

Puberty Stuff



Family Planning Tasmania
sexuality education & clinical services

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH PUBERTY?

It's the time in life when human beings (like you) develop and change from a child into an adult. Puberty will change the way you look, the way you feel and the way to relate to others. These changes may take months or years.

When does it happen? Usually some time between 8 and 17 years. Girls often go through it a bit earlier than boys do. There's a right time for everyone but it may be different for different people and that's OK.

How? That's a hard one to answer, but basically when the body is ready it starts producing special chemicals called hormones that tell your body to start changing.

The facts:

- It's totally normal
- Let's you know your body is on track and everything's going OK
- It will finish one day
- It can be confusing, exciting, strange - even scary
- You can talk to your parents or a trusted adult about it - they went through puberty too!

PUBERTY HAPPENS TO EVERYONE!

Because boys and girls bodies are a bit different inside and out, they change in different ways. There are some things though, that we all go through...

Growth spurts - Both males and females will have times when they grow quickly.

Muscles & body hair - Muscles develop and hair on legs and arms grows longer and thicker. Hair will begin to grow under the arms and pubic hair will grow around scrotum and the base of the penis (boys) and around the vulva (girls).

Faces & heads- Faces change and start to become more adult looking.

Pimples, zits, acne - These are caused sweat and oil which block the pores and cause an infection. Pimples usually appear on the face but you can also get them on the upper chest and back. Washing regularly, eating healthily and sleeping well can help.

Body Odour - The dreaded underarm BO! The pores of the skin start to produce oil as well as sweat and this is what smells. It's time to wash more often and use deodorants or anti-perspirants. Remember, these will only work on clean skin. You may also get smelly feet - so wear clean socks every day!

Voice - The voice box also grows, so both boys and girls will notice that their voices sound deeper. It's usually more noticeable in boys because boys develop larger voice boxes.

ADOLESCENCE

Adolescence is the big word used to talk about the emotional changes that happen to everyone during puberty. Like the physical changes, these emotional changes are caused by hormones.

Feeling sensitive, wanting more privacy, experiencing a mixture of emotions are all part of the rollercoaster that is puberty. It is totally normal (but not always pleasant) for moods and feelings change a lot – often for no obvious reason.

It's all part of becoming a more mature and independent human being but it can be very frustrating. Some days you may feel like a kid and other days you feel really grown-up. This is OK but often the people around you don't realise which one you are and will often treat you as the opposite. They also say things like "You're old enough to be responsible" and "You're too young to do that" and then they wonder why you're a bit confused.

New feelings may occur, such as sexual thoughts and fantasies. These may be general feelings or may be centred on a particular person. This person may be of the opposite sex or the same sex. These attractions are normal and OK and happen to lots of adolescents.

There may be times when these feelings become very physical. **Masturbation** is the touching and massaging of the sexual parts of the body and can relieve these physical feelings. It is OK to want to masturbate and OK not to want to masturbate but it is something that must be done in private.

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FOR THE BOYS!

Body shape will change. The hands and feet are likely to start growing first. Then the male's body will get taller and the shoulders and chest area will become broader. The penis gets longer and thicker and the testicles become larger. Some boys might get slight breast development. This is because of hormones and will settle down. It may take a while to get used to your new body.

Erections are when the penis becomes stiff or erect and it happens because of an increase in the blood flow to the penis. It's normal to start to get more erections during puberty and they show the body is developing and working OK. It can happen in response to touch, sexy thoughts or dreams, sometimes for no reason at all. They usually happen in private but – rarely - they may happen in public and that can be really embarrassing. Cover your groin with something and think of the most boring thing you can and it should go away.

More hair will start to appear, mainly above the upper lip and on the chin. It will be more noticeable in dark-haired males. Eventually the guy will make the decision to start shaving – not every day at first but when necessary. Some males may get hair on their chest and even on the back.

Wet dreams happen to most boys at some stage during puberty. This is when an erection and ejaculation (release) of semen occur while the male is asleep. Semen is the white fluid that contains sperm. Wet dreams are a normal part of growing up but it can be uncomfortable to wake up feeling damp and sticky.

Voice Breaking - when a boy's voice gets deeper this often doesn't happen smoothly but the voice may jump from normal to squeaky to deep quite suddenly. Although it's called the "voice breaking" it doesn't hurt and won't last long.

FOR THE GIRLS!

Body shape begins to change. As well as females getting taller, the hips get wider which gives the body a more rounded shape. It's also fairly common to put on a bit of weight during puberty - girls need to reach a certain weight to start their periods. Eating well and exercising regularly will help you stay healthy.

Breast development will begin with the nipples getting darker, then the breasts will begin to grow. One may develop a little bit faster but that's not unusual. They may feel tender or sore sometimes but this will pass. Breasts come in all shapes and sizes and yours will be the perfect size for your body.

Vaginal discharge is the sticky white/cream wetness that girls may notice on their underwear or toilet paper. This can happen before the first period and in-between periods. It is due to the new hormones and is normal and helps to keep the vagina clean and healthy.

Periods - Periods are part of the changes that give women the ability to have a baby. They are caused by the uterus shedding its lining. This passes out of the body through the vagina and looks like blood. This bleeding lasts from 3-7 days and happens about once a month. Pads and tampons are used to absorb the period fluid. For more info see FPT's download *About Periods*.

Body Hair - when some girls reach puberty they begin to ask whether they have to shave or wax legs, underarms, bikini lines etc. Hair removal can be painful, expensive, and hair may grow back differently. The truth is getting rid of hair is just a fashion and there are many women around the world who think this extra hair is beautiful. It's your body, it's your choice! 😊

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