

Puberty



What is Puberty?

Puberty is a very normal part of human development. It is the process of a child's body maturing into an adult's body. Puberty is a time of massive physical, emotional, and social change. These changes can feel exciting, scary, overwhelming, and/or empowering.

On average, the age of puberty onsets ranges from 8 to 13 years. However, because everyone is different, every body will experience puberty differently. There is no unique way to experience puberty.

When discussing puberty, our pamphlet will be using anatomically correct terms when referring to different parts of the body. The information will not be separated by **assigned sex** or **gender identity**, as these terms do not recognize those that identify as **intersex**, or those whose gender identity does not match their assigned sex.

What Happens During Puberty?

Your body shape will change, and your height will increase.

- Growth happens gradually and in spurts. Between toddlerhood and puberty, growth tends to be gradual. At Puberty, there are often growth spurts that can include “growing pains.”
- In general, people assigned female at birth tend to experience growth spurts earlier than people assigned male.
- Estrogen and testosterone are the main hormonal triggers for pubertal growth. People assigned male at birth make more testosterone and some estrogen. People assigned female at birth make more estrogen and some testosterone.
 - Estrogen widens the lower body, stimulates breast growth, and generally makes bodies “curvier.” Testosterone thickens skin, widens the upper body, and stimulates hair and muscle growth. Because everyone’s hormonal combination and proportion is different, we all grow in these ways to different degrees (e.g., some people assigned male at birth experience temporary breast development because of the estrogen in the bodies.
- As body size increases, feet, arms, legs, and hands can begin to grow before the rest of the body. This may cause a period of feeling clumsy.
 - Stretch marks or little scars can form on the skin from rapid growth.
- How shape and height changes is determined by genetics as well as social and environmental factors. Food high in nutrients, healthy sleep patterns (young people need approximately 9 hours of sleep per night), and physical activity are important for growth and development.

You will experience weight changes.

- Weight gain is very common during puberty.
 - We are bombarded with images from the media about weight and beauty that shape our cultural understandings of healthy, “normal,” and beautiful bodies. Healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes.
- It is important to learn and practise self-acceptance and to create positive spaces. Fat-shaming and other kinds of body shaming are systemic injustices.

You will experience new body hair growth.

- During Puberty, new hair grows in the pubic area (around the **vulva** and the **penis**) and under the armpits. Facial, back, chest, and buttocks hair also usually thickens.
 - Some people have a lot of body hair, some people have very little.
- Trimming or removing hair is a cultural and social practice often driven by the media and the cultural and social norms of the time. There is no health reason to remove (or not to remove) hair.

You may experience a voice change.

- **Androgens** are a group of hormones (the primary and most well-known being testosterone) that cause the voice box (larynx) to grow. The more testosterone there is, the more the voice deepens. If this happens

quickly, the voice might “crack” or “squeak.”

- On average, adult pitch is reached at 15 years of age, although the voice may not fully settle until the early twenties.

You will notice perspiration and body odour.

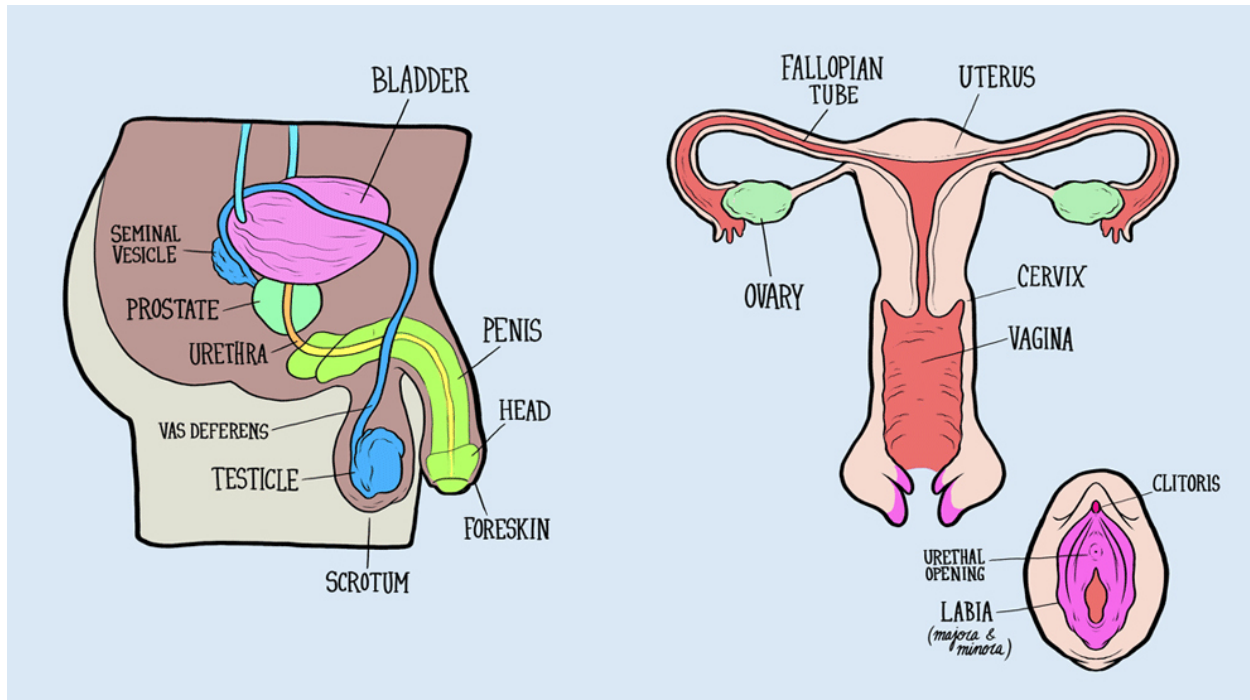
- During puberty, the sweat glands develop, leading to an increase in perspiration (sweat).
 - Increased sweat (and oil) make it more likely for bacteria to grow on the skin, especially under the armpits. This can lead to strong body odour that many people find unpleasant. To avoid body odour, you can use deodorant or antiperspirants. Deodorants are made to address the smell of sweat by killing the bacteria that grows on skin. Antiperspirants stop sweat entirely by blocking sweat glands with aluminum.
 - Good hygiene is important. Wash feet, hands, groin, and armpits regularly and change/wash clothes often. Soap and water is all that is needed to wash the body. Do not use products like douches. They can harm the body, increase susceptibility to sexually transmitted infections, and disrupt the body’s natural PH balance.

You may experience pimples and acne.

- Acne is so common that it is considered a “normal” part of puberty. The skin produces a waxy substance (called sebum) that may clog pores and lead to acne.
 - Acne is a condition of the skin that shows up as different types of bumps. These bumps can be blackheads, whiteheads, pimples, or cysts.
 - Ways to keep the skin healthy include: eating healthy food, sleeping well, and washing the face with mild soap. It is important to know that adhering to all these practices does not necessarily mean that you will not get pimples or acne. Pimples and acne depend on a number of factors, some of which cannot be controlled without a health care provider.
 - If acne affects self-image, you may want to consult a health care provider to discuss options.

There will be genital growth.

- During puberty, the colour of the genitals darkens, and they increase in size. The **labia minora** and (to a lesser degree) the **labia majora** become bigger. The **clitoris** also grows. **Testicles** inside the **scrotum** start growing and producing hormones and **sperm**. The scrotum hangs lower and becomes darker in colour. The penis grows larger after the testicles have increased in size.



- The tip and opening of a penis' **foreskin** becomes wider, progressively allowing itself to be pulled back toward the shaft of the penis and behind the **glans**.

You will notice signs of fertility.

- To be fertile is to have the capacity to reproduce.

- Signs of fertility for people with vaginas and people with uteruses is the increase of vaginal discharge (cervical mucus), which looks like a sticky or egg white like matter and the beginning of menstruation. Vaginal discharge is a common part of puberty and bodily function that may happen up to a year before the first period/menstruation.

Knowing what is normal for your body can help determine "abnormal" vaginal discharge. Please consult a health care professional if you experience vaginal discharge that is out of the ordinary for your body.

- Signs of fertility for people with penises include the first ejaculation of semen from the penis. One of the ways that ejaculation of semen from the penis can occur during puberty is in **nocturnal emissions** or "wet dreams." Wet dreams can happen all on their own, not connected to sexual dreams or thoughts. Some people get them, some people do not. Their frequency tends to be highest during puberty, but they can also continue into adulthood, often with less frequency.

You may experience intensified emotions.

- Mood swings are common throughout puberty and are in part caused by surges of hormones. Mood swings are when people feel really happy one minute and then really angry or even sad the next. Mood swings may come and go, as they often fluctuate with hormones.

- Pre-Menstrual Syndrome (PMS) is one way that intensified emotions can manifest for people who experience menstruation. Not everyone who experience menstruation experiences PMS. People experience PMS to greater or lesser degrees and through a variety of symptoms such as: mood swings, greater emotional sensitivity, increased water retention (bloating), tenderness in breast/chest tissue, diarrhea, headaches, and acne. PMS usually happens before menstruation and does not always look or feel the same month to month.

You may experience changes in sense of self.

- During puberty, young people have to deal with rapid physical changes, and this can leave some feeling self-conscious. Other people's reaction to the young person can also change (e.g., if someone suddenly looks older and is treated as such).
- Because puberty can start at different times for different people, some people find it difficult to cope with early physical changes or with waiting for them to happen.
- Social changes during puberty can include: seeking more independence and responsibility; developing a new identity as part of becoming an adult; developing a stronger individual set of values and morals and points of view (what is "right" and "wrong") as the capacity to think abstractly grows; and changing relationships/friendships and who people want to spend time with. These changes are influenced by peer/social groups, cultural background, and family expectations.
- Peer pressure increases around this time, coupled with a strong desire to fit in.
- If you're having a rough time navigating the complex emotions that come with puberty and need to talk to someone; reach out to someone you trust. If you do not have anyone you can trust, there are toll-free national crisis counselling lines, specifically for young people.

Klinik Crisis Line: 1-888-322-3019
Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868

You may experience intensified attractions, sexual thoughts, and feelings.

- As puberty sets in, you may feel intensified romantic and sexual attraction. Attraction may be towards celebrities or people you know; towards people of various gender identities and gender expressions, characteristics, and age. It may also become more exciting to think about being in a relationship with other people.
- People may start having more direct and stronger sexual feelings and fantasies.
- Masturbation is a common way to physically explore your own body and sexuality. People of any assigned sex and gender identity can masturbate (or self-pleasure). Not everyone masturbates but most people do. It is not an unhealthy behaviour, despite myths that say so.

People masturbate differently; there is no "right" way. The densest distribution of nerves in the body are in the **clitoris** and in the penis. At the same time, **erogenous zones** are all over the body. Each person finds different things pleasurable.

- Masturbation sometimes leads to **orgasm**, which is a strong, pleasurable feeling in the genitals and throughout the body. It may (or may not) happen alongside ejaculation from the penis or vulva. Similarly, ejaculation from the penis or vulva may (or may not) happen alongside an orgasm.

Overall, puberty involves physical, mental, emotional, and social changes.

- Everyone begins and ends puberty at different times during their adolescence. They also grow at different speeds and in different ways.
 - There are reliable, accurate sources for puberty and sexuality information, such as the information contained on our website; there are also less reliable and inaccurate sources.
- As you talk more about puberty, bodies, sexual health, and sexuality, it will feel more and more comfortable.

This pamphlet information was provided by Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights.

If you have any questions about puberty, or anything else pertaining to your sexual health, please contact us and we will be happy to answer your question or arrange an appointment with a health care professional.

Sexual Health Questions? We have Answers!

Location:

47 St. Clare Avenue, St. John's, NL, A1C 2J9

Hours:

Monday: 9am - 4:30pm
Tuesday: 9am - 4:30pm
Wednesday: 9am - 4:30 pm
Thursday: 12pm – 6:00pm
Friday: 9am - 4:30pm

Phone:

579-1009
Toll Free: 1-877-NO MYTHS (1-877-666-9847)

Website:

www.plannedparenthoodnlshc.com

Email:

pp.nlshc@gmail.com

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