

Help and advice for
mothers of girls



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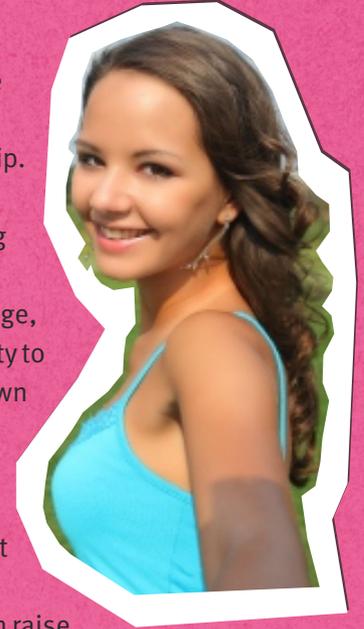
DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?

Your daughter suddenly closes her diary when you approach, she's been spending hours locked up in the bathroom of late, is endlessly on the phone to her girlfriends, and her response to your questions about her bad moods is just a resigned "Oh, you wouldn't understand anyway!" Does this sound familiar? Whichever way you look at it, the situation is unmistakable: your daughter is on her way to becoming a woman. Puberty presents a set of major challenges for the parent as well as the adolescent. You have to face the fact that your daughter, who used to see her mother as her best friend, no longer shares her every thought and secret with you. She lives in a world of her own, from which she deliberately or unconsciously shuts her mother out as a stranger. During this difficult time, as a mother, all you can do is try to maintain the relationship of trust with your daughter, and always be there for her with good advice and genuine assistance. But how can this be put into practice?

This information booklet offers practical advice on how you can help your daughter along the path to womanhood. It could be useful to think back to your own adolescence: What were the changes like for you? What experience did you gain?

Even though she may not always show it, your daughter has to know that for her you will always be one of the most important people in her life. During her path-seeking and experimentation, more than anything an adolescent needs trust and support. When everything around her

becomes uncertain it is particularly important that at least her parents are sure of themselves, and that they set limits and show an example with their own relationship. At the same time, however, as a parent you have to learn to let go without this meaning the end of the relationship with the child. This is without doubt an enormous challenge, but it also carries the wonderful opportunity to eventually get your daughter back as a grown woman, and a friend. Puberty also brings major physical changes. These are typically a sudden growth spurt, a widening of the hips and the development of breasts. The most important event is the occurrence of the first period. All of this can raise countless questions for a young girl, to which she seeks reassuring answers, and you might prefer to address them yourself, with the help of a professional. Did you know that many gynaecologists provide consultations specifically for teenagers? As a part of this you can receive precise answers and specific help in relation to the questions surrounding puberty and the related physical changes, menstruation, sexuality and contraception. Consultations for teenagers are specifically tailored to the needs of young girls, and do not necessarily entail a gynaecological examination. This is important, because it helps in overcoming the fear associated with the first visit to the gynaecologist.



We recommend that you mention this opportunity to your daughter.

THE SEPARATION PROCESS

Do you remember...

...what it was like to still be a child, yet to already feel the excitement of adult life? This is the paradoxical situation in which your girl now finds herself, as she pours all her energy into seeking her own identity. It is totally natural, and indeed necessary, that in the process she may become more distant from you and retreat into her own world. This behaviour is a part of the physiological process of separation, which you as a mother need to allow and support.

Help with direction-seeking

Sometimes I feel my daughter's friends are more important to her than I am.

What should I do?

You can be sure that you, and the opinions, views and judgements that you express remain very important to your daughter even during this period, even though she may not always show this outwardly and her behaviour is determined by the values that are communicated by other people, such as her girlfriends, her classmates or the media. Your daughter is at a stage in her life where she has to form her own opinion about everything, so there will inevitably be conflicts and differences of opinion. Under no circumstances,

however, should you abandon her in this situation. Parental indifference at this stage of life can be particularly damaging. The adolescent has a need for guidance and certainty, and to feel precisely where the limits are. In secret, it is certain that your daughter is relieved to know that you are watching and looking out for her.



Maintaining lines of communication

What am I doing wrong if my daughter doesn't turn to me with her questions?

Don't be critical of yourself: your daughter's reticence is not personally directed at you. Your daughter may not even

be aware that in this way she is giving rise to speculation.

In order for an adolescent to ask a question, she first has to

articulate what exactly it is that she doesn't know, but in most cases she does not have enough life experience for this. Besides this, adolescents often believe that they are already sufficiently informed through the media, and have no need for further information about issues such as physical development, menstruation, fertility or contraception. Don't let communication between you and your daughter to break down completely! If you succeed in this, there will be moments when your daughter spontaneously opens up to you. As often as possible, involve the father in such conversations too: his openness to communication, his approving or even critical opinion is also important for the development of your child's personality.

I'd like to talk to my mother about intimate matters, like I do with my friends, but I can't. My mother would like me to turn to her with my problems and questions, but I can't bring myself to do this because I'm embar-rassed. What can I do to make our relationship better?



PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Honesty

My daughter reacts very sensitively if I criticise her appearance.

How should I behave?

The most important thing is to stay calm and be tolerant, never sarcastic. Your daughter is experimenting with doing things her own way in terms of her appearance, too. At such times it is perfectly natural for her to miss the mark slightly, and choose clothing and accessories that are not entirely suited to her personality. Your daughter needs to find her own style, and this entails a lot of uncertainty. The fact that she reacts sensitively to the criticisms that you express is also natural. It is important, however, that despite this you always voice your opinion, both when you like her appearance and when you object to it. Feel free to express your opinion; it's quite possible that your daughter will eventually be grateful for it, even if she doesn't show it.

I'm 14 years old and I have a few questions. At what age is it normal to start menstruating? What caomplaints does it cause? How is it possible to relieve menstrual pain? Which is better or healthier: tampons or pads? Can I go swimming when I have my period? I've had discharges for at least a year; when can I expect my first period come earlier? When should I visit a gynaecologist for the first time? Do you need to be a certain age to use a tampon?

Do you remember...

...what is was like when everything suddenly changed? Your breasts started to show, your hips widened, your waist formed, and the first hairs began to appear under your armpits and on your pubic mound.

These were all signs that you had reached puberty. During this period the body seems to change a little more every day, which can be very misleading and a source of great uncertainty for your daughter too. The peak of the process is, without a doubt, the first period. This represents a turning point in the life of every young girl, and one that she must also come to terms with emotionally.

White discharge

For some time now my daughter has had a very strong discharge. Is there anything we should do? Your daughter has what is referred to as white discharge, which is a protein-based whitish-yellow vaginal secretion that stains the underwear. Talk to your daughter about the changes under way in her body, and explain to her that the discharge is completely normal, and is not in any way unclean. The white discharge is a sign that the first period is approaching, and will usually occur within a year to a year and a half.

The (first) period

My daughter is very unsettled because she's the only one in her class who hasn't yet started to menstruate. How can I reassure her? Explain to your daughter that the changes of puberty take place at a different rate for every individual, which is genetically determined and cannot be speeded up or delayed. Today girls start to

TIP

Suggest that your daughter use an air-permeable panty pad (without plastic foil). The thin, virtually undetectable pad will absorb the moisture.

menstruate at an average age of 12.5 years. Fundamentally, there is no need to worry if menstruation does not start until the age of 16, although after this age it is advisable to see a gynaecologist.

TIP

The first period is a special event in every girl's life, and should be treated as such. It might make your daughter happy if you mark the occasion by buying her that sweater that she longs for but can't afford. Or how about going for an ice cream or taking in a movie together – just you and your daughter?



Period pains

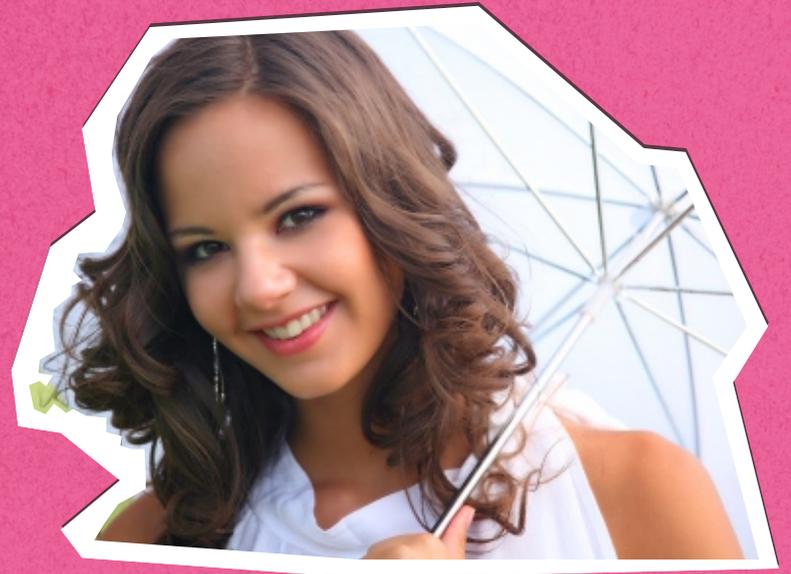
How is it possible to alleviate my daughter's menstrual cramps?

Unusually strong or sudden menstrual pain should not be casually dismissed. You should always turn to a gynaecologist with questions about menstrual pain. Only a specialist doctor can determine the cause of the pain and recommend an effective treatment. If your daughter complains of menstrual cramps, explain to her that during her period the uterus contracts to allow the endometrial lining and the blood to be expelled. For some women this is accompanied by a great or lesser degree of lower abdominal pain. The way your daughter experiences all this could also depend on your attitude to your own cycle, because the mother is the most important female role model for her. Let your daughter know that a woman can also be fit and active during her period. Doing sports is permitted, and indeed recommended during menstruation, as it can alleviate the pain. But at the same time let your daughter know that it's also perfectly natural if she feels worse on these days, and goes easier on herself as a result. Your daughter is just getting to know this important function of her body, and she needs to learn to accept the processes under way inside her.

Menstrual hygiene

When can my daughter start using tampons?

Even young girls can use tampons without problems, starting from the first period. Tampons are not harmful to health and do not cause any injury to the hymen, because by the time of the first period, this has undergone a change in response to the hormone oestrogen, with the result that it is now only a flexible, permeable ring that narrows the vagina. Discuss the available menstrual hygiene options with



your daughter, and talk about the pros and cons of the individual methods. Based on this, your daughter needs to decide for herself whether she would like to use tampons or pads. The majority of young girls prefer to use a tampon, because it allows them to enjoy the same freedom of movement as they do on other days.



It's good to know

If your daughter has any questions relating to menstrual hygiene, or if she has trouble inserting the tampon, a visit to a gynaecologist presents an excellent opportunity to get help with this too.

AT THE GYNAECOLOGIST'S

Do you remember...

...what your first visit to a gynaecologist was like? The nervousness, or perhaps fear, that you felt before the examination? Or the reason why you went to the doctor: perhaps you were having period pains, or wanted to get a prescription for the pill? Or did you go to see the gynaecologist simply because you had questions?

What will happen at the gynaecologist's? When should I go for an examination? And when will my period start? Please help!



The first visit to a gynaecologist

When it is advisable for my daughter to see a gynaecologist for the first time, and how can I help her with this?

If she has no complaints at all, your daughter does not need to see a gynaecologist just for a check-up. A gynaecological consultation, or possibly an examination, is necessary if your daughter has some kind of complaint, for example a burning itching sensation in the pubic or

vaginal region, or in the event of pain, discharge or a menstrual disorder, or if she has reached the age of 16 and is still not menstruating. Many gynaecologists offer consultations specifically for young girls: at specified times during surgery opening hours, they can get the answers to all their questions about physical development, sexuality and contraception. If your daughter has been properly informed and is aware of how her body works, she will be capable of taking responsibility for herself and deciding independently when it's time for her first visit to the gynaecologist. It's advisable for your daughter to keep her own health insurance (TAJ) card with her, because then she can visit her gynaecologist



independently, which is an important step on the road to adulthood. It's possible that your daughter may ask you to accompany her to the surgery. Even in this case it's better to stay in the waiting room, to signify that you respect her privacy but you will be there for her if she asks. This way, if she wants to, your daughter can speak with the doctor in private. Give her this opportunity!

Important information

In most gynaecologist's surgeries you can request information leaflets aimed specifically at young girls, which can help your daughter prepare for her first visit.

Gynaecological examinations

Does there have to be a gynaecological examination at the first consultation?

A gynaecological examination is not a compulsory part of the first consultation, except of course in cases where the causes of some kind of symptom or complaint need to be investigated.

At consultations for teenagers, the focus is on communication, the provision of information, and raising awareness. During the first consultations many gynaecologists perform an ultrasound scan through the abdominal wall, which gives a comprehensive picture of the positions and state of the pelvic organs; and what is more, the patient can also watch the examination on the screen.

SEXUALITY AND CONTRACEPTION



Do you remember...

...what your first intimate relationship with a boy was like? The thrill of anticipation, because everything was so new and unfamiliar? And the great expectations that you must have had of the first time? And do you remember the uncertainty that engulfed you when you thought about your expectations, and how you worried everything would be okay with the protection? You too probably did the best thing you could in this situation: you talked to your boyfriend or girlfriend, and possibly your mother or a gynaecologist, about your fears and worries. It is very helpful if a young girl can talk about all these things, especially about protection, which is an issue of key importance.

How can I know if a boy really loves me and doesn't just want to have sex with me? “



The first sexual encounter

I think that my daughter is still too young to have a sexual relationship. What should I do?

Whether or not your daughter is ready for her first encounter is very probably something that she will decide for herself. The most you can do is remind her that the first time can only be a beautiful experience for a girl if the time and the partner are

right; and she should feel free to wait until she feels certain that she is ready for the experience. It is important for her to not feel pressured; and under no circumstances should she say yes to a boy just so as not to cause him disappointment. You also mustn't forget to discuss contraception with your daughter in good time.

At some time or other your daughter is bound to ask permission for her boyfriend to sleep over. The decision is naturally yours, and if possible you should stick by your decision even if it is in the negative. You essentially cannot prevent your daughter from forming a sexual relationship with a boy. Talk to her about the fact that sexuality is an especially intimate affair, and it is important that they also respect the privacy of the other family members.

Constant information

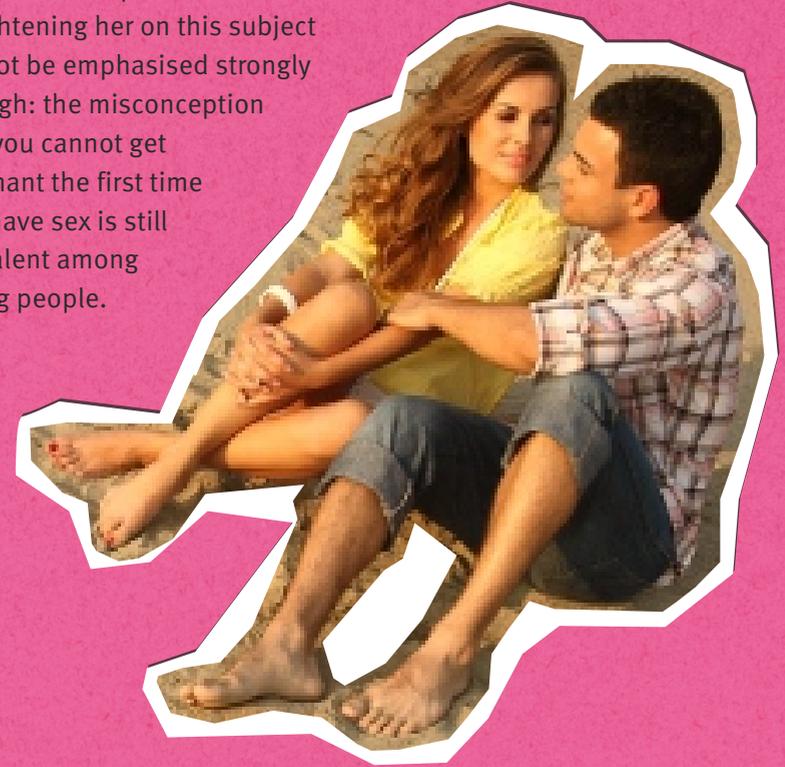
When should I talk to my daughter about protection?

You should start talking about protection, as a very important issue, when you first talk to your daughter about the facts of life; in other words, well before the first physical relationship, when your daughter can still pay attention to what you are saying without inhibitions, and will also have the opportunity to

TIP

Do you feel unsettled if you have to talk about this sensitive issue, or are you at a loss when your daughter dismisses the topic with a simple "Oh mum, what are you thinking again?!" Suggest to your daughter that she see your gynaecologist, where at a teenager consultation she can learn all about contraception, and won't necessarily even have to undergo a gynaecological examination.

ask questions later. The issue becomes even more urgent when your daughter starts to get to know a boy with whom she starts to form a closer relationship. Try and find an opportunity to have this chat, because the importance of enlightening her on this subject cannot be emphasised strongly enough: the misconception that you cannot get pregnant the first time you have sex is still prevalent among young people.



Reliable contraception

Isn't my daughter too young to go on the pill?

If your daughter indicates that she would like to take the pill, then in most cases there is no point in talking about what is the right age. Her question indicates that she has a need for contraception, and has a particularly responsible attitude. Taken properly, the pill is one

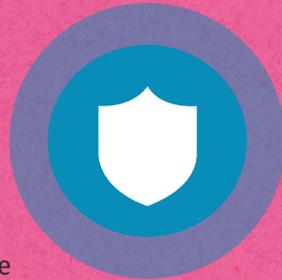
of the most reliable means of contraception, especially for young girls. The gynaecologist, by interviewing the patient in depth, rules out any potential risks, and on this basis prescribes the appropriate product. When selecting the product, one consideration could be what other beneficial effects the pill has apart from its contraceptive action. By taking modern contraceptives you can alleviate or even eliminate menstrual pains, the amount of bleeding may be reduced, and the cycle can be made more regular. Besides this, products containing certain active ingredients can have a beneficial effect on the condition of an acne-sufferer's skin.

Double protection

Is it necessary to use a condom while taking the pill?

The pill can prevent an unwanted pregnancy, but it offers no protection against sexually transmitted diseases, the incidence of which has been rising in recent years.

It is very important to also talk about this with your daughter. Make it clear that apart from HIV, and the AIDS that it leads to, there are also other much more common diseases, such as Chlamydia infection. The bacterium known as Chlamydia can travel, via the uterus, all the way to the fallopian tubes, where it may trigger a severe inflammation that can later have serious complications, possibly leading to infertility. Explain to your daughter that she must look after her body, that she is responsible for her health, and it is essential that she also talk to her boyfriend about this, as protecting against unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases is their shared task.



Is the pill harmful to health in any way?

No other contraceptive device or method is the subject of as many misconceptions or half-truths as the pill. Naturally, nobody would like to fill their daughter full of “chemical substances”. This preconception originates from the “prehistoric age” of oral contraception, when pills with far higher hormone content were on sale. It should be borne in mind, however, that modern products have low hormone content, and even in the case of young girls they are good at reproducing the physiological processes that take place in the body. In other words, they do not influence development during puberty. Of course it is also true that the contraceptive pill is still a medicine, and just like all other medicinal products it may have side effects.



THE CONTRACEPTIVE PILL: MYTHS AND FACTS



Common myths about contraceptives:

- Contraceptives will make me put on weight. This is not true. You can't gain or lose weight by taking the pill. In certain cases products with higher oestrogen content can cause water retention, but these pills are less and less prevalent today.
- It is not true that the pill only protects against unwanted pregnancy from the second cycle onwards. If you start taking the pill on the first day of the period and keep taking it regularly from then on, the contraceptive effect is also assured in the first cycle.
- It's a misconception that the protection is not effective during the one-week break from taking the pill. If the pill is taken regularly, then there is no need to worry about falling pregnant even during the one-week break.
- The contraceptive pill will make me infertile. This statement does not stand up to scrutiny. The contraceptive pill does not affect future fertility even if it is taken for many years. Pregnancy may occur as early as during the first cycle after stopping taking the pill.
- It is a misconception that the pill protects against sexually transmitted diseases. The only reliable form of protection against these diseases is the condom.
- If I forget to take the pill once, it's still no problem. Unfortunately this isn't true. Even one missed pill can reduce the effectiveness of the contraceptive, so in these cases extra precautions (for example a condom) should be taken.
- It is also an outmoded view that after taking the pill for a certain length of time, you need to have a few months' break. Based on our current knowledge, in medical terms this is unnecessary and not recommended.

It is true, however, that in addition to its contraceptive action the pill can have several other beneficial effects:

- It is true that the pill can alleviate menstrual pain and reduce the amount of the bleeding.
- It is true that certain products, containing anti-androgens, can have a beneficial effect on the condition of the skin and hair.
- It is true that pregnancy can occur immediately after coming off the pill, even after many years of taking it.
- It is true that the pill ensures reliable contraception even in the first cycle, if you start taking on the first day of the period and continue to take it regularly after that.
- It is true that the combination of taking the pill and smoking is not without its risks, as the side-effects of contraceptives occur more frequently in smokers.



Afterword

In most cases several years elapse between the first period and the first sexual encounter, and during this interval several stages of pubescent development will take place. Although the change undoubtedly represents a great strain, in most cases puberty should still not be equated with an ongoing crisis or catastrophe. In any given situation, girls have a very good sense of what it is that they find attractive, and what they would prefer to avoid. If you present to your daughter, a positive and responsible experience of sexuality and femininity, then you have every reason to trust that your daughter will successfully deal with the feelings and influences directed at her both from the outside world and within herself, as she searches for her own identity and direction.

Imprint

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NOTES



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