

Understanding Puberty

Your Body Changes

A changing body, mind and feelings are a natural part of growing up. During puberty your body grows and changes into an adult's body. The changes don't happen overnight. They happen over the course of a few years. During this time, your body is not the only thing that's changing.

As the body grows, it produces chemicals called *hormones*.

Both boys and girls experience the following kinds of changes:

- The body grows taller. (You may feel clumsy or awkward.)
- Hair and skin become oily. (Your face may begin to break out.)
- Hair and sweat glands develop under the arms. (It may be time to use a deodorant.)
- New feelings and thoughts about body changes can be confusing. (You may worry or feel embarrassed.)

Hormones are chemicals that the body makes. These chemicals are like messengers that tell the body what to do and when to do it. Hormones tell the body when it is time to begin the changes known as puberty.

Puberty is a time when the body grows and changes on both the inside and outside. Puberty usually happens between ages 9 and 16 for girls and ages 10 and 17 for boys. Puberty is a normal part of growing up. Understanding puberty makes it easier to accept the changes.

Girls may notice changes in their body shape. Hips get wider and the waist may get smaller. Breasts develop and may feel tender and sore. Body hair begins to grow.

Boys may notice the voice beginning to more muscular. Hair begins to grow on the face and other parts of the body.

The way you see yourself and how you feel about your body changes too. Sometimes you may like the changes in your body. At other times, they may make you uneasy or unsure of yourself. It's not unusual to compare yourself to other boys or girls. It's important to remember that each person's body changes at his or her own pace.

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Your Relationships Change

Your relationships with your family may change as you grow up. These changes bring new choices and responsibilities. You have new kinds of freedom, but also more rules. Your personal choices show others the kind of person you are.

Relationships with friends change too. You may feel comfortable spending time with friends of the same gender or you may be comfortable with friends of a different gender. Either way is normal. During this time you may start to feel curious about or attracted to others in a special way.

Things to Know and Think About

- Puberty happens to everyone.
- Puberty happens at a different pace for each person.
- Growing and changing can affect the way you think, feel and act.
- Puberty brings new responsibilities and choices.
- Because of puberty, your body will be able to reproduce or make a baby. The time to have sex or make a baby is still a long way off.

Things to Do Daily

- Eat healthy. A variety of good foods is important for a growing and changing body.
- Exercise daily. You'll look and feel better.
- Get plenty of rest and sleep. You'll feel less stressed.
- Take a bath or shower using a soap that fights germs, bacteria and odor.

Things to Remember

- Ask for help or information about your body when you need it.
- Talk about your feelings or concerns with a caring adult.
- Respect other people's feelings and bodies.
- Make choices that respect and protect your body and your future.