

Puberty for Boys

Puberty is the time when a boy's body grows into a man's body.

How does puberty start?

Puberty starts with a change in your hormones. Hormones start working on the testicles, causing them to make testosterone. Testosterone is the main hormone that starts the changes that happen when boys go through puberty.

When does puberty start?

The average age when boys start puberty is around age 11. However, it can start anywhere between age 9 and 14 years. The physical changes usually take place over 3 to 4 years.

How do I know when puberty has started?

The first thing you may notice is pubic hair. Soon after pubic hair starts growing in the area around your penis, the penis will start to get bigger. It will get longer and then thicker. Your testicles will also get bigger. The testicles make sperm as well as testosterone. (Sperm can fertilize a woman's egg and make a baby.) The testicles are in the scrotum, which is the sac of loose skin below the penis. As you mature, the scrotum will hang lower and get looser.

What happens to the rest of the body?

Testosterone works on many parts of the body. In addition to pubic hair, you will start to have hair under your arms and more body odor. This is a good time to start using deodorant. Your voice will change. This takes awhile. Before your voice gets deeper, it may go through a squeaky period. You may get embarrassed by it, but it usually doesn't last more than 6 months. Testosterone makes your muscles get bigger and stronger even without weight lifting.

Towards the end of puberty, you will have a growth spurt. You may grow 4 to 6 inches taller in 1 year. Your beard will start to grow, and you will need to shave. Hair may also grow on your chest, stomach, and back.

What are erections?

Boys can get erections (a stiff penis) throughout their lives. When you go through puberty, you start having them more often. Erections are caused by increased blood flow into the penis. They may happen any time. They may happen just randomly or they may be caused by romantic or sexual thoughts or by physical contact (like stroking the penis). Focusing your attention on something else can help make an erection go away.

What are wet dreams?

As your body is developing, hormones from the brain tell the testicles to make sperm, and your body makes fluid that helps nourish sperm. This fluid combined with sperm is called semen. The body produces millions of sperm each day. Semen can be stored for awhile, but eventually it needs to be released. The hormones signal the penis to have an erection and then to release the semen. You may have romantic or sexual dreams when this happens. Wet dreams are normal. They can happen a few times a week, a few times a month, or maybe not at all. They are a normal part of growing up. Your parents know that it happens, so you don't need to be embarrassed by it.

What is masturbation?

Masturbating is touching, rubbing, or stroking the penis for sexual pleasure. The penis gets erect and touching or rubbing it may lead to the release of semen (ejaculation). It feels good and can release tension. By the early to middle part of puberty, many boys start masturbating. Boys may masturbate several times a day, once a month, or not at all. It is a natural way to explore your body and is quite normal. People often joke about it, but it is important to know that there are no bad things that happen from masturbating.

What about acne?

One part of puberty that teenagers don't like is acne. It is a normal part of growing up caused by your changing hormones. For some boys, acne may be mild, but for others it may get pretty bad. Using nonprescription medicine is OK if your acne is mild, but if it seems to be more serious, you may want to see your healthcare provider for medicine to help treat it.

What are the emotional changes of puberty?

As you go through puberty you start to have a wide range of feelings. You are trying to figure out your place in the world. You become more independent and start doing things without your parents. You may be influenced by your friends' ideas and feel pressure to do things that you may not agree with, like using drugs or alcohol. It is a time to start sorting out your values and decide what is right and wrong.

As part of this, you may start to have strong sexual urges. You may develop a romantic attraction to someone and start dating. You may feel like you are in love one day and not the next. It is natural to have feelings that change quickly. You may start thinking about having sex. Take time to think through your decision before you have sex. You need to think about the physical and emotional risks you will be taking. If you decide to have sex (intercourse) or oral sex (kissing a partner's genitals), it is important to talk with your partner about what you are doing and the risks involved. Your girlfriend could get pregnant or you could get an infection from sex. The only way to prevent pregnancy or a sexually transmitted infection 100% of the time is to not have sex.

If you decide to have sex, latex condoms can help to prevent pregnancy. Condoms can also protect you from some infections.

Who can I talk to about these changes?

You can talk to your healthcare provider, parents, friends, and teachers about the changes you are going through. You may find that you feel distanced from your parents. You may be uncomfortable talking with them or other adults about your interests and feelings. The adults may feel the same way. Remember that your culture, music, and clothing styles are different than what your parents are used to. Your parents may not seem to be in touch with your world, but they really want to know what you are feeling and going through. Be open when they ask you about things like sex, drugs, and friendships. If you feel like your parents are not meeting your needs, talk to them about it and ask them if you can spend more time together. Deep down, they truly want the best for you. Parents can be your best resource and strongest support.

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