and what you feel comfortable with.

If you do decide to shave, whether you're a guy or girl, you have a few different choices. You can use a traditional razor with a shaving cream or gel or you can use an electric razor. If you use a regular razor, make sure the blade is new and sharp to prevent cuts and nicks. Shaving cream and gel are often a better bet than soap because they make it easier to pull the razor against your skin. Some of the newer razors contain shaving gel right in the blade area, making even beginners feel comfortable shaving.

Whether you're shaving your legs, armpits, or face, go slowly. These are tricky areas of your body with lots of curves and angles, and it's easy to cut yourself if you move too fast. An adult or older sibling can be a big help when you're learning to shave. Don't be afraid to ask for tips.

You might want to avoid shaving your pubic hair because when it grows back in, the skin may be irritated and itchy. Also, guys may think twice about shaving their chests, and girls should avoid shaving their faces because the stubble that grows back will look prickly and thicker, forcing you to shave over and over.

If you're a girl and you're worried about hairs on your upper lip, step back from the mirror and you may see that the hair everyone really sees is probably not as bad as you think.

If you do decide you want to get rid of unwanted facial hair, research the options and ask an adult or older sibling for advice. Many products are made for facial hair — everything from bleach that lessens its appearance to hair removers that are specially made for hair on the face. And some new oil-free facial moisturizers on the market contain substances to make facial hair softer and less visible. You may want to try one before you opt for bleaching or hair removal.

In the rare case where a girl's facial hair growth is enough to cause anxiety, a dermatologist or skin specialist can use permanent removal techniques such as electrolysis. In some cases, excess hair growth in girls can be a sign of a medical condition, like polycystic ovary syndrome. If you're a girl who is worried about hair growth, talk to your doctor.

Reference: [http://kidshealth.org/teen/your\\_body/](http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_body/)

## **Adolescent Hair Care**

We have about 100,000 hairs on our heads. Each hair shaft has three layers, with the **cuticle**, or outside layer, protecting the two inner layers.

Shiny hair is a sign of health because the layers of the cuticle lie flat and reflect light. When the scales of the cuticle lie flat they overlap tightly, so the inner layers are well protected from heat, sun, chlorine, and all the other hazards that can come from living in our environment. When hair is damaged, though, the scales may separate and hair can become dry. Because the scales on dry hair don't protect the inner two layers as well, hair can break and look dull.

The type of hair a person has — whether it's straight or curly — can also affect how shiny it is. **Sebum**, which is the natural oil on the hair, covers straight hair better than curly hair, which is why straight hair can appear shinier.

Depending how long a person's hair is or how fast it grows, the end of each hair shaft can be a couple of years old. So the hair at the end of the shaft could have survived a few summers of scorching sun and saltwater and winters of cold, dry air. How well you care for your hair from the time it emerges from the root plays a role in how healthy it looks.

## **Caring for Hair**

How you take care of your hair depends on the type of hair you have, your lifestyle, and how you style your hair.

**Your hair type.** People with dry, curly hair have different hair care needs than people with straight, fine hair. But all hair needs to be treated gently, especially when it's wet. Wet hair can stretch, making it more vulnerable to breakage or cuticle damage. That's why using a hot blow-dryer (or other heat styling products) on very wet hair can damage it.

Some people find that their hair gets oily in their teen years. That's because the hair follicles contain **sebaceous glands** that make sebum, which moisturizes the hair and skin. During adolescence, the sebaceous glands may become overactive, producing more oil than needed. As with acne, oily hair is usually a temporary part of puberty.

Many teens care for oily hair by washing it once a day — or more if they're active. As long as you treat your hair gently when it's wet, frequent washing shouldn't harm it. If you have acne, it's a good idea to keep the hair around your face clean so hair oils don't clog your pores.

If you're washing your hair every day or more, it may be better to choose a mild shampoo instead of a shampoo designed for oily hair. For some people — especially people with fine, fragile, or combination hair (hair that's oily at the crown but dry on the ends) — shampoos for oily hair can be too harsh. If you have oily hair and want to use a conditioner, choose one that's made for oily hair.

If your hair is dry, it's a good idea to wash it less frequently. Some people only need to wash their hair once a week — and that's fine. Many people who have curly hair also have dry hair. Curly and dry hair types are usually more fragile than straight hair, so you'll need to be especially careful about using heat styling products. Shampoos made for dry hair and hair conditioners can help.

**Your activity level and interests.** Do you play sports or spend a lot of time at the beach? These kinds of things can affect your hair. For example, if you're an athlete with oily hair, you may want to wash your hair after working up a sweat during practice and games. But if you're a lifeguard or a swimmer, sun and saltwater (or the chlorine in pool water) can dry your hair out, no matter what your hair type. If you're exposed to sun, wind, or other elements, you may want to use a shampoo designed for dry hair or use a conditioner. It's also a good idea to wear a hat to protect your hair when you're outdoors.

**Your hairstyle.** Heat styling products like curling and straightening irons can dry out even oily hair if they're used too much. Follow the instructions carefully, and don't use them on wet hair or high settings, and give your hair a vacation from styling once in a while. Ask your hair stylist or dermatologist for advice on using heat styling products.

Chemical treatments can also harm hair if they're not used properly. If you decide you want a chemical treatment to color, straighten, or curl your hair, it's best to trust the job to professionals. Stylists who are trained in applying chemicals to hair will be able to evaluate your hair type and decide which chemicals will work best for you.

Here are some things to be aware of when getting chemical treatments:

- **Relaxers.** Relaxers (straighteners) work by breaking chemical bonds in curly hair. Relaxers containing lye can cause skin irritation and hair breakage. Although "no lye" relaxers may cause less irritation, both types of relaxers can cause problems if they are used in the wrong way (for example, if they're mixed incorrectly or left on the hair for too long). Scratching, brushing, or combing your hair right before a chemical relaxing treatment can increase these risks. And don't use relaxers — or any hair treatment — if your scalp is irritated.

If you decide to keep straightening your hair, you'll need to wait at least 6 weeks before your next treatment to protect your hair. Relaxers can cause hair breakage when used over a period of time, even when they're used properly. Using blow-dryers, curling or straightening irons, or color on chemically relaxed hair can also increase the risk of damage.

- **Perms.** Perms take straight hair and make it curly. The risks are similar to those associated with relaxers.
- **Color.** There are two types of color: permanent (which means the color stays in your hair until it grows out) and semi-permanent (the color washes out after a while). Some semi-permanent coloring treatments, like henna, are fairly safe and easy to use at home. Some people get a condition called contact dermatitis (an allergic reaction with a rash) from henna and other "natural" products, so be sure to test a small area first.

Other color treatments — especially permanent treatments — can cause hair loss, burning, redness, and irritation. A few types of coloring treatments can cause allergic reactions in certain people, and in rare cases these can be very serious. So talk to your stylist if you are worried that you may be sensitive to the products. Also, talk to your stylist about doing a patch test before using a product. And never use hair dyes on your eyelashes or eyebrows.

Regular haircuts are one of the best ways to help keep hair healthy. Even if you have long hair or you're trying to grow your hair, a haircut can help protect the ends of your hair from splitting and damage. In fact, cutting may actually help your hair grow better because it's healthy and not breaking off.

## **Dealing With Hair Problems**

Here are some common hair problems — and tips on how to deal with them.

### **Dandruff**

Dandruff — or flakes of dead skin — can be noticeable in a person's hair and on clothing. No one really knows what causes dandruff, although recent studies seem to show that it may be caused by a type of fungus.

Dandruff isn't contagious or dangerous. Over-the-counter shampoos containing salicylic acid, zinc, tars, or selenium sulfide can reduce dandruff flakes. When shampooing, massage your scalp (but don't scratch) for at least 5 minutes, loosening the flakes with your fingers. Rinse your hair well after washing. If your dandruff doesn't improve, see your doctor. He or she may prescribe a prescription shampoo and possibly a lotion or liquid to rub into your scalp.

### **Hair Breakage**

Hair can break when points in the hair thicken or weaken. Sometimes this happens near the scalp so a person's hair never grows very long. When hairs break at the ends, they're called "split ends," and the splits can travel up the hair shaft.

A major cause of hair breakage is improper use of chemical hair treatments, like the treatments described above. But brushing or combing hair too frequently or in the wrong way (such as using a fine-toothed comb on very thick, curly hair or teasing hair) can lead to breakage. Hair extensions and braids can also cause breakage. Leaving them in too long or pulling them out without professional help can cause hair and scalp damage or even hair loss.

Sometimes hair breakage and dry, brittle hair are signs of a medical problem, such as hypothyroidism or an eating disorder. If your hair is breaking even though you don't treat it with chemicals or other styling products, see a doctor.

### **Hair Loss (Alopecia)**

It's normal for everyone to lose some hair. In fact, we lose about 100 hairs each day as old hairs fall out and are replaced with new ones. With hair loss, though, hair thins at a rate that can't be replaced. When hair falls out and isn't replaced by new hair, a person can become bald or have bald patches. Hair loss can be temporary or permanent, depending on the cause. If changing your hairstyle or other treatment doesn't help, see a doctor. He or she may prescribe a drug to slow or stop hair loss and to help hair grow.

As with the rest of our bodies, hair is healthiest when we eat right, exercise, and protect it from too much

Reference: [http://kidshealth.org/teen/your\\_body/](http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_body/)

## **Adolescent Dental Hygiene**

Dentists say that the most important part of tooth care happens at home. Brushing and flossing properly, along with regular dental checkups, can help prevent tooth decay and gum disease.

If you're like most people, you don't exactly look forward to facing a dentist's drill. So wouldn't it be better to prevent cavities before they begin?

### **Giving Plaque the Brush-Off**

To prevent cavities, you need to remove **plaque**, the transparent layer of bacteria that coats the teeth. The best way to do this is by brushing your teeth twice a day and flossing at least once a day. Brushing also stimulates the gums, which helps to keep them healthy and prevent gum disease. Brushing and flossing are the most important things that you can do to keep your teeth and gums healthy.

Toothpastes contain abrasives, detergents, and foaming agents. Fluoride, the most common active ingredient in toothpaste, is what prevents cavities. So you should always be sure your toothpaste contains fluoride.



About 1 person in 10 has a tendency to accumulate **tartar** quickly. Tartar is plaque in a hardened form that is more damaging and difficult to remove. Using anti-tartar toothpastes and mouthwashes, as well as spending extra time brushing the teeth near the salivary glands (the inside of the lower front teeth and the outside of the upper back teeth) may slow the development of new tartar.

If you have teeth that are sensitive to heat, cold, and pressure, you may want to try a special toothpaste for sensitive teeth. But you'll still need to talk to your dentist about your sensitivity because it may indicate a more serious problem, such as a cavity or nerve inflammation (irritation).

### **Tips on Proper Brushing**

Dentists say that the minimum time you should spend brushing your teeth is 2 minutes twice a day. Here are some tips on how to brush properly:

- Hold your brush at a 45-degree angle against your gumline. Gently brush from where the tooth and gum meet to the chewing surface in short (about half-a-tooth-wide) strokes. Brushing too hard can cause receding gums, tooth sensitivity, and, over time, loose teeth.
- Use the same method to brush all outside and inside surfaces of your teeth.
- To clean the chewing surfaces of your teeth, use short sweeping strokes, tipping the bristles into the pits and crevices.
- To clean the inside surfaces of your top and bottom front teeth and gums, hold the brush almost vertical. With back and forth motions, bring the front part of the brush over the teeth and gums.
- Using a forward-sweeping motion, gently brush your tongue and the roof of your mouth to remove the decay-causing bacteria that exist in these places.
- Use an egg timer or play a favorite song while brushing your teeth to get used to brushing for a full 2 to 3 minutes. Some electronic toothbrushes have timers that let you know when 2 minutes are up.

### **Facts on Flossing**

Brushing is important but it won't remove the plaque and particles of food between your teeth, under the gumline, or under braces. You'll need to floss these spaces at least once a day.

The type of floss you choose depends on how much space you have between your teeth. Dentists usually recommend unwaxed floss because it's thinner and easier to slide through small spaces. However, studies have shown that there is no major difference in the effectiveness based on the type of floss used.

With any floss, you should be careful to avoid injuring your gums. Follow these instructions:

- Carefully insert the floss between two teeth, using a back and forth motion. Gently bring the floss to the gumline, but don't force it under the gums. Curve the floss around the edge of your tooth in the shape of the letter "C" and slide it up and down the side of each tooth.
- Repeat this process between all your teeth, and remember to floss the back sides of your back teeth.

### **Tooth-Whitening Products**

Some toothpastes claim to whiten teeth. There's nothing wrong with using whitening toothpastes as long as they also contain fluoride and ingredients that fight plaque and tartar. But these toothpastes alone don't contain much in the way of whitening ingredients and probably won't noticeably change the color of your teeth.

It's easy to be lured by ads telling people they need gleaming white teeth. But these ads are really targeted to older people. The truth is that most teens don't need tooth whitening because teeth usually yellow as a person gets older. If you think your teeth aren't white enough, though, talk to your dentist before you try any over-the-counter whitening products. Your dentist may be able to offer you professional treatment, which will be suited to your unique needs and will work better than over-the-counter products.

Be careful when buying over-the-counter whitening products. Some bleaching agents may damage your gums and mouth. So always follow the instructions on any whitening product you use.

## The Nutrition Connection

Eating sugar, as you probably already know, is a major cause of tooth decay. But it's not just how much sugar you eat — when and how you eat it can be just as important to keeping teeth healthy.

When you eat sugary foods or drink sodas frequently throughout the day, the enamel that protects your teeth is constantly exposed to acids. Hard candies, cough drops, and breath mints that contain sugar are especially harmful because they dissolve slowly in your mouth. Many experts suggest that you take a 3-hour break between eating foods containing sugar.

Sugary or starchy foods eaten with a meal are less harmful to your teeth than when they're eaten alone, possibly because the production of saliva, which washes away the sugar and bacteria, is increased. Eating sugary foods before you go to bed can be the most damaging (especially if you don't brush your teeth afterward) because you don't produce as much saliva when you sleep.

For most people, it's hard to cut out sweets completely, so try to follow these more realistic guidelines:

- Eat carbohydrates (sugars and starches) with a meal.
- If you can't brush your teeth after eating, rinse your mouth with water or mouthwash, or chew sugarless gum.
- Don't eat sugary foods between meals.
- If you snack, eat nonsugary foods, such as cheese, popcorn, raw veggies, or yogurt.

## Going to the Dentist

The main reason for going to the dentist regularly — every 6 months — is **prevention**. The goal is to prevent tooth decay, gum disease, and other disorders that put the health of your teeth and mouth at risk.

Your first consultation with a dentist will probably consist of three main parts: a dental and medical history (where the dentist or dental hygienist asks you questions

about your tooth care and reviews any dental records), a dental examination, and a professional cleaning.

The dentist will examine your teeth, gums, and other mouth tissues. He or she may also examine the joints of your jaws. The dentist will use a mirror and probe (a metal pick-like instrument) to check the crown (visible part) of each tooth for plaque and evidence of looseness or decay. The dentist also will check your bite and the way your teeth fit together (called **occlusion**).

Your dentist will examine the general condition of your gums, which should be firm and pink, not soft, swollen, or inflamed. He or she (or an assistant) will use the probe to check the depth of the **sulcus**, the slight depression where each tooth meets the gum. Deep depressions, called pockets, are evidence of gum disease.

After examining the visible parts of your teeth and mouth, your dentist will take X-rays that might reveal tooth decay, abscesses (collections of pus surrounded by swollen tissue), or impacted wisdom teeth.

Professional cleaning is usually performed by a dental hygienist, a specially trained and licensed dental professional. Cleaning consists mainly of removing hard deposits using a scaler (a scraping instrument) or an ultrasonic machine, which uses high-frequency sound waves to loosen plaque deposits. The particles are then rinsed off with water.

After cleaning, the dental hygienist will polish your teeth. The process cleans and smoothes the surfaces of the teeth, removing stains and making it harder for plaque to stick to the teeth. Finally, the hygienist may treat your teeth with a fluoride compound or a sealant to help prevent decay.

At the end of your visit, the dentist will let you know if you need to return to fill a cavity. Your dentist also may refer you to an orthodontist if he or she thinks you may need braces or have other issues.

### **More Dental Problems**

**Dental caries** (tooth decay) can attack the teeth at any age. In fact, 84% of 17-year-olds have the disease. Left untreated, caries can cause severe pain and result in tooth loss. Losing teeth affects how you look and feel about yourself as well as your

ability to chew and speak. Treating caries is also expensive. So prevention and early treatment are important.

It may surprise you to know that 60% of 15-year-olds experience **gingivitis**, the first stage of gum disease. Gingivitis, which involves the gums but not the underlying bone and ligament, is almost always caused by an accumulation of plaque. As with caries, treatment can be expensive.

If you remove plaque regularly and follow good oral hygiene habits, your gums usually will return to their healthy state. However, more serious gum disease can cause gums to swell, turn red, and bleed, and sometimes causes discomfort. How dentists treat gum disease depends on the extent of the disease.

Reference: [http://kidshealth.org/teen/your\\_body/](http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_body/)

### **Adolescent Menstrual Hygiene**

Once you get your period, you'll need to use something to soak up the menstrual blood. There are lots of choices out there, and it may take some experimenting before you find the product that works best for you.

Here's an overview of what's available.

#### **Pads**

Super, slender, overnight, with or without wings, deodorant, maxi, mini . . . pads may seem a bit confusing at first because there are so many different kinds. But the good news is that with all these choices, there's bound to be one that works for you.

Pads are rectangles of absorbent material that attach to the insides of a girl's underwear. They're sometimes also called sanitary pads or sanitary napkins. Some pads 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.

Some girls have periods with heavier bleeding, and others have lighter periods with less bleeding. Pads come in several different thicknesses and absorbencies for heavier or lighter menstrual periods or for day or nighttime use. That way, girls who have a lighter flow don't need to feel like they're wearing a pad that's bigger than they need — and girls with a heavy flow don't need to worry that they'll leak through their pad.

Some pads come with a deodorant or deodorizing substance in them, although these can cause irritation in the genital area for some girls.

Most pads that you buy in stores have a sticky strip along the bottom. You peel off the strip that covers the adhesive, press the pad into the crotch of your underwear (wrapping the wings around and sticking them under the crotch if the pad you're using has wings). This type of pad is disposable. Once you've removed the pad, wrap it in toilet paper and put it in the trash can (or if you're at school or out somewhere, in the special disposal box that's found in most stalls). Don't try to flush a pad down the toilet — even the lightest kind of pad may back up the toilet and make a huge (embarrassing!) mess.

It's also possible to buy reusable pads that can be washed after each wearing — these are usually available in natural health stores or online. These kinds of pads clip onto a girl's underwear (or have a special holder that clips on). Some women choose to use these pads because they think they are better for the environment or because they save money. It's all a matter of personal preference.

No matter what kind of pad you choose, it's best to change pads every 3 or 4 hours, even when your flow isn't very heavy. Regular changing prevents buildup of bacteria and eliminates odor. Naturally, if your period is heavy, you should change pads more often because they may get saturated more quickly.

## **Tampons**

Unlike a pad, which catches menstrual blood after it leaves the body, a tampon absorbs blood from inside the vagina. A tampon is also made of absorbent material,

but it's compressed into a tiny tubular shape. Like pads, tampons come in different sizes and absorbencies for heavier and lighter periods (words like "super" or "ultra" on the packaging usually mean that a tampon is designed for girls whose flow is heavier).

Tampons can also come with or without deodorant. Again, using these is a matter of personal preference. There's no real need for deodorant in a tampon, since regular changing usually gets rid of any odor. And girls should be aware that, for some people, the deodorant in tampons can irritate the vagina.

It's easy to use a tampon, but you do need to learn how. After washing your hands, follow the directions that come with the tampons carefully and be sure to relax. Some tampons come with an applicator — a plastic or cardboard tube that guides the tampon into the vagina. Other tampons are inserted with the fingers. Some girls find that using an applicator-style tampon (especially one with a rounded top) and a slender-sized tampon makes it easier at first. It also helps to first try a tampon on a heavier flow day, so that the tampon slips in easier.

Many girls worry about whether a tampon can get lost inside them. Luckily that can't happen because the opening of the cervix (located at the top of the vagina) is just too tiny for a tampon to get through. Tampons usually have a string attached to one end that stays outside a girl's body and can be used to remove the tampon at any time.

A tampon needs to be changed every 4 to 6 hours or when it's saturated with blood. Because you can't see a tampon as you can with a pad, you'll need to remember when it's time to change or you may get spotting or leakage on your underwear or clothing. Pull gently on the string that is attached to the end of the tampon until the tampon comes out, wrap it in toilet paper, and throw it in the trash. Don't flush a tampon down the toilet — even when the box says a tampon is flushable, some tampons can still cause problems in some plumbing systems.

If it's time to change your tampon and you can't find the string, don't worry! A tampon can't get lost inside you. You'll need to reach in with your fingers to find the string. It may take a minute to do because the string might be a bit hard to grab.

## **Menstrual Cups**

Like a tampon, a menstrual cup is inserted into the vagina. Instead of absorbing menstrual blood, though, the cup catches the blood before it flows out of the vagina. Menstrual cups are made of flexible materials, like rubber or silicone. As with tampons, you can't see when the cup is full, so it will need to be emptied (or, in the case of disposable cups, thrown away) several times a day. Instructions that come with the cup explain how to do this.

Menstrual cups are not as commonly used as tampons, so they may be harder to find. Although some menstrual cups look like a diaphragm, they are not a method of contraception and will not offer any protection against pregnancy or STDs.

### **Avoiding Problems**

One thing to remember about tampons: It's very important that you change them every few hours and that you wear the absorbency type that is right for you. Never put a tampon in and leave it in all day or all night, thinking that you won't need to change it because your period is so light. Doing this puts girls at risk for a rare but very dangerous — and sometimes life-threatening — disease called toxic shock syndrome (TSS).

TSS results from a bacterial infection that may occur when using super-absorbent tampons, especially if they are left in longer than is recommended.

Symptoms of TSS include high fever, vomiting or diarrhea, severe muscle aches, a feeling of extreme weakness or dizziness, and a rash that looks like a sunburn. If you ever have these symptoms while wearing a tampon, remove it and tell a parent, school nurse, or other adult immediately. Have someone take you to the nearest emergency department as soon as possible. The body can go into shock with TSS if someone waits too long to seek medical treatment.

Remember, though, that TSS is very rare and most women never become ill from using tampons, especially if they follow the guidelines for changing them regularly.

### **Tampon or Pad?**

When deciding what type of protection to use, it's really up to you. Some girls like tampons because they're easy to store in a purse or pocket. Tampons and cups are also helpful for girls who participate in sports like swimming, since you can't wear a pad in the water.



Some girls prefer pads because they're easy to use and it's easier to remember when to change them since you can see them getting soaked with blood.

Many girls switch back and forth: Sometimes they use tampons and sometimes they use pads, depending on the situation, where they're going to be, and their menstrual flow. Some girls use pads at night and tampons during the day. And some girls with heavy periods use tampons together with pads or pantliners for added protection against leakage.

If you have any concerns or questions about your period, talk to your doctor.

Reference: [http://kidshealth.org/teen/your\\_body/](http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_body/)

## **Adolescent Skin Hygiene**

Sometimes it may seem like your skin is impossible to manage, especially when you wake up and find a huge zit on your nose or a cold sore at the corner of your mouth. The good news is that there are ways to prevent and treat common skin problems — read on for some tips.

### **Acne**

A pimple starts when the pores in the skin become clogged with a type of oil called **sebum**, which normally lubricates the skin and hair. Acne is common during puberty when hormones go into overdrive, causing the skin to overproduce sebum. Because many oil-producing glands are on the forehead, nose, and chin, this area — the **T-zone** — is where a person is most prone to pimples.

Here are some tips to help prevent breakouts and clear them up as fast as possible:

- Wash your face twice a day (no more) with warm water and a mild soap made for people with acne. Gently massage your face with circular motions. *Don't scrub.* Overwashing and scrubbing can cause skin to become irritated. After cleansing, the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) recommends applying an over-the-counter (no prescription needed) lotion containing benzoyl peroxide. This will decrease oil and bacteria.
- Don't pop pimples. It's tempting, but here's why you shouldn't: Popping pimples can push infected material further into the skin, leading to more swelling and redness, and even scarring. If you notice a pimple coming before a big event, like the prom, a dermatologist can often treat it for you with less risk of scarring or infection.
- Avoid touching your face with your fingers or leaning your face on objects that collect sebum and skin residue like the telephone receiver. Touching your face can spread the bacteria that cause pores to become inflamed and irritated. To keep bacteria at bay, wash your hands before applying anything to your face, such as treatment creams or makeup.
- If you wear glasses or sunglasses, make sure you clean them frequently to keep oil from clogging the pores around your eyes and nose.
- If you get acne on your body, try not to wear tight clothes, which don't allow skin to breathe and may cause irritation. You also might want to stay away from scarves, headbands, and caps, which can collect dirt and oil, too.
- Remove your makeup before you go to sleep. When buying makeup, make sure you choose brands that say "noncomedogenic" or "nonacnegenic" on the label. Throw away old makeup that smells or looks different from when you first bought it.

- Keep hair clean and out of your face to prevent additional dirt and oil from clogging your pores.
- Protect your skin from the sun. It may seem like a tan masks acne, but it's only temporary. A tan can cause the body to produce extra sebum, which may worsen your acne, not improve it. Tanning also causes damage to skin that will eventually lead to wrinkles and increase your risk of skin cancer.

If you're concerned about acne, talk to a dermatologist. Dermatologists offer a range of treatments that help to prevent and clear up acne and acne scars. A dermatologist can help you find the treatment method that's best for you and can also give you lots of useful tips for dealing with acne and caring for your skin type. Some salons and spas have trained skin specialists, called **estheticians**, who can offer advice and skin care treatments.

## **Sun and Skin**

We all know we need to protect our skin from the sun's harmful rays. Of course, it's impossible to avoid the sun — who wants to hide indoors when it feels so great to get outside and be active? And the sun's not all bad, anyway: Sunlight helps our bodies create vitamin D. So follow these tips when you're outdoors to help manage sun exposure:

- Wear sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15, even if it's cloudy or you don't plan on spending a lot of time outdoors. If you sweat a lot or go swimming, reapply sunscreen every 2 to 3 hours (even if the bottle says the sunscreen is waterproof).
- Choose a sunscreen that blocks both UVA and UVB rays. Look for the words "broad spectrum protection" or UVA protection in addition to the SPF of 15 or greater. Select a sunscreen that says "nonacnegenic" or "noncomedogenic" on the label to help keep pores clear.
- The sun's rays are strongest between 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM, so make sure you reapply sunscreen frequently and take breaks indoors if you can. If your shadow is longer than you are tall, then it's a safer time to be in the sun (you should still wear sunscreen, though).

- Apply more sunscreen (with higher SPF) when you're around reflective surfaces like water, snow, or ice.
- We all know that the sun can damage skin, but did you know it can contribute to eye problems, too? Protect your face and eyes with a hat and sunglasses that provide 100% UV protection.
- Some medications, such as prescription acne medications or birth control pills, can increase your sensitivity to the sun, so if you're taking medication, increase your sun protection.
- If you want the glow of a tan, try faking it with self-tanners or salon tanning treatments. Avoid tanning beds, though, because although manufacturers claim that tanning beds are free of UVB rays, they still use harmful UVA rays.

### **Cold Sores**

Cold sores usually show up as tender "pimples" on the lips. They are caused by a type of herpes virus (HSV-1, which most often is not sexually transmitted) so they *are* contagious from person to person. Once you get this virus it stays in your body, meaning you'll probably get cold sores every now and then throughout your life. Here are ways you can help prevent cold sores from making an appearance (or reappearance if you've had them in the past):

- Avoid getting cold sores in the first place by not sharing stuff like lip balm, toothbrushes, or drinks with other people who might have cold sores. The virus that causes cold sores is transmitted through the nose (in mucus) and the mouth (in saliva).
- People who have the virus know that cold sores can flare up from things like too much sun, stress, or being sick. Just one more reason to lather on that suntan lotion, eat well, exercise, and get plenty of sleep!

If you do have a cold sore, here are some tips for keeping yourself comfortable:

- Take acetaminophen or ibuprofen if the cold sores are painful.

- Suck on ice pops or cubes to ease pain and keep cold sores cool.
- Stay away from acidic foods (like oranges, tomatoes, and lemonade) and salty, spicy foods, which can cause irritation.
- Don't pick at cold sores while you're waiting for them to go away. They may bleed or become infected with bacteria.

Usually, cold sores go away on their own after a week or two. But if you get them frequently or they're a problem, talk to your doctor or dermatologist, who may be able to prescribe medication to alleviate symptoms and shorten the amount of time cold sores last.

## **Eczema**

Eczema is a condition that causes skin to become red, itchy, and dry. If you have eczema, you might notice that you are prone to getting itchy rashes — especially in places like where your elbows and knees bend or on your neck and face. The symptoms of eczema can vary from person to person. Though you can't cure eczema forever, you can take steps to prevent it from flaring:

- Stay away from things like harsh detergents, perfumed soaps, and heavily fragranced lotions that tend to irritate the skin and trigger eczema.
- Because water tends to dry out the skin, take short, warm showers and baths. If you're going to have your hands in water for a long time (like when you're washing dishes or your car), try wearing gloves.
- Soothe your skin with regular applications of a fragrance-free moisturizer to prevent itching and dryness. Creams generally moisturize a bit better and last longer than lotions for most people. Creams work best if applied when the skin is slightly wet, like just after bathing.
- Be careful which fabrics you wear. Cotton is good because it's breathable and soft. (But if you are exercising, some of the newer synthetic materials actually keep you drier and are better for you than cotton.) Try to stay away from materials like wool or spandex that may cause irritation or allergic reactions.

- Keep stress in check. Because stress can lead to eczema flares, try activities like yoga or walking after a long day to keep your stress levels low.
- If you wear makeup, look for brands that are free of dyes and fragrances that can aggravate eczema.

If you're having trouble managing your eczema, talk to a dermatologist, who can suggest ways to better control it.

### **Other Skin Conditions**

Warts are tiny skin infections caused by viruses of the human papilloma virus (HPV) family. There's no way to prevent warts from occurring (other than avoiding contact with people who have them). But if you do get them, don't rub, pick, or scratch them because you can spread the virus and get new warts. Some over-the-counter medications containing special acids can help get rid of warts, but it's always a good idea to see your doctor before trying one. If you find warts in your genital area, you should see your doctor, who can recommend the best treatment method for that sensitive area.

Another type of wart-like viral infection is **molluscum contagiosum**. (It's not as scary as its name sounds!) Like warts, it can be transmitted through scratching and sexual contact.

Fine white or purplish lines on the skin called stretch marks are pretty common in most teens. Stretch marks are formed when the tissue under your skin is pulled by rapid growth or stretching, like during puberty. Stretch marks usually fade on their own over time. Talk to a dermatologist if you're concerned about them.

Because our skin is the most visible reflection of what's going on in our bodies, people equate healthy skin with beauty. But healthy skin is about more than just good looks; it's essential to our survival. So keep your skin glowing with the right skin care techniques and by eating well and getting lots of exercise