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Puberty and Adolescence for Boys

Puberty refers to the physical changes that occur during adolescence—the time when a child grows into an adult. During this time, the youngster will obtain sexual maturity, meaning that the body will become capable of making a baby. Although there is no set age when these changes occur, most boys experience puberty between the ages of ten and 16. Girls generally go through puberty a few years earlier.

The process of puberty can begin quickly during adolescence. Chemicals in the body are released causing the body to rapidly grow and change in ways that may make boys and girls feel awkward—both physically and emotionally. These hormones cause a child's hands and feet to grow larger, for instance. They also cause the arms and legs to grow longer. Sometimes this occurs very quickly, indeed; consequently, adolescents may be more clumsy at this time, literally stumbling over their own feet.

Boys and girls experience some changes during puberty that are similar. For example: Both begin to grow hair under the arms, on the legs, and in the pubic area; the sweat glands start to produce more body odor; the hair and face become oilier, sometimes causing pimples or acne; they grow taller and heavier; and both undergo a voice change, but this is much more noticeable for boys. During this change, a boy's voice may play tricks on him, sounding at first like his old voice, then suddenly deepening in the middle of a sentence, then rising again. Eventually a boy's new voice will become established and not fluctuate so much.

Some changes during puberty, however, are very different for boys and girls. The hormones in a boy's bloodstream cause his shoulders to become broader and his muscles to become larger than a girl's. Boys start growing hair above and around the penis and then on the face. Some boys develop a strong mustache and beard while others hardly grow any facial hair at all. Chest hair doesn't usually come in until late in puberty, but may never come in at all.

During puberty, boys' penises become more sensitive and they begin having more erections. This can happen when the penis is touched, if the pants fit too tight, when riding a bike, when nervous, or when thinking about sex. These unpredictable erections can be embarrassing, but they are seldom noticed by others and usually go away if a boy tries to think about something else.

At times, however, an erection can lead to ejaculation. When this happens semen, a creamy, white liquid containing sperm, squirts out of the penis. Sometimes this occurs during sleep, causing the boy to wake up with wet, sticky pajamas. This is sometimes called a "wet dream," and it is a normal part of growing up and is nothing to feel ashamed about. When a boy starts ejaculating, it means he is physically able to make a girl pregnant.

During all these changes, it's not unusual for both boys and girls to compare themselves with others. This comparison often occurs with their own peers at school and in locker rooms. As a result, many youngsters will tend to feel self-conscious or unhappy with their bodies. A boy may think his penis is too long or too short, too thick or too thin. A girl may think her breasts are too small or too large. The fact is that there is no such thing as a "right" size or shape of a penis or a breast or a human being, for that matter. It's important to remember that few people in real life look like models or celebrities; besides, the pictures in magazines are usually retouched and enhanced.

While all these physical changes are happening, young people are also developing ideas about what is important to them. Puberty can be a very confusing time, particularly since a boy or girl might realize that he or she thinks differently from others. Sometimes that can mean conflict, hurt, and pain—especially when it involves parents, siblings, or friends. Part of growing up means learning that—for many things—there is no "right" or "wrong," just different opinions.



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