

When Puberty Starts and What It Means



Between the ages of 9 and 16, almost all boys and girls go through puberty. Puberty begins when the body begins to produce male or female hormones.

These hormones cause the body to grow and

develop from a child's body to an adult body. Hormones can make your child's emotions and feelings change.

Puberty takes place slowly over time and not everyone goes through puberty at the same time. This can cause boys and girls to worry about being different. Girls may be embarrassed that they are not developing breasts. Boys may worry about being short or not having muscles like their friends. People who go through puberty early may feel out of place or that people are looking at them. "Late bloomers" may be afraid that their body will never change.

Each person has his or her own personal time schedule for growing up and becoming an adult. It is important to know that in a very short time, everyone will go through puberty and feel changes in their bodies. Once that happens, you will learn that each person is different and special. Some will be tall, others short. Some boys will have very wide shoulders, others will be thin. One of the most important lessons about growing up is learning to accept the way your body looks.



For help or more information,
call your local health department
or the **Info Connection** toll-free at
1-800-545-1098

Talking
with
Your Child
about
Growing Up





Questions Boys Have

Many boys have the same questions about the changes that happen to their bodies during puberty.

Below are the answers to some of these common questions.

- **“What does it mean when you wake up in the middle of the night and it feels like you wet the bed?”**
It means you have had what is called a “wet dream.” This is when your penis gets hard and you have an orgasm while you are asleep. An orgasm is when a white, milky-looking material called semen comes out of your penis. This is perfectly normal and it just means that your body is growing up.

- **“Sometimes I get an erection when I’m not doing anything, just standing around talking. It is really embarrassing. What causes this and how can I stop it?”**
This is normal. An erection (or “getting hard”) is caused by extra blood in your body going quickly into your penis. It can be caused by touching your penis or by thinking about sex. It can also happen for no reason at all. There’s not much you can do to stop it. You can try to hide the erection by wearing big, loose shirts or pants or by covering it with a backpack or notebook. Other people probably won’t notice it as much as you do.

- **“Why do some guys have extra loose skin that hangs down over the tip of their penis and some guys don’t?”**
If a boy does not have the extra loose skin, it means that he has been circumcised. Circumcision is an operation that is usually done when a boy is born and is usually done for religious reasons or because it is the custom. It is done by taking off the loose

- **“One of my testicles looks different than the other. Does this mean that there is something wrong with me?”**
The testicles get larger during puberty. This is the time when they start making the male hormone testosterone. Boys may notice that one testicle may be bigger than the other. Often one testicle may hang lower than the other. This happens to many boys and is normal. Testicles may also change in appearance when the air temperature is too cold or hot. This is because the body naturally brings the testicles closer to the body when it is cold and relaxes them when it is hot. This allows the testicles to always be at the best temperature for making sperm. Boys should know that the testicles should not hurt or feel sore. If this happens, the boy should visit a doctor or clinic to find out why.



Questions Girls Have

Many girls also have the same questions about the changes that happen to their bodies during puberty.

Below are the answers to some of these common questions.

- **“When will I start getting my period?”**
There is no way to know this for sure. Some girls start their periods as young as nine years of age while others don’t start having periods until they are sixteen years old. You will start getting your periods when your body is ready. You are probably going to start getting your

periods at about the same age as your mother and any sisters that you have started getting theirs. You will also know that you will probably be getting your period within a year’s time when your breasts start growing and when you get pubic hair.

- **“What do I do if I’m not at home when I start my period?”**
You should carry a pad or tampon with you. They are usually sold in machines in public restrooms and you can get them from the nurse’s office if you are at school. There isn’t much blood when your period first starts, so you will have time to get a pad or tampon.
- **“Sometimes my breasts feel a little sore and tender and one of them is a lot bigger than the other one. What is wrong with me?”**
This is perfectly normal. Your breasts will often

be sore and tender while they are growing and one of them may even grow faster than the other one. You may be a little embarrassed about this, but don’t worry. Both breasts will be about the same size in a year or so.

- **“My breasts started getting bigger when I was really young and now I feel like everyone is looking at me. I don’t like it and I wish I weren’t so big.”**
Sometimes girls who start growing breasts early or who have large breasts are teased. Growing breasts can make you feel uncomfortable because it is so obvious. Girls who haven’t started to grow breasts can also be embarrassed and they may be afraid that they will always be “flat-chested”. Each girl is different and your body will decide when to start growing breasts and how big they will get.