

Puberty - Ready or Not...

Puberty is the time of your life when your body starts changing from a child to an adult. At times you may feel like your body is totally out of control! Your arms, legs, hands, and feet may grow faster than the rest of your body. You may feel a clumsier than usual.

Compared to your friends you may feel too tall, too short, too fat, or too skinny. You may feel self-conscious about these changes, and many of your friends probably do too.

Everyone goes through puberty, but not always at the same time or in the same way. In general, here's what you can expect:

When?

There's no "right" time for puberty to begin. Girls start a little earlier than boys - usually between 8 and 13 years of age. Puberty for boys usually starts at about 10 - 14 years old.

What's Happening?

As you grow, your body starts to produce more chemicals called *hormones* that will cause many changes in your body.

Hair, WHERE?!

Everyone - During puberty, soft hair starts to grow in the pubic area (the area between your legs and around your genitals - your vagina or penis). This hair will become thick and curly. You may also notice hair under your arms and on your legs. Boys might get hair on their faces, chest, belly, or back. Shaving is a personal choice. If you do shave, remember to use your own clean razor or electric shaver to avoid spreading germs, in case you cut yourself.

Zits and Sweat

Everyone - Other changes that happen during puberty is that your skin gets oilier, and you start to sweat more. It's important to wash every day to keep your skin clean. Most people use deodorant or antiperspirant to keep odor and wetness under control. Don't be surprised if you still get pimples, even if you wash every day. This is called *acne*, and it's normal during this time of life when your hormone levels are changing so quickly. Almost all teens get pimples



sometimes. There are ways to help keep it under control, like washing gently, and *not* picking at the pimples! Talk to your doctor for more information about skin care.

Curves and Muscles

Boys - As you go through puberty, you'll get taller, your shoulders will get broader, and as your muscles get bigger your weight will increase.

Girls - As you go through puberty, you'll get taller, your hips will get wider, and your waist will get smaller. Your body will begin to build up some fat in your belly, bottom, and thighs. This is normal, and gives your body the curvier shape of an adult woman.

Everyone - Sometimes the weight gain that's part of puberty causes both boys and girls to feel so worried about how they look that they try to lose weight by not eating, or throwing up, or taking medicine. If you feel this way, talk with a parent or your health care provider.

Breasts

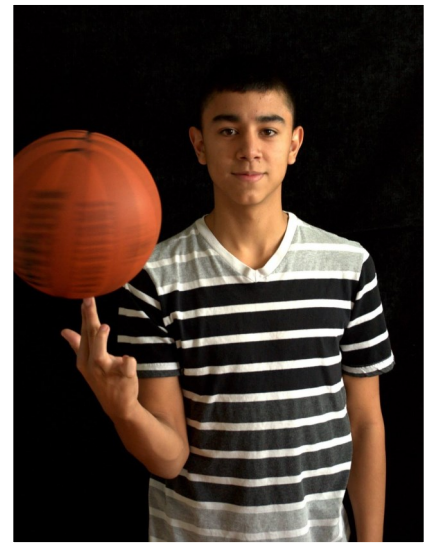
Girls - The first sign of puberty in most girls is breast development: small, tender lumps under one or both nipples. The soreness goes away as your breasts grow. Don't worry if one breast grows a little faster than the other. By the time your breasts are fully developed, they usually end up being pretty much the same size.

Boys - During puberty, some boys may have swelling under their nipples too. If this happens to you - don't worry, you're not growing breasts! This swelling is common and temporary. But if you're worried, talk to your health care provider.

Does Size Matter?

Boys - During puberty, the penis and testes get larger. There's also an increase in sex hormones. You may notice you get erections (when the penis gets stiff and hard) more often than before. This is normal. Even though you may feel embarrassed, if you don't draw attention to it, most likely nobody else will ever notice. Every guy's penis is unique, and size has nothing to do with manliness or sexual functioning.

Girls - Breasts come in all sizes and shapes. Their purpose is to make milk for a baby you might have one day, and small breasts can do that just as well as large ones. As your breasts get bigger, you may want to start wearing a bra. Some girls feel excited about this and some may feel embarrassed, especially if they are the first of their friends to need a bra. Do what feels comfortable for you. →



...expect some big changes!

We're here to help!

I'm leaking!

Girls - Your menstrual cycle or "period," usually starts a couple of years after your breasts start to grow, often between 10 - 16 years of age. Once a month, your ovaries release eggs, and if one of those eggs meets up with a sperm from a male's penis, it could grow in your uterus and develop into a baby. To get ready for this possible pregnancy, your uterus builds up a thick lining of tissue and blood cells. If the egg doesn't connect with a sperm (if it doesn't get "fertilized"), your body doesn't need this lining. It then flows out of your uterus and through your vagina. Your "period" is this monthly discharge. A girl that has periods can get pregnant, even if her periods aren't yet happening every month. Most periods last between 3 - 7 days, and you'll need to wear pads or tampons to keep your clothes clean. You can keep doing all your regular activities during your period. In fact, exercise can help with cramps and make you feel better all over.

Boys - As your body matures, your testes begin to produce sperm. This means that during an erection, you may also ejaculate. This is when semen (sperm and other fluid) is released through the penis. This can happen when you masturbate or even when you're sleeping. You might wake up to find your sheets or pajama are wet. This is called a nocturnal emission or "wet dream." It's normal and will stop as you get older.

Voice Changes

Everyone - Your voices will start to deepen from a child's voice to that of an adult. Boys might notice that your voice cracks (suddenly changes from high to low back to high), but as you keep growing this will stop, and your voice will stay at the lower range.

New Feelings

Everyone - In addition to all the physical changes you'll go through during puberty, there are a lot of emotional changes as well. You may start caring more about what other people think about you, because you want to feel accepted and liked. Your relationships may start to change too; some may become more important and some may become less so. You'll start to separate more from your parents and identify more with people your own age. You'll start to make decisions that can affect the rest of your life.

At times you may not like the attention of your parents and other adults, but they're also trying to adjust to the changes you're going through. Many teens feel that their parents don't understand them - this is normal. It's usually best to politely let them know how you feel and then talk things out together. Some teens lose their tempers more easily or feel that no one really cares about them. Talk with a trusted adult - you may be surprised at how much better you feel! Sawtooth Mountain Clinic has Behavioral Health Consultants that are available to help you work through all the changes that are happening in your life.

Sex and Sexuality...

Everyone - During this time, many young people become more aware of their attraction to other people. Just a look, a touch or a thought about someone may make your heart beat faster and make you feel funny all over.

You may have some questions, such as:

- When should I start dating?
- When is it OK to kiss?
- How far would I go sexually?
- Is oral sex really sex?
- Am I ready for the risks and responsibilities of sex?
- Is it okay for me to masturbate?

...And Some More Things to Think About

Everyone - Masturbation is normal and won't hurt you. Some people do it, and some people don't. Deciding to become sexually active with another person can be even more confusing. TV, movies, the internet, friends, and songs can make it seem like a great idea, but at the same time you hear about the dangers and all the warnings telling you to wait.

Sex is like the rest of life - it can be good or bad. It all depends on the choices that you make about it. Take dating, for example. If you and a friend feel ready to start dating (and it's okay with your parents), that's one thing. But what if one of you wants to break up? Just be honest and kind, and while you might feel sad or angry, keep doing your regular activities. Talking with a trusted adult can really help.

What about the physical part of dating? Holding hands, hugging, and kissing may happen, but they don't have to lead to sex. Deciding whether to have sex is one of the most important decisions you'll ever make, so take your time and think it through. If at all possible, talk to your parents about your family's values. There's only one sure way to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, and that's by not having sex. Even if you can't get pregnant with oral sex, you can still get infections like herpes, gonorrhea, HIV, and HPV. Waiting until you're old enough to deal with the responsibilities that come along with being sexually active can take a lot of stress off you.

If you do decide that you're going to have sex, you can talk confidentially with your health care provider about what type of birth control is best for you and how to protect yourself from sexually transmitted diseases.

And remember, whether you're a boy or a girl, you can ALWAYS say "NO," even if you've said "YES" before. You get to decide whether to consent or not, and it's your right to change your mind at *any* point. If there's any uncertainty at all, just ask your partner how he/she is feeling. It can be as simple as, "Do you really want to?" Whatever the answer - it's respected.

Taking Good Care Of Yourself

Everyone - As you get older, you'll have to make choices for yourself about all kinds of things, not just sex. Eating healthy food, keeping physically fit, and getting plenty of rest will help your body be at its best as you go through the many changes that puberty brings. Take good care of yourself - you're worth it!

If you have questions about your health or your feelings, the providers at Sawtooth Mountain Clinic are here to help. Call 218-387-2330 for more information.