

Disclaimer

We hope you find the information on our website and resources useful. This resource is provided for informational and educational purposes only. It is intended to offer general information and should never be taken as medical advice. As medical information is situation specific and can change, we do not warrant that the information provided is correct. You and your child should not rely on the material included within this resource and we do not accept any responsibility if you or your child does.

All About Puberty

A Guide for Parents and Carers to Share with Their Children

Puberty can be a tricky topic for any family to discuss but it is, nevertheless, an important part of growing up and a subject that children should feel that they can ask about or discuss, without being judged, if they have any queries or concerns.

Some families are naturally very open and are comfortable discussing such topics. Other families are much more private and these sorts of conversations are often avoided by everyone. This document is designed to be shared with your children, if you wish, as a way of engaging in discussion with them about puberty. The document can act as a guide, providing the sorts of questions children might have about puberty along with clear, accurate, honest answers.

Learning about body parts and changes that occur as we grow up does not have to be confined to the gender of the child learning or asking questions, e.g. there is no reason why a boy cannot learn about periods and a girl cannot learn about erections. However, you need to decide, as a family, what feels right and ensure no one is feeling uncomfortable with the topic of conversation.

Puberty is something that every human goes through. The more we normalise talking about it, the less uncomfortable we all become when the topic comes up. If children see that we, as adults, are uncomfortable discussing puberty, it will make them feel that it is a subject to be embarrassed about and one which must never be discussed. However, as we all know, ignorance leads to misconceptions, misunderstandings, an inability to make informed decisions and, sometimes, acquiring knowledge from less trusted or less accurate sources (such as friends, peers, magazines, TV, films or the Internet).

All About Puberty

What Is Puberty?

Puberty is a normal part of growing up for every human and it's important to learn about puberty before it happens so that we know what to expect and who to talk to if we have any questions or concerns.

Puberty is the time when we start to change from being children to becoming adults. Our bodies start to release new hormones (natural chemicals) and these hormones cause changes in our bodies. The changes our bodies go through are similar from person to person but not always exactly the same. That's because we are all different.

It is really important to learn about puberty before it actually happens. Then, we won't be worried about any changes that occur. For females, puberty usually starts around the age of 11 or 12 and for males, puberty usually starts around the age of 13 or 14. However, because we are all different, some people go through puberty earlier or later – and that's nothing to worry about!

What Changes Might All Young People Experience during Puberty?

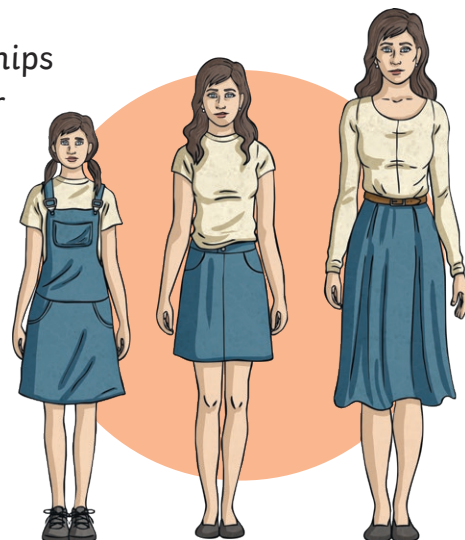
Puberty can cause the body to sweat more and produce more oil. This means we have to wash more often, maybe use a deodorant and take care of our skin. The change in hormone levels might cause spots (or acne) and you might notice your hair becoming more greasy and needing washing more often.

Mood swings can also affect young people as their body gets used to the different levels of hormones. You might feel tearful, angry, sad, lonely, frustrated, irritable – and often not really understand why. You might feel more tired than normal, too, as your body is using energy by growing.

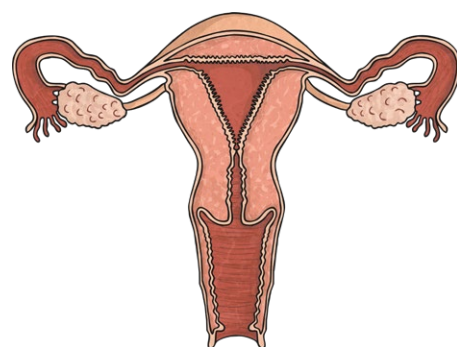


What Changes Will Females Experience?

During puberty, the female body starts to change shape as the hips widen and breasts develop. The breasts beginning to develop (or 'bud') is usually the first sign of puberty in females. Sometimes, the breasts can feel rather tender and it is perfectly normal for one breast to develop before the other one. Starting to grow pubic hair (between your legs, around the vulva) is usually the next sign of puberty. Later, underarm hair will start to grow, too, and you might notice some white fluid in your pants; this is vaginal discharge and it's completely normal in adult female bodies. Remember, everyone is different so some people will notice very few changes while the bodies of others might change a lot.



The biggest change in the female body during puberty is menstruation (starting to have periods). When females are born, they already have tiny eggs inside their bodies. These eggs are one of the cells needed to make a baby. During puberty, the female body begins releasing one egg at a time, each month, from the ovaries. This is so the body can prepare for making a baby. Of course, not everyone wants to make a baby or can make a baby and that's fine, but the female body is preparing and doing what it naturally does.



When the egg is released from the ovaries, the female body, very cleverly, gets the uterus ready to take care of the egg by building up the lining of the uterus walls. If that egg is unfertilised and not needed to make a baby, then the lining of the uterus breaks down and leaves the body with some blood. This is a period.

Every female is different so some start their periods as young as 9 while others might not start until they are 16. Around 10 to 11 is the average age for starting menstruation. Periods can last between three and eight days but the average is around five days. There tends to be heavier (more) bleeding in the first two days. When females have their period, they need to wear protection in their underwear to absorb the blood that is released from the body. These products are called sanitary products. You can buy them in supermarkets and chemists. Some public toilets have them in machines, too. It is a good idea to have some sanitary products at home for when periods start and it is also sensible to carry some in your school bag, or if you go out – to stay at a friend's, for example.

It is important to remember that every female has periods and that it is OK to ask someone for help or a sanitary product if you need one – at home, at school or at a friend's house. Try not to be embarrassed – it's simply a normal part of being female.

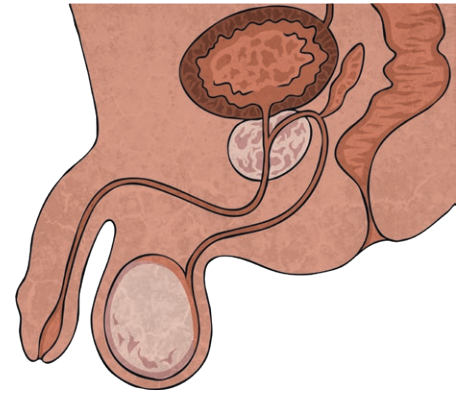


What Changes Will Males Experience?

Males generally start puberty a little later than females. The hormone called testosterone is responsible for the changes in the male body. The first signs of puberty in the male body tend to be the growth of the testicles and pubic hair growing at the base of the penis.

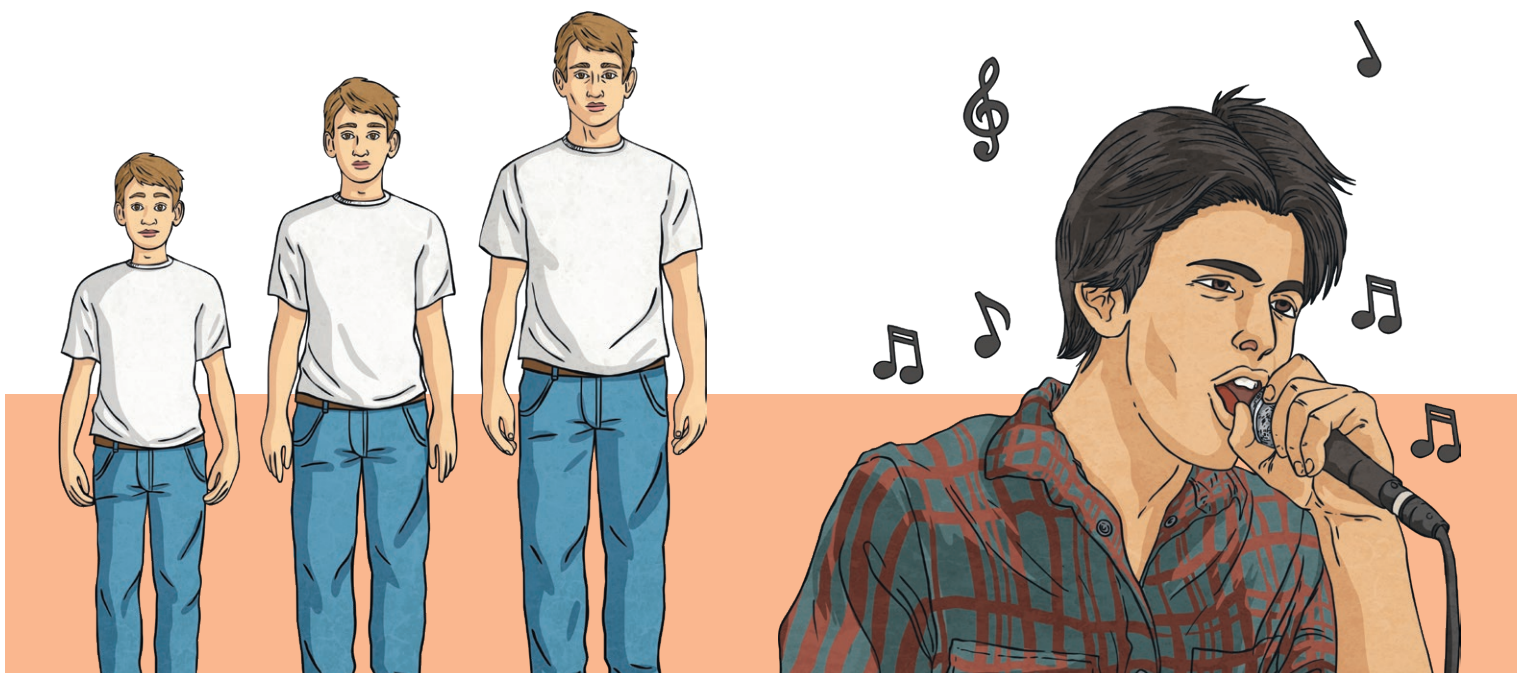
You might also notice that during puberty you experience more erections. An erection is when the penis fills with blood, becomes hard or stiff, gets bigger and stands out from the body. Erections can happen at any time. You might get lots in one day or none at all. They can even happen when you're sleeping!

The increased testosterone levels can also cause 'wet dreams', which is when the penis ejaculates semen while dreaming. You mustn't worry if this happens during the night. It is a normal part of growing up if you are male.



Like the female body, male bodies also start to change shape but in a different way; the shoulders get broader and the body starts to build muscle. Occasionally, males experience a little breast growth but this is temporary and nothing to worry about. Underarm hair and facial hair will also start to grow, but – remember – everyone is different and this can happen at different times for different people.

The deepening of the voice is another noticeable change. This can be different for everyone – it might be a fast change or it might happen over a longer period of time; the voice might become deeper straight away or it might sound a bit strange as it 'breaks'. Males also develop a more prominent Adam's apple – a lump on their throat. This is the voice box inside the throat getting bigger as the voice gets deeper.



Want to Know More?

- Picture books can be a superb way of opening up discussions that might otherwise seem embarrassing. There are lots of excellent books available to buy or you could see what is available in the local library.



- There is some excellent, reliable information about puberty on the Internet but you will need to be careful about which sites are age-appropriate and the accuracy and quality of the content that is on the site. The NHS, the FPA (formerly the Family Planning Association) and Childline have useful information online.

