

Preparing for changes at puberty

Year: Y4

Subjects and Issues

- Body parts
- Growing and changing
- Personal hygiene
- Puberty
- Science
- Relationships education
- Periods
- Menstruation
- Body changes
- Wet dreams
- National Curriculum science - relationships elements

Please note from September 2026 pupils should be taught the correct names of body parts, including the penis, vulva, vagina, testicles, scrotum, nipples. Pupils should understand that all of these parts of the body are private and have skills to understand and express their own boundaries around these body parts. The RHSE guidance does not specify when pupils should be taught this content; that is a decision for the school.

The **Science National Curriculum** statement associated with this lesson is from the Y5 Programme of Study. However, it is not uncommon for menstruation to begin before that age. Girls can start their periods as young as 8 years old, so it is strongly recommended that children learn about periods from Y3/P4. The DfE acknowledges in the 2025 guidance that whilst the average age of the onset of menstruation is twelve, periods can start at eight, so covering this topic before girls' periods start will help them understand what to expect and avoid distress.

This lesson builds on the content of the Y3/P4 lesson *My changing body*. It reviews some of its content and extends the learning. If the children haven't done that lesson then it's recommended that you teach it first, as a lead into this one.

Introduction

Start by reviewing the class agreement or develop one if not already developed. Look at [suggested ground rules/class agreement](#).

Explain that male and female bodies have differences, and things in common. We'll learn about both kinds of bodies today. This is important for all pupils – to have an awareness and understanding of the changes all bodies go through during puberty, to help them be respectful and supportive of those around them.

Ask the children who can remember from the previous puberty lesson (All Change) the names of the private parts of the male and female bodies:

Female:

- Vulva (External parts of female genitals which are visible. This includes the clitoris, two sets of labia - the inner and the outer - and the entrance to the vagina.)
- Vagina (Inside the body - the opening of the reproductive part of the girl's body (the passage which leads to the womb. This is also where tampons and Mooncups or Menstrual cups are placed during menstruation.
- Breasts (These develop and grow during puberty. Breasts produce milk after childbirth, to feed a baby.)

Male:

- Penis (This is the shaft-shaped reproductive organ that hangs outside the male body. It helps transport urine (wee) and sperm away from the body.)
- Testicles (produce millions of sperm everyday once a boy starts puberty)
- Scrotum (sack of skin that holds the testicles outside the body)

Both:

- Anus (end of the digestive system, where poo comes from)

Emphasise that nobody should ask to see or touch these parts of the body [unless we give permission, e.g. to see a doctor] These parts are private, but remember, your whole body belongs to you.

Can anyone tell us what happens to a boy's body when he starts puberty? (increased body hair, get bigger and taller, voice deepens, may get spots, greasy hair, testicles start to make and store sperm, may have wet dreams).

Can remember what happens to a girl's body when she starts puberty? (increased body hair, get bigger and taller including widening of hips and breast development, voice can deepen slightly, may get spots, greasy hair, vaginal discharge produced, eggs get released/periods/menstruation). And when can these changes start happening? (Any time from 8 for girls and 9 for boys, but the average age is 11 for girls, and 12 for boys).

Explain that we are going to learn more about wet dreams, involuntary erections, and periods, and how they can be managed.

Activity 1 - What happens with periods?

Show the clip of menstruation from the Kidshealth website to help remind the class of what they talked about in the *My changing body* lesson in Year 3/P4. [**View this film here.**](#)

Allow time for any questions after. You may find it useful to refer to the *IWB slide showing the female internal reproductive organs* and the *Menstruation Cycle* image, here. (NB - the IWB resource contains a second slide showing the male internal reproductive organs. Although this is not needed for this lesson it can be used if questions about boys' internal reproductive organs arise). The [**Puberty Glossary**](#) may also be useful to have to hand for this section.

Using the images of period products on the IWB or with examples of real products to show the children, ask

whether anyone can remember what a girl or woman could use to protect her clothes when she is having a period? (period/menstruation pads, tampons, or maybe even menstruation cups. You can use the [Puberty glossary](#) to explain pads and tampons. When someone is new to having periods, the two most popular choices are either pads or period pants. Someone can choose to wear pads that they stick inside their pants and wear for between 4-6 hours that they then throw away, or there are period pants that they can wear all day, depending on how heavy their flow is, that have something like a pad sewn into the pants and so they collect the blood and can be washed, dried and used again.

The *labelled side view of the female reproductive system* resource can be useful to show that girls have three holes and that period products, such as tampons and menstrual cups, go in a separate hole from the one that the wee comes out of.

Menstruation cups are plastic devices that a woman can place inside her vagina to collect period blood. See Mooncup.co.uk for more information. It needs to be emptied regularly, just the same as changing a pad or tampon on a regular basis; this is also for safety reasons associated with toxic shock syndrome). You may find it useful to know that the DfE is running a [Period Product scheme](#) where you can order a range of period products and have them delivered for free.

Explain here the need for extra care to be taken by girls at this time of the month - regular changing of pads (or other items used to protect clothing) and to change underwear twice a day - morning and night, or as needed, if wearing disposable pads.

Acknowledge that it can be useful to track when a period happens as it can help us predict when the next period will come. They usually happen every 28-35 days, although that can be different for different people and can change from month to month when starting our periods for the first time. A quick and easy way to do this is to print off a [yearly calendar](#) and mark the first day of your period and how long it lasts with a pen. (It might be useful to print off a few so that those that

want to can take one home - perhaps offering a more discreet time for them to collect one, if they'd rather not in front of the rest of the class). Then count on 28 days from when the first day of your last period started and that will give you a rough idea of when your next period might start, so you can plan ahead, such as taking pads or period pants on holiday. (Some children might mention period trackers that can be used on smartphones but women who tracked their menstrual cycle using smartphone apps have been [warned about the privacy and safety risks](#) of doing so.)

Explain, too, that the hormones (chemicals) which cause the changes at puberty also make a person's sweat glands more active, and the sweat they produce more attractive to bacteria, which can create body odour (BO). This means that the person needs to wash more regularly, wash their clothes more regularly and consider using deodorant.

Activity 2 – Period quiz: true or false?

With the children working in pairs, distribute the *Period Quiz: true or false?* Activity sheet and ask the pupils to complete this. Go through the quiz, answering any questions that arise, or offer children the opportunity to post any questions in a Questions box or 'Ask it basket'. Explain that these questions can be answered at a later date. (See teacher guidance film clip in Resources needed area for guidance on using a question box).

Activity 3 – Managing wet dreams

Explain that in the same way people manage the blood from a period being released from their body by using products to stop their clothes from being stained, people who have wet dreams may need to think about how they keep their nightclothes, e.g. pyjamas, and bedding clean. Explain that a wet dream is when a boy releases semen from their penis during the night while they are asleep or a girl produces some extra vaginal fluid. It is totally normal to experience them and totally normal not to. It's just the body's way of testing things out as it is changing and growing into an adult body. It's

more noticeable for boys as the fluid is released externally. If this happens, it would be a good idea to think about changing their nightclothes and possibly the bedsheets so that they can be cleaned. You might like to share the *IWB slide showing the female and male internal reproductive organs* and show this film clip to your class:

What is a wet dream?

Please note: this video also refers to girls having wet dreams. You may find **[this article about girls and wet dreams](#)** useful for further reading.

After showing the video it's important to check their learning, take any questions, and reinforce the importance of personal hygiene once puberty has started.

Also acknowledge that an involuntary erection, also called a spontaneous erection, occurs when the penis becomes hard and points away from the body. These erections are totally normal and can happen at any age, though they are more frequent in adolescents and young adults. They often occur during sleep and it is not uncommon for people to wake up with an erection too.

Summing up

Summarise the lesson, explaining that periods, involuntary erections and wet dreams are a normal part of growing up and show that it's the body's way of working as it should, getting ready for adulthood.

Periods are nothing to be ashamed about and we wouldn't be here if it wasn't for eggs and periods! (Also recognising that some children may be IVF babies.)

Extension (optional)

Children could go home and talk to their parents about what they remember about when they first started puberty, and how they felt.

Adapting lessons for learners with additional needs

Teachers will need to consider the individual needs of children in their class in order to ensure the activities are inclusive. Advice from specialist teachers or the school SENDco may be helpful. Examples might include:

- It would be particularly useful for children with SEND to have physical self-care/puberty product objects that they can look at and be shown how they are designed to be used.
- Dependent on the level of need, it may be useful to build in time each day with pupils to practice using different products, e.g. brushing teeth, combing hair, and using deodorant.
- Using the [Widgit symbols provided in this booklet](#) provided by the NSPCC may be useful for some learners to access the learning, particularly as part of pre-teaching or overlearning opportunities

Our additional [Signposting and Support page](#) provides further guidance on adapting SCARF lessons to meet the needs of learners with additional needs.

Did you know?

Our specially trained educators can deliver RSE workshops that include the topics covered in this lesson. The advantages include providing staff with the opportunity to observe someone, which gives them the confidence and skills to deliver RSE going forward. Contact your [local team](#) to check the availability of these workshops for your school.

Version History

Wed, 08 Apr 2026

- Simplified side-view of female reproductive organs added

Thu, 02 Apr 2026

- Wording updated to include explanation of the names for private parts for male and female bodies.

- Vocabulary updated to include scrotum, vulva, anus, involuntary erections, spontaneous erections, and vaginal discharge

Mon, 30 Mar 2026

- Wording added from RSHE guidance 2025 about teaching about menstruation from eight years old and further detail around body odour.

Mon, 11 Aug 2025

- Content added regarding period trackers and the benefits of a paper calendar with link provided

Thu, 31 Jul 2025

- Extra ideas added for learners with additional needs

Learning Outcomes

Children will be able to:

- Know the key facts of the menstrual cycle;
- Understand that periods are a normal part of puberty for girls;
- Identify some of the ways to cope better with periods.

Key Vocabulary

ovaries

sperm

testicles

puberty

vagina

penis

cervix

wet dreams

semen

ejaculate

menstrual cycle

ovulation
fallopian tube
vulva
eggs
genitals
scrotum
period/menstruation pad
tampon
menstruation cup

breasts
hips
spots
sweat
pubic hair

If using the film clips, the following words are also used:

fertilised egg
periods
menstruation
pregnant
spontaneous erections

What is a wet dream?

nocturnal emission

whitish fluid

wet

lubricated

slippery

sexual nature

felt good

pee

sheets

laundry

guilty

embarrassed

normal

natural

voice deepens

lining of the uterus

pads

menstrual cup

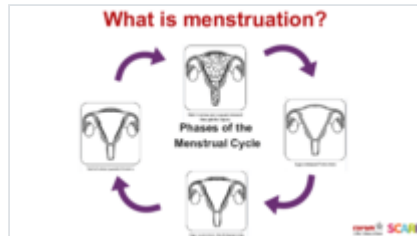
Menstruation Film Clip

anus

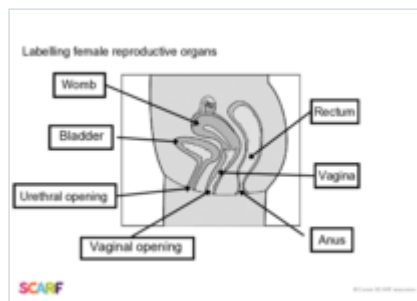
vaginal discharge



Period products - to show on IWB



Menstruation Cycle — can be printed or shown on IWB



Basic Female Reproductive Organs Side View — can be printed or shown on IWB



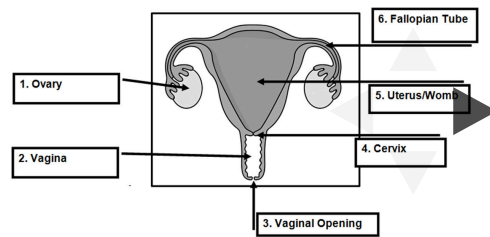
14 Using a question box



Whiteboards



Labelling internal female reproductive organs



Labelling female and male internal organs

DfE Relationships Education and Health Education statutory requirements

- **Physical Health and Mental Wellbeing (Health Education)**
Changing adolescent body 1. Key facts about puberty and the changing adolescent body, particularly from age 9 through to age 11, including physical and emotional changes.
- **Physical Health and Mental Wellbeing (Health Education)**
Changing adolescent body 2. About menstrual wellbeing including the key facts about the menstrual cycle.

DfE Relationships Education and Health Education statutory requirements (2025)

- **Developing bodies** 1. About growth and other ways the body can change and develop, particularly during adolescence. This topic should include the human lifecycle, and puberty should be discussed as a stage in this process.
- **Developing bodies** 2. The correct names of body parts, including the penis, vulva, vagina, testicles, scrotum, nipples. Pupils should understand that all of these parts of the body are private and have skills to understand and express their own boundaries around these body parts.

- **Developing bodies** 3. The facts about the menstrual cycle, including physical and emotional changes, whilst the average age of the onset of menstruation is twelve, periods can start at eight, so covering this topic before girls' periods start will help them understand what to expect and avoid distress.
- **Families and people who care for me** 4. That stable, caring relationships are at the heart of safe and happy families and are important for children's security as they grow up.
- **Online safety and awareness** 4. The importance of exercising caution about sharing any information about themselves online. Understanding the importance of privacy and location settings to protect information online.

National Curriculum Links

- **Science Y5** **Animals including humans** (Non-statutory guidance) Pupils should draw a timeline to indicate stages in the growth and development of humans. They should learn about the changes experienced in puberty.