



ANDORRA PEDIATRICS

8945 Ridge Avenue
Suite 3 - 4 - 5
Philadelphia, PA 19128
215-483-8558
andorrapediatrics.com

Information for Adolescent Boys

Puberty, Abstinence, Sex, Testicular Self Exam, Masturbation, and Emotions

As part of growing up, you will go through puberty. Puberty is the time in your life when your body changes from that of a child to that of an adult. Chemicals in your body called hormones cause these changes. Because there are so many changes that happen during puberty, you may feel like your body is out of control. In time, your hormones will balance out and your body will catch up.

Not only does your body change, but your emotions change too. How you think and feel about yourself, your family and friends, and your whole world, may seem different. As you go through puberty, you will begin to make important decisions for yourself, take on more responsibilities, and become more independent.

If you are already going through some of these changes, you may be asking yourself, "Am I normal?" or "Do other people my age feel the way I do?" Don't worry. Lots of changes happen during puberty and, although it can be a confusing time of life, it can be exciting.

Puberty for boys usually starts with a growth spurt at about 10 to 16 years of age. You may notice that you grow out of your clothes or shoes a lot faster than you used to. Don't worry, your hormones will balance out and your body will catch up.

How Will My Body Change?

Following are some other changes you will notice during puberty:

Body size: Arms, legs, hands, and feet may grow faster than the rest of your body. Until the rest of your body catches up, you may feel a little clumsy.

Body shape: You will get taller and your shoulders will get broader. You will gain a lot of weight. During this time, many boys experience swelling under their nipples. This may cause them to worry that they are growing breasts. If you experience this, don't worry. It is common among boys your age and is a temporary condition. If you are worried about it, talk to your pediatrician.

During puberty, your muscles will also get bigger. Try not to rush this part of your growth. You may have friends who work out with weights and equipment to build up muscles, and you may want to begin this type of training yourself - often before your body is ready for it. If you are interested in these activities, talk to your pediatrician about a safe time for you to begin weight training.

Voice: Your voice will get deeper. This may start with voice cracking. As you continue to grow, the cracking will stop and your voice will stay at the lower range.

Hair: Hair will appear under your arms, on your legs and face, and above your penis. Chest hair may appear during puberty or years after, although not all men have chest hair. Some men shave the hair on their faces. There is no medical reason to shave, it is simply a personal choice. If you decide to shave, be sure to use shaving cream and a clean razor made for men. It is a good idea to use your own personal razor or electric shaver and not to share one with your family or friends.

Skin: Skin may get more oily and you may notice you sweat more. This is because your glands are growing too. It is important to wash every day to keep your skin clean and to use a deodorant or antiperspirant to keep odor and wetness under control. Despite your best efforts to keep your face clean, you still may get pimples. This is called acne and is normal during this time when your hormone levels are high. Almost all teenage boys get acne at one time or another. Whether your case is mild or severe, there are things you can do to keep it under control. For more information on treating acne, ask us for our handout on acne.

Penis: Your penis and testes will get larger. You may have erections more often due to an increase in sex hormones. Erections occur when the penis gets stiff and hard - sometimes for no reason. This is normal. Even though you may feel embarrassed, try to remember that most people will not even notice your erection unless you draw attention to it. Many boys become concerned about their penis size; a boy may compare his own penis size with that of his friends. It is important to remember that the size of a man's penis has nothing to do with his manliness or sexual functioning.

Your body will also begin to produce sperm during puberty. This means that during an erection, you may also experience ejaculation. This occurs when semen (made up of sperm and other fluids) is released through the penis. This could happen while you are sleeping. You might wake up to find your sheets or pajamas are wet. This is called a nocturnal emission or "wet dream." This is normal and will stop as you get older.

Testicular Self Exam

Testicular self-exam, or TSE, is a painless, simple and very important monthly procedure for early detection of testicular cancer. Men who have an undescended or partially descended testicle are at a much higher risk of developing testicular cancer.

The first sign of testicular cancer is usually a slight enlargement or change in the consistency of the testicle. Small lumps, about the size of a pea, may be initially painless. As they grow larger, however, the testicle becomes firmer and you may notice a dull ache in the lower abdomen or groin, or a sensation of heaviness.

Although most lumps are non-cancerous, be sure to report any inconsistency to your doctor immediately. Cancer is most common in men aged 20-35. Regular self-examination for testicular changes can lead to early diagnosis and effective treatment.

A testicular self-exam (TSE) should be performed after a warm shower or bath when the skin of the scrotum is most relaxed. The heat causes the skin to relax, making the exam easier. Examine both testicles regularly, at least once a month.

Ask us for our handout showing how to perform a testicular self-exam.

Emotional Changes During Puberty

In addition to the many physical changes you will go through during puberty, there are many emotional changes as well. You may start to care more about what other people think about you. You will want to be accepted and liked. At this time in your life, your relationships with others may begin to change. Some become more important and some less so. You start to separate more from your parents and

identify with others your age. You may begin to make decisions that could affect the rest of your life.

Many people your age feel self-conscious about their changing bodies - too tall, too short, too fat, too skinny. Because puberty causes so many changes, it is hard not to compare what is going on with your body with what is happening to your friends' bodies. Try to keep in mind that everyone goes through puberty differently. Eventually, everyone catches up.

Sex And Growing Up

During this time, you also become more aware of your sexuality. A look, touch, or just thinking about someone may make your heart beat faster and produce a warm, tingling feeling all over. This is completely normal. You may be asking yourself the following questions:

- "Is it okay to masturbate (touch your genitals for sexual pleasure)?"
- "When should I start dating?"
- "When is it okay to kiss?"
- "How far is too far?"
- "When will I be ready to have sexual intercourse?"
- "Will having sex help my relationship?"

Masturbation is normal and will not harm you. Many boys and girls masturbate, many do not.

Deciding to become sexually active can be very confusing. On one hand, you hear so many warnings and dangers about having sex. On the other hand, movies, TV, magazines, even billboards seem to be telling you that having sex is okay. The fact is, sex is a part of life and, like many parts of life, it can be good or bad. It all depends on you and the choices you make.

As you continue through puberty, you may experience pressure from many sources to have sex. Knowing where the pressures come from will make them much easier to deal with. Pressure to have sex may come from:

- The media: Because there are so many images in the media about sex, it is easy to get the idea that having sex is the right thing to do. Sex in movies, TV shows, magazines, and in music is often shown as not having any risks. Do not let these messages fool you. In real life, having sex can be very risky.
- Your own body: It is perfectly normal to be interested in sex. After all, growing sexually is what puberty is all about. The sexual urges you feel during puberty can be very powerful. What is most important is to stay in control of these feelings and not let them control you. Keep in mind that sex is not the only way to express how you feel about someone. Taking walks, talking, holding hands, hugging, and touching are great ways to be close to someone you have strong feelings for.
- Your friends: It may seem like "everybody's doing it" or that people who have sex are "cool." Maybe you feel like you should have sex to be popular and fit in with the group. However, people like to talk about sex and some may want others to believe that they are having sex even when they are not. Someone who does not want to be your friend just because you are not having sex is probably someone who is not worth being friends with anyway. Do not let friends - or anyone - talk you into having sex. This is a decision you make when it is right for you, not for your friends.

Deciding whether or not to have sexual intercourse is one of the most important decisions you will ever make. Why not take your time and think it through? Talk with your parents about their values. Waiting to have sexual intercourse until you are older, in a serious relationship, and able to accept the responsibilities that come along with it is a great idea! You should enjoy being young without having to worry about things like pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STD's).

However, if you decide to have sex, always use latex condoms to prevent sexually transmitted diseases like gonorrhea, syphilis, chlamydia, herpes, and HIV (the AIDS virus).

Abstinence: Young People Can Wait

Not having sex (abstinence) is the only sure way to prevent pregnancy and STDs.

People who wait until marriage to have sexual intercourse usually find out that it is:

- Less risky to health
- Easier to act responsibly and take precautions to avoid infections and pregnancy
- More special
- More satisfying
- More accepted by others

Be patient. At some point, you will be ready for sexual intercourse. Move at your own pace, not someone else's. Talk with your parents about their values. Your pediatrician can explain how intercourse affects your body, and why you should wait until you are older. To avoid the risks - and to make intercourse really special in the future - why not just wait for now?

Learning To Take Care Of Yourself

As you get older, there will be many decisions that you will need to make to ensure that you stay healthy. Eating right, exercising, and getting enough rest are important during puberty because of all the changes your body is going through.

It is also important to feel good about yourself and the decisions you make. You have to learn to care for your own body, work hard and maintain good health, and to like yourself as you are.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

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