

to-cook meals have replaced home-made traditional items like *sheera*, *upma*, *poha*, *parathas* etc. However, the newly-preferred foodstuffs come laden with salt, processed sugars, caffeine, artificial sweeteners and preservatives; all of which cause obesity and metabolic imbalance. Parents should try limiting their child's intake of such foods, to prevent complications like early puberty.

HELP YOUR CHILD

A child going through this unusual ordeal requires its parents' help and reassurance more than anything else. Dr Shafalika S B, Columbia Asia Hospital, Hebbal, says, "Girls at this young age are not mature enough to handle this development, both physically and emotionally. Changing pads on their own, coping with menstrual irregularities, heavy flow and painful cycles is not an easy task." Thus, mothers play a critical role in this regard. Girls need to be educated about what happens inside the body, how to use a napkin/tampon, the



physical discomforts she may experience, the need for overall hygiene, the need to consume nutritious and iron rich foods, staying hydrated, stay positive and not physically exert herself. The last one becomes especially difficult because a child of eight-nine years of age is raring to play, and when she cannot do it, when her friends are playing, it becomes confounding and saddening for her. Mothers need to gently explain and counsel the child about this.

Family members, including the father, need to have a positive attitude towards menstruation so that the daughter considers it as a part of life and not be ashamed of it. If the family is religiously inclined and requires the child to follow certain taboos while menstruating, she needs to be explained about it as logically as possible, without making her feel impure or unwanted.

Parents also need to set an example for their children by eating healthy (balanced with proteins, vitamins, minerals and carbohydrate), controlling the consumption of processed foods, living active lifestyles, using glass and steel food/liquid containers and bottles.

It is only when the little girl is physically, mentally and emotionally prepared to face this huge turning point at a tender age, will she be able to cope with the pressures and problems related to the same.

