

# Puberty and Boys

## What is puberty?

Between the ages of 10 and 14 most boys and girls begin to notice changes taking place in their bodies. These changes, which occur over a number of years, are generally referred to as puberty.

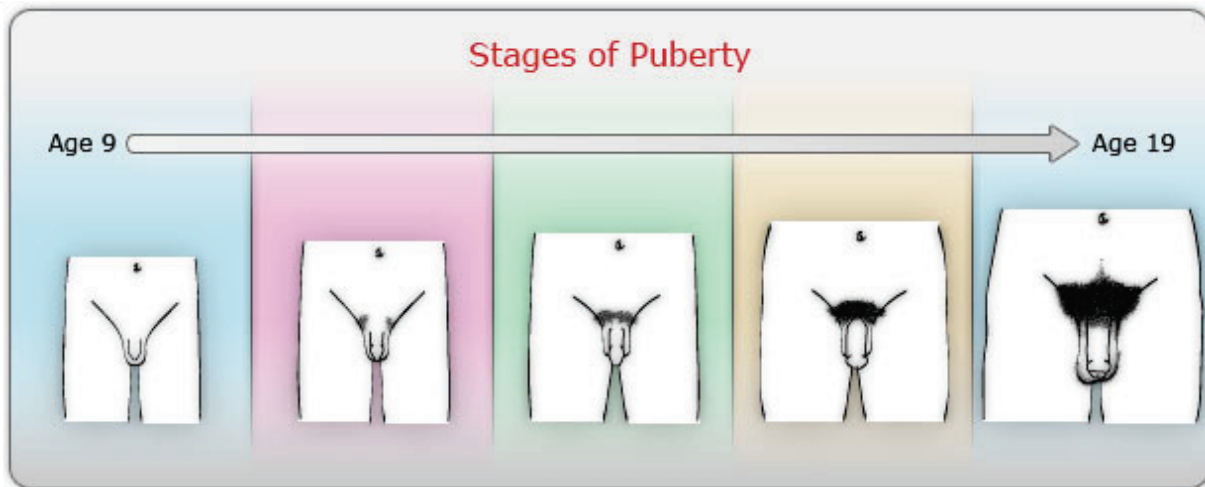
The changes take place in all boys and girls but they will start at different times and take place at different rates. Not everyone starts puberty between the ages of 10 and 14, some people start younger, and some much later. Similarly, in some people all the changes take place in two years, and in others they can take as long as four years. Generally they start between ages 7 and 13 in girls and ages 9 and 15 in boys.

Puberty starts when extra amounts of chemicals called hormones start to be produced in the body. These hormones guide the changes that take place in the body. As well as causing physical changes these hormones also cause emotional changes.

## What are the physical changes that take place in boys?

A boy's voice gets deeper, his muscles develop and his chest gets broader. Hair starts to grow on his face, legs, chest, and under his arms. In due course he will need to start shaving.

During this time his penis and testicles will also grow bigger and longer. Sometimes one testicle grows faster than the other, and it is natural for one to hang lower than the other. Hair, called pubic hair, will also start to grow at the base of his penis. As a boy gets older, this hair will grow thicker and courser.



This diagram is only a representation. All boys' bodies look different and penises come in many different shapes and sizes.

As a boy progresses through the stages of puberty, he will also start to have erections and he may have wet dreams.

### **What is an erection?**

An erection is when a boy's penis hardens and lengthens. This usually happens when a boy has romantic or sexual thoughts, or as a result of physical stimulation. However, during puberty a boy will start to get erections more often, sometimes without any stimulation at all.

Most erections are not straight, and tend to either curve upwards or to either side. Many boys worry that their penis is smaller than other boys', but most penises are around the same size when erect.

### **What is a wet dream?**

*“Wet dreams are not something to be embarrassed about; they are natural and happen to lots of people.”*

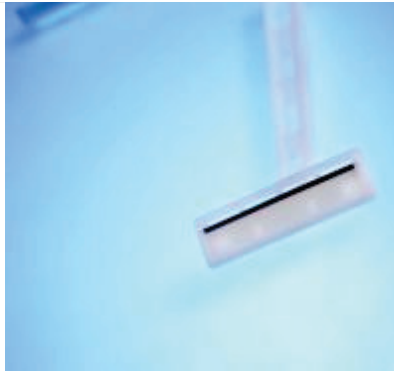
Erections can happen at any time, including when a boy is asleep. A wet dream happens when a boy becomes sexually aroused while he is asleep and ejaculates (semen - the sticky liquid that sperm is part of - is released from his body through his penis). Sometimes boys can remember having had a sexual dream. But often they just notice a wet patch on their nightclothes or on the sheets when they wake up.

If a boy has a wet dream, he should always wash when he wakes up. This is because he may develop an infection around his penis and testicles if the area is not kept clean. It is a good idea for a boy to wash his testicles and penis, particularly behind his foreskin (if he has one), every day.

Wet dreams are not something to be embarrassed about; they are natural and happen to lots of people. There is also no need to worry about not getting wet dreams as not everyone does.

### **How often does a boy need to shave?**





Disposable razor

When a boy first grows hair on his face, it is usually just a small amount on his upper lip and chin. This can be removed by shaving it off with a razor. Razors can be bought in most supermarkets and drug stores.

Sometimes shaving can cause a rash, particularly if a boy has not shaved before or has sensitive skin. Using shaving foam or gel before shaving will help reduce any irritation caused to the skin. You can also buy electric razors, which are used on dry skin and are less likely to cause cuts.

At first a boy probably won't need to shave very often. But eventually a boy will probably need to shave every day as this hair starts to grow back thicker and more quickly.

### **What does it mean for a boy's voice to break?**

This is just a way of saying that a boy's voice will get deeper. Sometimes it can happen very quickly, perhaps even overnight. But often boys go through a period where they have trouble controlling their voice, and it goes up and down in pitch as they talk. This can be embarrassing, but it usually doesn't last very long and all boys' voices will eventually settle down and sound deeper.

*"When my voice was breaking i used to get really embarrassed, it would go really high in the middle of a sentence and all my mates would laugh. But now i laugh right back when it happens to them!" Jon*

## **What can a boy do if...**

### **He gets spots (pimples)?**

Almost everybody has spots at some time during their life and most young people get spots around puberty. Washing your face more often with mild unperfumed or antiseptic soap and warm water may help, but be careful not to scrub your face as this can irritate the skin. Some people find that eating less fatty foods (such as chips and chocolate) and drinking lots of water can help. However, spots during puberty are usually caused by hormones, and are not something that you can control.

It is important to try not to pick at, or squeeze the spots as this can cause them to become infected. It may help to use a face wash, cream or lotion, designed specifically for spots. These can often be bought from chemists.

If you get very bad spots it might be acne. Acne is a common skin condition that mostly occurs on the face, arms, back and chest. If you think that you might have acne, you could speak to a doctor as they will be able to give you advice. There are also various special creams and pills that your doctor may prescribe to help you with the problem.

**He has mood swings?**

Boys and girls may experience sudden changes in feelings during puberty. Feelings can swing backwards and forwards, and you may feel like laughing at one moment and crying the next. Boys particularly can experience strong feelings of anger. Sudden mood changes are partly caused by the increasing amount of hormones in the body.

Talking to a friend or someone you trust can help to relieve your feelings. Mood changes are only temporary, and will settle down with time.

**He gets an erection when he doesn't want to?**

Spontaneous erections are very common during puberty, and there's not much a boy can do to stop them happening. However, there are ways of dealing with an unexpected erection and making it less noticeable. You can sit down or cover it with something (for example a folder, bag, or by tying a sweatshirt round your waist). You can also choose to wear clothes that make an erection less obvious, for example jeans and tighter styles of underwear. Try to concentrate on something else until it goes away. You may be embarrassed, but remember that it happens to everyone.

***"The worst time was when i was playing soccer. I was out in the middle of the field in front of everyone so i couldn't do much about it. It wasn't funny at the time but everyone got over it pretty quick"*** Alex

**Someone says he smells?**

As boys and girls' bodies develop during puberty so too do their sweat glands. These glands are to help control the body's temperature and result in more sweat being produced. The best way to reduce the risk of smelling is to wash and change your clothes regularly. You can also use antiperspirant deodorant under your arms.

**He is unhappy about the way he looks?**

***"Remember that there is a large range of healthy penis sizes and shapes, and that most penises are around the same size when erect."***

The physical changes that occur during puberty can cause considerable worry for young people. Boys often compare themselves to their friends, and worry if they are growing or changing faster or slower.

Height and weight are two things that particularly worry young people. For boys, penis size is also a common worry. Try to remember that there is a large range of healthy penis sizes and shapes, and that most penises are around the same size when erect. Also remember that your body is changing and will keep changing as you go through puberty.

It is important to think about the things you like about yourself and the way you look.

**He starts changing earlier than his friends?**

There is no set time when puberty starts, and this means that often boys will find they start to change at a different time from other boys their age. This is very normal, but can cause a boy to feel embarrassed or 'different' from his friends. Remember that it won't be long before others start to go through the same changes.

Some boys begin puberty as early as age 9. In some cases a boy may begin to show signs of puberty at a younger age. This is known as 'precocious puberty'. If a boy starts to show signs of puberty much earlier than age 9, it is a good idea to speak to a doctor to make sure there are no underlying health problems.

If you are worried, try to speak with somebody you feel comfortable talking to.

**All his friends have started changing but he hasn't?**

In the same way that boys who are 'early developers' can feel embarrassed or 'different', not beginning puberty until much later than others can also cause a boy to worry. Try to remember that everyone goes through puberty at their own pace. Starting later than your friends does not mean that your body will always be less mature; it won't be long before you start to go through the same changes that they are.

Some boys don't start puberty until age 15. If a boy is worried that he has not begun to see any changes by this age, he should speak to an adult who he feels comfortable talking to.

If a boy is much older than 15 and has not begun puberty (known as 'delayed puberty'), it is a good idea to speak to a doctor to make sure there are no underlying health problems.

**He is being bullied?**

Bullying comes in many different forms. It is bullying if somebody hurts you physically, calls you names, threatens you, steals or damages your belongings, excludes you, or spreads rumours about you. It is not something that just happens at school, it can happen anywhere: at home, over the phone, through text messages, and online. Bullying is a very serious issue and if a boy is being bullied for any reason, he should speak to an adult.

***"Even though you may feel helpless sometimes, there are a lot of things you and others can do to help stop the bullying."1***

## References

1. Stop Bullying Now! 'Are you being bullied?' (<http://www.stopbullyingnow.hrsa.gov/kids/are-you-being-bullied.aspx>)