

# The Growing Child: Teenager (13 to 18 Years)



## How much will my teen grow?

The teen years are also called adolescence. This is a time for growth spurts and puberty changes (sexual maturation). A teen may grow several inches in several months, followed by a time of very slow growth. Then they may have another growth spurt. Puberty changes may happen slowly. Or several changes may occur at the same time.

It's important to remember that these changes will happen differently for each teen. Some teens may have these signs of maturity sooner or later than others. Each child goes through puberty at their own pace.

## What changes will happen during puberty?

Sexual and other physical maturation that happens during puberty is due to hormonal changes. Here's a look at the changes for boys and girls.

In boys, it's hard to know exactly when puberty is coming. There are changes that occur, but they happen slowly and over a period of time. It's not just a single event. Each male teen is different and may go through these changes differently. These are average ages when puberty changes may happen:

- **Start of puberty.** Between 9½ and 14 years old.
- **First puberty change.** Enlargement of the testicles and scrotum.
- **Pubic hair appears.** Shortly after the testicles start enlarging.
- **Penis enlargement.** Begins about 1 year after the testicles start enlarging.
- **Wet dreams (nocturnal emissions).** About 14 years old.
- **Hair under the arms and on the face, voice change, and acne.** About 15 years old.

Girls also experience puberty as a series of events. But their puberty changes often begin before boys of the same age. Each girl is different and may go through these changes differently. These are average ages when puberty changes may happen:

- **Start of puberty.** Between 8 and 13 years old.
- **First puberty change.** Breast development.
- **Pubic hair appears.** Shortly after breast development. In some girls, pubic hair may appear before breast development.
- **Hair under the arms.** About 12 years old.
- **Menstrual periods.** Between 10 and 16½ years old. About 2 to 3 years after the development of breast buds.

Both boys and girls go through certain stages of development when developing secondary sex characteristics. These are the physical characteristics of males and females that are not involved in reproduction. These include voice changes, body shape, pubic hair distribution, and facial hair. Here's a quick look at the changes that happen:

- **Boys.** In boys, the first puberty change is the enlargement of the scrotum and testes. At this point, the penis does not enlarge. Then, as the testes and scrotum continue to enlarge, the penis gets longer. Next, the penis will continue to grow in both size and length.

- **Girls.** In girls, the first puberty change is the development of breast buds. This is when the breast and nipple elevate. The dark area of skin that surrounds the nipple of the breast (the areola) gets larger at this time. The breasts then continue to enlarge. Over time, the nipples and the areolas will rise again. They then form another mound on the breasts. When a girl becomes an adult, only the nipple is raised above the rest of the breast tissue.
- **Both boys and girls.** Pubic hair development is similar for both girls and boys. The first growth of hair makes long, soft hair that is only in a small area around the genitals. This hair then becomes darker and coarser as it continues to spread. Over time the pubic hair looks like adult hair, but in a smaller area. It may spread to the thighs. It sometimes goes up the stomach.

## What does my teen understand?

The teen years bring many changes. These are not only physical, but also mental and social changes. During these years, teens become more able to think abstractly. Over time they can make plans and set long-term goals. Each child may progress at a different rate and may have a different view of the world. In general, these are some of the abilities you may see in your teen:

- Develops the ability to think abstractly
- Is concerned with philosophy, politics, and social issues
- Thinks long-term
- Sets goals
- Compares themselves to their peers

As your teen starts to struggle for independence and control, many changes may happen. Here are some of the issues that may affect your teen during these years:

- Wants independence from parents
- Peer influence and acceptance becomes very important
- Romantic and sexual relationships become important
- May be in love
- Has long-term commitment in relationship

## How to help your teen to develop socially

Here are some ways to help strengthen your teen's social abilities:

- Encourage your teen to take on new challenges.
- Talk with your teen about not losing sight of oneself in group relations.
- Encourage your teen to talk with a trusted adult about problems or concerns, even if it is not you.
- Talk about ways to manage and handle stress.
- Provide consistent, loving discipline with limits, restrictions, and rewards.
- Find ways to spend time together.

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