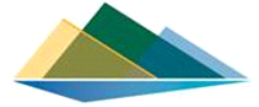


#puberty
#publichealth5-19service



PUBERTY FACTSHEET

This factsheet will provide you with information about puberty and links to helpful websites.

“One minute I feel fine, the next I feel upset. No-one understands me”

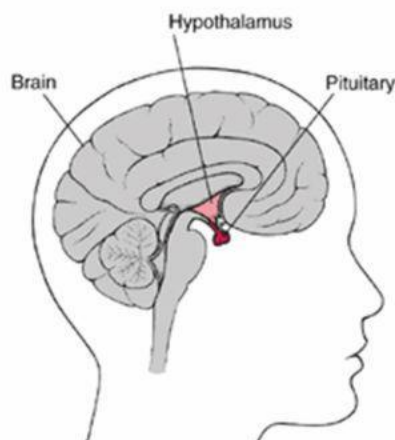
Puberty describes the changes that your body goes through during your early teens that lead to you developing into a young man or woman. Your body begins to produce hormones that both change your body and affect your emotions, and this can be a difficult time to get used to all these changes.

Puberty takes different amounts of time for everyone. In girls it usually occurs between the ages of 8 and 15, and in boys between 10 and 17. The changes can occur in the space of two years, however for some people it may take up to four years for them to all appear: this is normal, and doesn't mean there is anything wrong with you.

What is happening to me?

The changes that are taking place to your body are due to hormones. These are chemical substances that trigger both physical and emotional changes.

The pituitary gland in your brain is responsible for releasing hormones into the bloodstream, where they act as chemical messengers to the whole body. Testosterone is the sex hormone released in boys, and oestrogen is released in girls.



I feel different

Puberty isn't just about the physical changes that are happening to you: minds and feelings change too, and you're likely to have emotional ups and downs. Sometimes you might get angry and have rows with your family and friends, or feel moody and fed up for no reason. Even though it can feel awful at the time, mood swings are normal and will settle down. Remember at other times life will feel really exciting as things change and new opportunities arise.

Sexual thoughts and feelings: it's normal to have sexual thoughts and feelings during puberty when your body is changing. It can be confusing and strange at first but it isn't unusual, and your feelings will calm down after a while when your body adjusts to the changes.

I don't like the changes happening to me

It's normal to worry about the way you look sometimes, especially as your body changes and grows, and there can be a lot of pressure to look a certain way and fit in. Don't compare yourself to other people: remember everyone is different. Find something you like about yourself: once you have found one thing you are likely to find more. Try and ignore negative or mean comments from other people, and if you can't then you should try talking to someone you trust to help it stop.

What physical changes will happen to me?

All the hormonal alterations can produce a few unwanted changes in all of us:

Sweating

During puberty you will find that you sweat more, and this happens to both boys and girls as your sweat glands change and produce more sweat to help control your body's temperature. Your newly grown body hair is great at trapping this sweat, which leads to body odour.

Keeping good personal hygiene will mean you still look and feel healthy:

It's important to wash your whole body regularly and wear clean clothes so that you don't smell, and you can also wear deodorant or antiperspirant if you are worried about smelling.

Also, remember to brush your teeth well twice a day, as this will help keep bad breath and tooth decay away.

Spots

We all get them at some point in our lives: and all wish they would go away! Most young people get spots around puberty and they are usually caused by hormones, which are not something you can control.

There are a few things you can do to help:

- Wash your face twice a day with unscented or antiseptic soap in warm water (but don't scrub too hard as this will irritate the skin)
- Try eating less fatty foods and drink plenty of water to keep your skin hydrated
- Do not pick or squeeze them, even though it may be tempting as they can become infected
- You could also try special face washes and creams for helping spots
- If you get very bad spots it might be acne, which is a common skin condition that often occurs on the face and back. If you think you have it, speak to your doctor who can give you advice and possibly provide special creams and pills to help.

Who can I talk to?

If you feel worried about the changes that are happening, talk to someone you trust for example your parents, older siblings or friends, or to your teacher, who will be happy to chat.

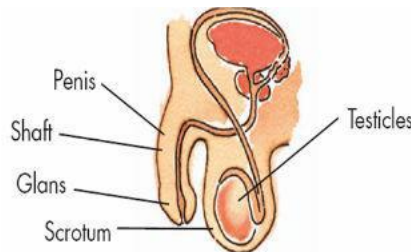
Boys: Physical changes

You will go through lots of changes during puberty. Some of these only you will know about, but others will be obvious to other people. Below are some of the things that will happen to you:

- You will grow taller: your chest and shoulders will broaden and you may become more muscular. Boys grow later than girls: don't worry, you will catch up!
- Your penis and testicles will grow bigger and your testicles will gradually drop.
- You may get unexpected erections, where the penis goes hard and stiff: this is due to hormone changes. They can occur at any time, even when you are not thinking about sex which can be embarrassing, but remember other people don't notice them as much as you do. When it happens, try to sit down or cover it with something, and try to focus on something else until it goes away.
- Spots will develop and you will sweat more: this is due to new hormones.
- When you start producing sperm, you may experience wet dreams. This is normal, and is where you ejaculate while you are asleep.
- Hair will grow, including your armpits, legs, arm, face (cheeks, upper lip and chin), chest and around your penis (pubic hair)
- Your voice will begin to break, which is where it gets deeper. This can happen quickly or slowly, and you might sound croaky for a while, or have a high voice one minute and a low voice the next, but it will settle down eventually.

The male reproductive system

All boys are born with a foreskin: a fold of skin at the end of the penis that covers the glans. It is important to wash beneath the foreskin every day to prevent infections. However some boys have a circumcision: this is where the foreskin is cut away, and is usually for religious or cultural reasons. Penises work the same whether they are circumcised or not.



The most familiar function of the penis is to produce urine. Note that it is not possible to urinate when the penis is erect.

The male reproductive system has two other main functions:

1. It produces the sex hormones, including testosterone, which are what help you to mature.
2. It is responsible for production and release of semen.

One of the first changes you may notice during puberty is that the scrotum and testes grow larger. This is because the testes begin producing millions of sperm cells every day, which contain your genetic material and eventually get released as semen.

The penis also elongates during puberty, and the seminal vesicles inside it grow. It is through these that the sperm travel.

The penis becomes hard when a male is sexually excited, as the tissues in the penis fill with blood, and it becomes stiff and erect.

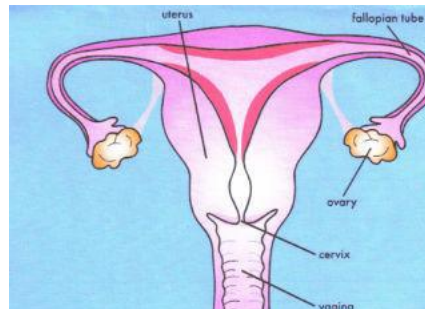
Girls: Physical changes

You will go through lots of changes during puberty. Some of these only you will know about, but others will be obvious to other people. Below are some of the things that will happen to you:

- You will grow taller: this can happen very quickly.
- Your breasts and hips will get bigger: it can feel itchy or uncomfortable as this is happening, but this is normal. Breasts begin as a small swelling under the nipples, before the whole area gets bigger. More curves will develop all over your body: this does not mean you need to lose weight, it just means you are getting a womanly shape.
- Hair will begin to grow under your arms and around your vagina (known as pubic hair). The hair on your legs might get darker, and some hair may grow on your upper lip too.
- Periods will begin, with accompanying period pains and vaginal discharge often occurring before.
- Your vagina changes, and will start to produce a white or clear liquid known as vaginal discharge. This is normal and is your vagina's way of keeping clean and healthy. It often gets heavier just before your period is about to start. It should be white and not very strong smelling – if it looks green or yellow or smells a lot then you should see your doctor in case you have an infection, such as thrush (which is common and easily treated).
- Spots will develop and you will sweat more: this is due to new hormones.

The female reproductive system

The female reproductive system is located within the body, unlike that of males.



The female reproductive system enables you to:

- Produce eggs, which contain your genetic material
- Have sexual intercourse
- Protect and nourish a fertilized egg while it develops
- Give birth once the fetus is fully developed

Girls are born with all of their eggs already made, but they remain inactive until puberty begins, where hormones lead to the release of one egg every month. This creates what is known as the menstrual cycle.

“my two best friends have started their periods. I’m 12 and worried that it hasn’t happened yet”

What are periods?

- The most common age to begin periods is around 12 years old, but it is different for everyone: you could be anything from 8 until 18, so don’t worry if you haven’t started yet.

- Periods are part of your menstrual cycle. Each cycle starts on the first day of your period and lasts around 28 days, until your next period. Periods themselves usually last between 3 and 7 days every month, but this can vary when you first start as your body settles down.
- In each cycle, levels of the hormone oestrogen rise, which causes an egg to be released from your ovary.
- Your uterus then gets ready for a possible pregnancy, and its lining becomes thick and soft. However if the egg is not fertilized then the uterus lining passes out of your body as blood through your vagina: this is your period. Each month you only lose about 3-5 tablespoons: not as much as you might think! Sometimes this blood flow is just a brown stain in your knickers, whereas other times it may be redder in colour: both are normal.

How will they affect me?

- A few days before your period starts you may experience mood swings as the hormones kick in: this is very normal! Your breasts may become a bit sore, and vaginal discharge may increase the week before.
- You may also get stomach cramps (known as period pains) in the few days before it starts and during the first couple of days of your period. Holding a hot water bottle against your stomach can help, as can doing some gentle exercise. If the pain is really bad you should talk to your parents, or GP.

What do I do?

- To collect the blood you can use either sanitary towels, which soak it up after it has left the vagina, or tampons, which absorb it before it leaves. One method isn't better than the other, and it's up to you to decide which you find easiest and most comfortable.
- You have to change the towel or tampon several times a day, at least every 4 hours on the heaviest days. Remember too to wash every day you are on your period.
- It's a good idea to carry some towels or tampons with you when you think your period is due. If you do get caught out at school don't be afraid to ask at the office or ask a female teacher – they are very used to being asked!
- Remember for the first year or two, your periods will probably be quite irregular as your body adjusts, so don't worry if it is later than you expect, and try to be prepared. If you are worried about your period, there are plenty of people you can talk to: you parents or carers, older sisters, and female teachers: they will all be able to give you advice.

VISIT THESE USEFUL WEBSITES:

www.kooth.com

Free online counselling and support

www.nhs.uk/live-well/sexual-health/stages-of-puberty-what-happens-to-boys-and-girls/

NHS webpage with information about puberty

www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/you-your-body/puberty/puberty-facts/

Childline website has lots of useful information and advice for children

www.brook.org.uk/your-life/puberty

Brook provide information and advice about sexual health and wellbeing for under 25s

www.riseabove.org.uk/article/puberty-myth-vs-fact-quiz/

Information and resources for young people about health related topics