

## **PUBERTY FACTS**

### **What Is Puberty?**

Puberty is the time when your body changes from a child's body to an adult body. Puberty usually begins between the ages of 9 and 16.

At puberty, glands in your body begin to produce hormones – chemicals that cause the changes of puberty. Hormones tell the different parts of your body how to grow and develop.

Hormones also cause you to be more emotional and have ups and downs in your feelings. Hormones may create sexual feelings in you and make you feel attracted to others.

### **When Does Puberty Begin?**

Each person has a personal time clock that determines when he or she will begin puberty. Some people will mature earlier and some later.

Having different personal time clocks can make it hard to be this age. Those who develop early may feel self-conscious and awkward. They often think everyone is looking at them. Those who develop later may worry about when their bodies will change.

It is no fun to feel different from your friends. But in a few years, the changes will even out and you will be more comfortable in your new body.

Try to remember that every body is different. Some are tall, some are short. Some girls have larger breasts, some have smaller ones. Some boys are broad and muscular, others are thin and wiry. An important part of growing up is learning to accept your body as it is, even if it isn't exactly what you want.

The changes of puberty happen slowly. Growing up will take months and even years. Each one of us has our own way of growing and developing – a way that is just right for us.

### Boys Want to Know

***Why do some guys have extra loose skin that hangs down over the tip of their penis? My penis doesn't look like that.***

You have been circumcised, these boys have not. Circumcision is an operation usually done at birth. It takes off the loose skin (called the foreskin) that covers the tip of the penis. Circumcision is usually done because of custom or for religious reasons.

***I woke up one night and it felt like I had wet the bed. What causes this?***

This is called a "wet dream." Sometimes a boy's penis becomes erect and he has an orgasm while he is sleeping. During an orgasm, a white, milky-looking fluid called semen comes out of his penis. Wet dreams are totally normal. They simply mean that your body is developing and maturing.

***The other day I was standing in the hall, talking with some kids. Then I got an erection – just like that. I was really embarrassed. What happened? How can I stop this?***

An erection happens when extra blood flows rapidly into the penis. An erection can come from touching the penis or from sexy thoughts. Sometimes it happens when you are excited or nervous. Sometimes it happens for no reason at all. There's not much you can do about it. Loose-fitting pants or shirts may help hide an erection. You also can try hiding it with a binder or backpack. Remember that other people don't notice it as much as you do.

***Sometimes my chest feels tender and sore. My breasts even seem to be getting a little bigger. What is wrong with me? Am I going to look like a girl?***

Most boys have some soreness around their nipples during puberty. The hormones that cause puberty also cause this soreness. It will go away on its own in a few months. Many boys also have some breast growth during puberty. This is normal. It usually goes away in a year or so. Try swimming or exercises to develop your chest muscles.

### Girls Want to Know

***My breasts started growing when I was really young. Now I feel like everyone stares at me. I hate it! I wish I weren't so big.***

Breast growth can cause problems for girls because it is so obvious. Sometimes girls are teased because their breasts start growing early or they have large breasts. Girls who haven't started to develop may feel embarrassed. They may worry that they will always be "flat-chested." Your own personal time clock decides when your breasts will develop.

***My breasts have been sore and tender lately. One of them is a lot bigger than the other. Is anything wrong?***

It is normal for breasts to be sore and tender while they are developing. Often one breast will develop more quickly than the other. This is also normal. You may feel self-conscious about it, but try not to worry. Within a year or so, both breasts will be about the same size.

***When will I start my periods?***

There is no way to know exactly when you will start menstruating. But there are clues you can look for. When did your mother start her periods? If you have an older sister, when did she start? You are likely to start at about the same age.

Have your breasts started growing? Do you have pubic hair? You will probably begin your period within the next year or so. Remember, girls start their periods at different ages. Most start between the ages of 9 and 16. Only your body knows what is normal for you.

***What if I start my period at school?***

If your body signs are telling you that you may begin your period soon, carry a menstrual pad or tampon in your backpack or purse. If you are at school and think you have started, the school nurse or secretary will help you. Sometimes girls worry that the blood will gush out. But periods usually begin slowly, with only a little bit of blood. You will have enough time to get a menstrual pad.