

Puberty Changes Teacher Guide

PUBERTY CHANGES CHECKLIST

The following checklist provides an overview of the main physical and emotional changes which take place during puberty. Teachers need not expect to include all of this information in the first lesson; the whole checklist would be a lot of information for most classes. For example, in Year 5 some subjects, such as wet dreams might not come up in lesson 1 will be dealt with in lessons 2 and 3.

Changes for both males and females

- The body starts to grow, quite fast at times
- Private parts (genitals) grow and develop
- Moods and feelings can change a lot
- The body sweats more and smells differently
- Body hair grows darker and stronger (on arms and legs)
- Pubic hair grows
- Armpit hair grows
- Spots can appear on the face and shoulders
- Skin can become oily
- Hair may become greasy
- Sexual feelings can develop
- Masturbation might start

Female Changes

- Periods start
- Ovaries begin releasing eggs (ovulation)
- Breasts and nipples grow
- Nipples may darken in colour
- Hips get broader
- A white discharge comes out of the vagina
- The voice deepens a little
- Bones get heavier

Male Changes

- Shoulders and chest grow and develop
- Muscles get thicker
- The voice deepens and 'breaks'
- Facial hair grows
- Chest hair grows
- Sperm and semen start being produced
- Erections happen
- Wet dreams may start
- The testicles 'drop'

Further Notes

These notes offer guidance for teachers; they do not need to be read to the class word for word. Key information can be included where relevant and used at the teacher's discretion, depending on the needs and responses of the class. Some of the information goes beyond the subject matter of the lessons, but may be useful for answering spontaneous questions.

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CHANGES TO EVERYONE

The body grows, quite fast at times

During puberty, between the ages of 8 and 17, everyone's body grows a great deal, both inside and out; height, weights, body shape and size all change. This is triggered by the sex hormones. It is natural for all genders to put on some weight during puberty – a lot of growth is happening and the body needs more fat and muscle. Boys and girls can grow at different rates – girls can grow more quickly, but boys can go on growing for longer. For girls, growth spurts are often connected with getting periods. Growth will also be different for each person – everyone changes at their own rate. There are times when a lot of growth happens in a few months – this is often called a growth spurt. Sometimes the brain can't keep up and teenagers can become quite clumsy and awkward.

Private parts grow and develop

Just like the rest of the body the private parts (genitals) grow and change. In males, the penis gets longer and thicker and the testicles and scrotum get bigger. In females, the vulva (the area between the girl's legs, the labia – the folds of skin around the vagina, and the clitoris get bigger. The male and female internal reproductive parts also grow and develop.

Moods and feelings can change a lot

Emotional ups and downs can be a big part of puberty as young people try to get used to their changing bodies and feelings and make sense of new experiences – somewhere between being a child and a young adult. There is a huge amount of hormonal activity and feelings can be influenced by sudden changes and rises in hormone levels. Sometimes people can feel moody, angry, frustrated or sad for no particular reason; at other times life can seem exciting; this is normal, although if someone feels bad most of the time, it would be good to talk to a trusted person. For further advice on mood changes see Year 5, lesson 3, Activity 4, Year 5 Puberty Problem Page.

The body sweats more and smells differently

Once young people reach puberty they sweat in a new way, again due to hormonal activity. More sweat is produced by the sweat glands – for example under the armpits and in between the legs – and it smells stronger. If the sweat isn't washed away it turns into body odour. Teenagers need to pay more attention to hygiene – see Year 5, Lesson 3, Activity 2, Kim's Game and Kim's Game Teacher Guide.

Body hair/pubic hair/armpit hair

One of the first signs of puberty is increased body hair. Hair on the arms and legs get darker and hair grows in the armpits and around the genitals (pubic hair). In males pubic hair grows round the base of the penis and on the scrotum and in females hair grows in between the legs and around and above the vulva. There are different ideas about why pubic hair grows, for example to absorb sweat or to protect the private parts. People make different choices about whether to keep or shave body hair. See Year 5, Lesson 3, Activity 2, Kim's Game and Kim's Game Teacher Guide.

Spots/Skin/Hair

Just as hormones affect the sweat glands, they also stimulate oil glands in the skin. The oil – called sebum – is actually protective to the skin but during puberty hormones are often in overdrive and the oil glands become over active. The skin on the face can get greasy and spots can develop because tiny holes next to hair follicles get blocked. The extra oil can also make the hair greasy. Many teenagers get spots, which can vary from small pimples to severe acne. Spots can also appear on the neck, upper back and shoulders and boys can be more affected because the male hormone testosterone tends to make them worse. Spots can be difficult to cope with and they can really affect someone's self esteem, but to start with, it can help to understand why they are happening. For further advice on spots, see Kim's Game Teacher Guide and the Puberty Problem Page Teacher Guide.

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Sexual feelings can develop

Being attracted to other people, “fancying” them, having exciting feelings about someone that go beyond friendship – this can all start during puberty. Feelings become intense and affect the body in different ways. People can be attracted to others of the same sex/gender or a different sex/gender.

Masturbation

Masturbation is when a person touches, strokes or stimulates their own private parts because it feels nice. It’s quite common for people of both genders to explore their own private parts and masturbate during puberty. There have been all sorts of myths about masturbation – such as, it will cause blindness or insanity or, in males, it will use up all the sperm. However there is no evidence for this. Masturbation can provide a way for someone to understand their own body. However, not everyone likes to masturbate and some people would feel uncomfortable doing so.

FEMALE CHANGES

Periods Start/Ovulation

At some point during puberty girls will start having periods (menstruation). This is when they bleed from the vagina for 2 – 7 days, usually once a month. Once a month the female sex hormones trigger the release of an egg from the ovary (ovulation) and the sides of the womb thicken and form a soft, blood filled lining. If the egg is not fertilised by a sperm it will dissolve while the womb lining breaks down and passes out of the vagina as blood. This is a period. The amount of blood varies from person to person and can be light at times and heavy at others. It may take a while for periods to settle into a regular pattern when girls first start having them. Breasts can become tender before and during a period and women often experience cramping pains. Feelings can be influenced by the menstrual cycle, especially when a period is due - this is called premenstrual tension.

There are a wide variety of products that people can use to help manage their period; tampons, pads menstrual cups and other reusables. They are all used to absorb menstrual fluid. Pads are used externally and placed in the underwear. Tampons and cups are internal products and go inside the vagina. Whatever product is used they need to be changed regularly and they all have helpful and important instructions in the packaging. When changing tampons and pads always dispose of the used product in a bin rather than flushing down the toilet. Parents/carers may be able to advise on what menstrual products to try but in the end, it comes down to what works best for the individual. For more detail on periods see Year 5, lessons 2 and 3. There is an animation of the menstrual cycle at http://kidshealth.org/teen/sexual_health/girls/menstruation.html?tracking=T **RelatedArticle**

Breast and nipples grow

During puberty breasts, nipples and the circle of skin around the nipple (areola) grow and develop. Breasts can take up to four years to grow and mature. Both breasts and nipples can feel sensitive and even tender while they are growing and can also tingle and itch. The nipples and areola can darken. Each girl’s breasts start to grow at different times and breasts and nipples really vary in size and shape and texture. Sometimes one breast grows faster than another and although this evens out many women have slightly different sized breasts, just as people can have different size feet, hands etc.

Hips get Broader

It is natural for girls’ bodies to change shape and increase in weight during puberty, despite the media holding up images of slim women and teenagers. Girls’ hips get broader; how broad depends on someone’s natural body shape, everyone is different. Wider hips create more room for giving birth, providing a wider birth canal.

A white discharge comes out of the vagina

During puberty girls may notice a white creamy fluid in their knickers. This is a healthy vaginal discharge which starts before a girl’s first period and often precedes a period. The fluid comes from glands inside the vagina and helps to keep it healthy. Knowing what a healthy discharge looks like helps to spot an unhealthy one.

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The voice deepens a little

Although girls' voices don't change as dramatically as boys, the voice does get gradually deeper – a female adult voice is naturally deeper than that of a female child's voice.

Bones become heavier

While boys' muscles get bigger, girls' bones become denser and heavier.

MALE CHANGES

Shoulders and chest grow and develop

On average, boys start growing later than girls, although they are not necessarily entering puberty later. They may be more likely to have growth spurts towards the end of puberty. One of the final phases of growth for boys is a broadening of the chest and shoulders, although again body size and shape varies from person to person.

Muscles get bigger

While boys are growing, the muscles get bigger, with the muscle fibres getting longer and thicker.

The voice deepens and 'breaks'

In boys, the voice box in the throat grows, making the voice sound deeper and gruffer than before. The 'Adam's apple' – the round bit in the front of the neck – can become more noticeable. Sometimes the voice might veer from high to low, sounding squeaky one minute and deep the next. This can be disconcerting and embarrassing, but like everything else in puberty, the voice settles down with time and can eventually become a whole octave deeper.

Facial hair grows

Males grow hair on their chins, cheeks and around the mouth – facial hair usually appears on the top lip first and then spreads to the rest of the face. The hair is soft to start with but grows thicker and stronger as time goes on. As with all puberty changes, the amount of facial hair varies from person to person and some males will start to grow facial hair earlier than others. It's an individual choice whether to shave or keep facial hair. Women sometimes have a small amount of facial hair, particularly on the upper lip – this is quite normal. For more discussion about facial hair see Year 5, Lesson 3, Activity 2, Kim's game and Kim's Game Teacher Guide.

Chest hair grows

As with facial hair, some men have a lot of chest hair, others have a little. Men can also have hair on their back and stomach area.

Sperm and semen start being produced

During puberty the testicles grow and start to produce sperm, which are tiny – invisible to the human eye. The sperm mixes with fluids to form a milky liquid called semen. Semen contains a sugary substance which helps the sperm to move faster. The male body can produce millions of sperm every day. Semen comes out of the body in an ejaculation. This is when a male has an erection and after a time the muscles at the base of the penis contract and push the semen out of the penis quite fast. An average ejaculation produces about a teaspoonful of semen and this can contain millions of sperm. Semen and urine cannot come out of the penis at the same time.

Erections happen

An erection (sometimes called a 'boner' or 'hard on') is when the penis goes stiff and hard and sticks out from the body (instead of being soft and hanging down). Physically, this happens because blood rushes into the tissue in the penis and the muscles around the penis tighten to hold it in. The penis can go hard and soft from quite an early age. During puberty, however, erections can happen a lot, sometimes because of growing sexual feelings or sometimes at random and at quite inconvenient and embarrassing times. This is normal and should settle down with time. It's very common to wake up with an erection.

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Wet dreams may start

During puberty, boys may get an erection and ejaculate some semen during their sleep – this is called a ‘wet dream’. A wet dream may be caused by an exciting dream or may not be connected to a dream at all. Boys may have a few wet dreams, a lot or none at all – all of these are normal. It’s not possible to stop wet dreams happening – they happen unconsciously during sleep. (Adult men sometimes have wet dreams). There are different theories about why wet dreams happen but they definitely start during puberty when sperm production begins and are linked to increased hormonal activity. Another way that semen can come out of the penis is through masturbation. Boys may touch or rub their penis, get an erection and ejaculate.

See also Year 5, Lesson 3, Activity 3, Puberty Problem Page and Puberty Problem Page Teacher Guide.

Testicles ‘drop’

Boys’ testicles do not strictly ‘drop’ during puberty. Before a boy is born the testicles are inside the body and shortly before birth they descend into his scrotum. What is noticeable during puberty is the penis, testicles and scrotum get bigger, as this happens the testicles get heavier and hang lower, becoming more obvious than they were before. That is why people say that a boy’s ‘balls drop’ but they have already dropped into the scrotum long before puberty. The testicles hang outside the body to keep the sperm cooler than normal body temperature. (Heat can damage the sperm). This is why the testicles shrivel and cling to the body in cold temperatures and hang lower when it’s hot. Often one testicle hangs a bit lower than the other – again this protects the sperm by stopping the testicles from bumping into each other. For more information on puberty see:

<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/puberty.html?WT.ac=ctg#catchanging-body>