

Welcome to Puberty

If you're reading this, it's probably because you're about to become a teenager. There are a lot of great things about becoming a teenager. You get taller, bigger, and stronger. You get better at many of the things you enjoy doing, like playing a musical instrument, drawing, or being on the soccer team. You begin to have more freedom—to go more places and do more things with your friends. You may start dating. You may even get your first job and have your own money to spend in ways that you want to spend it. These things all make becoming a teenager an exciting time in your life.

This book will help you know what to expect as your body and mind go through some pretty major changes. It will answer most, if not all, of the many questions you are likely to have as you go through puberty. Of course, it's also a very good idea to talk to your parents, other family members, a doctor or nurse, or other trusted adults about any concerns you have.



Hey! Don't be shy about asking questions.
Remember that all adults were once as young as
you and went through the same changes!

What is puberty?

Puberty is the process that your body goes through as you grow from a child to an adult. During puberty, your body and mind change in many ways. Puberty is also the time when your voice gets deeper and you start to look less like a kid and more like a grown-up.

Some of the changes you will notice as you go through puberty:

- ◆ You get taller.
- ◆ Your shoulders get wider.
- ◆ Your muscles get bigger.
- ◆ You grow hair in new places.
- ◆ Your voice gets deeper and lower.

In addition to these physical changes, you might notice other changes in yourself. Your relationships with your family and friends might change, too. It's not always easy to go through so many changes so quickly. Puberty can be exciting, confusing, scary, or no big deal—each reaction is perfectly normal.



Does this ever happen to you?

- Your body seems to look and feel different every week.
- Your voice cracks when you answer a question in class and you hope no one noticed.
- You spend more time with new friends than with old ones.

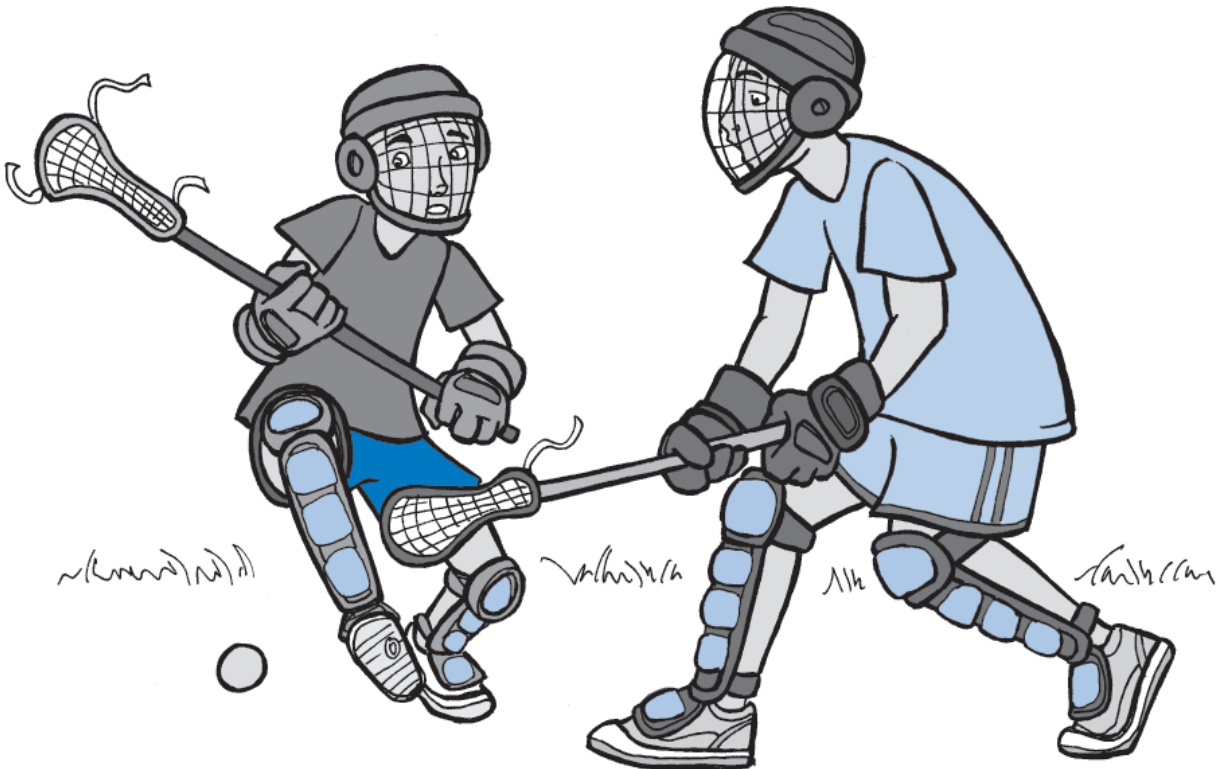
What is adolescence?

Adolescence is the period of time between the end of childhood development and adulthood. This period starts at about age 11 or 12 and continues through the late teen years and early 20s. Adolescence is a time of change—learning who you are and who you want to become—and it includes the path to getting there.

How long does puberty last?

Puberty generally starts sometime between the ages of 9 and 14. For many boys, it takes about 5 to 6 years to go through all the different stages of puberty. But every boy is unique and will go through puberty in his own way and at his own pace.

You might notice that some boys in your class seem to be finishing the last stage of puberty while other boys seem to still be in the first stage. This is normal, because there is no exact timetable for puberty that everyone follows.



How should I feel about puberty?

Different boys have different feelings about starting puberty. Some boys can't wait to see changes in their body. They feel ready to look and act more like an adult. Other boys are not quite so ready. They're still interested in their old toys and games and are comfortable still being a kid. And some boys alternate between feeling ready and feeling not quite so ready to move on. Whichever of these ways you feel is normal.



It can be hard to be one of the first boys in class to go through puberty. You may feel that people expect you to act older than you really are. Or some kids may tease you about your facial hair or having to use deodorant before everyone else.

Whether you go through puberty early or late, you're going to go through it in your own way. Try to focus more on enjoying it than worrying about when it will happen!

It can also be hard to start puberty later than your friends. It can seem like people still see you as a younger kid. Or you might be teased for being shorter or smaller than other kids.

The fact is, boys start puberty at different ages. There is no “normal” age for puberty to begin. Also, some boys may start puberty earlier than other boys but end puberty later. Knowing that, if you still feel worried about starting puberty, talk to your parents or your doctor. Ask your father when he started puberty. Chances are that you will go through puberty at a similar age as, and in a similar way to, your dad.

Why will my feelings change during puberty?

Puberty is a time when many boys become more self-conscious. You may find that you begin to worry more than before about how others see you. You may start to compare yourself to your friends, noticing that some of them look older than you and that some seem better at things you find important, like playing sports or getting attention from other people.

You may notice that you and your parents don't always seem as close as you used to be. You may not want your parents to know as much about your life as you were willing to share when you were younger. Your parents might ask you if there is something wrong because you may be more quiet or keep to yourself more than usual.

Does this ever happen to you?

One minute you may feel like a kid who wants to play and the next minute you feel more grown-up, wanting more freedom and independence.

Puberty is also a time when you may begin to think about the world and your place in it. You might decide to pursue some special interests. You may start to read newspapers or watch the news and learn about some issues in the world that concern you. You may even notice something about your school or your neighborhood that troubles you. Can you make a difference, and, if so, how? These are all normal feelings and questions for teenagers.

The changes you are experiencing occur for many reasons. One reason is that your hormones are changing. *Hormones* are chemicals that are responsible for many processes in the body, including growth and development, and even mood. During puberty your way of thinking also changes as your brain further develops.

Another reason you may be feeling different is that your life is changing. You may have switched schools, starting middle school or junior high. You may feel more pressures and responsibilities as you get older. You may have made new friends, started thinking about dating, or gone through a family change like a divorce or moving to a new town. These are all big changes and they are likely to affect the way you feel.

If you have special needs or a long-term illness, whether or not others know about it, going through the many changes of puberty can sometimes be challenging. You're certainly not alone. Whenever you find things especially difficult, you'll feel better if you express your feelings to your parents, your doctor, the school nurse, a counselor, or another adult you trust. It can also be helpful to talk to other kids your age—you'll quickly realize that you all have a lot in common.



Some Ways You Can Make a Difference

- Help an elderly neighbor.
- Read to a younger child.
- Organize a fundraiser for a worthy cause.
- Stop an act of bullying.
- When you're old enough, volunteer at a local hospital, nursing home, soup kitchen, or animal shelter.

Why do I care more about what I look like? I never used to think about it.

You might notice that how you look seems more important as you become a teenager. You overhear girls talking about which boys they think are cute and see them giggle as you walk by. You may begin to wonder if they think *you're* cute and if any of that giggling has to do with you.

You might start comparing yourself to other boys in your school and neighborhood. Some of them might seem taller and more muscular than you.

You may think, “I hate getting changed for gym in the locker room. I’m the only boy who hasn’t started to grow underarm hair yet. I still look like a kid!” Or “I’m one of the shortest boys in my grade—people never seem to pay attention to me!”

These are common ways that boys your age compare themselves to others.



It’s pretty easy to start feeling bad about yourself or worried that others don’t think you look that great. The bottom line is that nobody has the perfect body, or face, or set of muscles. Not even those guys you see in fitness magazines! Although it’s normal to find things about yourself that you want to change, try not to be too critical of yourself. Constantly putting yourself down does nothing but make you feel bad. Try to remind yourself of the things you like about yourself

when you start to feel bad. Here's an example: "I may be shorter than most boys, but I'm really funny and easy to talk to." Or, "I may be smaller than most of the other kids, but they're always asking me for help with math." If you're having a hard time finding those good qualities in yourself, ask someone you trust—a good friend or a parent or another adult you look up to. You might be surprised to hear how many good things the people who know you see in you!

Did you know that the photographs of guys you see in fitness magazines and ads have been touched up quite a bit to make them look more muscular and to make their skin look more clear? These men would look very different if you saw them in person. They would look more like everyone else—not perfect!

What is happening to my voice lately? One minute it sounds squeaky and the next it sounds so deep.

During puberty, your *vocal cords* grow longer and wider. Your voice box (which doctors call the *larynx*) grows too. This change to your vocal cords causes your voice to get lower and deeper, making you sound more like an adult than a child. But don't expect this change to happen overnight!

When your voice box grows, you may notice it as a lump in the middle of your throat. This is usually referred to as an *Adam's apple*. Most boys have an Adam's apple, while most girls don't because their voice box doesn't grow as much as a boy's.

While it's happening, your voice might seem to go up and down. It can sound high-pitched and squeaky one minute and deep and scratchy the next. This is normal. But don't worry—the squeaking will stop and your voice will even out at the lower range.



REAL BOYS, REAL FEELINGS

I play on a hockey team. My dad wants me to try out for the baseball team because he used to play it. I don't know how to tell him that I just want to play ice hockey. Age 11

My dad yells at my soccer coach during games and makes me want to crawl in a hole. It makes me not want to play sports. I have to say something to him. Age 10

I'm skinny and I want to bulk up, so a friend told me about steroids. My dad found out about it and printed out a list of all the scary things steroids could do to me. I don't want to deal with those problems, so I'll stick to push-ups and lifting weights. Age 12

I go to dance class with my older sister.

**One of my friends found out and says I'm a
sissy. I like the classes and I like to dance
so I don't care what he says. Age 10**

**One of the guys at
school found some pills.
I don't want to "rat" but
I'm scared that some of
my friends will take the
pills with him. Age 12**

My parents want
me to stop playing so
many video games, but it's
my favorite thing to do. My
grades are good. I don't
see why I can't spend
my time how I want.
Age 10

