



Growing Up

Q1. What is adolescence?

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines adolescence as the period in human growth and development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood, from ages 10 to 19 years. It is a unique stage of human development and an important time for laying the foundations for good health. Adolescents experience rapid physical, cognitive and psychosocial growth.

This is a transitional phase of growth between childhood and adulthood and closely related to the onset of puberty.

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During adolescence, an individual goes through rapid changes due to hormones. These give the signal to the body to start preparing for development and enable the body to function as an adult. Male body releases “Testosterone hormone” and the female body releases “Estrogen hormone”.



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Q2. What changes does an adolescent go through at the onset of puberty?

The table below highlights some key changes adolescents go through.

	Female	Male	Key Messages
Skin	Skin becomes oily, sometimes with pimples or acne.		This lasts through your teen years and then usually ends. Wash your face daily with soap & water.
Hair	Hair growth on legs, chest, face, underarms and in pubic areas.		The amount of new body hair that grows is different for each adolescent.
Breast	Breasts grow, swell and hurt just a little.	Breasts may swell.	Both breasts may not grow at the same rate or to the same size. It is normal for one breast to be a bit smaller than the other one.
Body Size	Hips broaden, breasts enlarge, weight and height increase.	Shoulders and chest broaden, weight and height increase.	Girls reach their full height before boys. However, by the end of puberty, young men are often taller and weigh more.
Sweating	Sweat increases and body odour may appear.		This is normal. Daily washing or bathing can help to control it.
Voice	Voice deepens slightly.	Voice deepens and may crack.	Male voices may go suddenly from high to low and from low to high. This cracking of voice is a natural process.
Female Sexual Organs	Menstruation begins and there is vaginal discharge		It is normal for the vaginal discharge to increase in mid-cycle and before the period.
Male Sexual Organs		Erections and wet dreams occur. Penis and testicles enlarge.	Erections and wet dreams are completely normal.

Q3. What is Puberty?

Puberty is when a child's body begins to develop and change, as they become adults. During this period adolescents reach sexual maturity.

Q4. What is Menstruation/Periods?

The United Nations Population Fund defines menstruation as the process in which the uterus sheds blood and tissue through the vagina. This is a natural and healthy process for girls and women of reproductive age. It is often called “the period.” It typically lasts 2 to 5 days, but this varies from individual to individual.

Q5. At what age does the first period come (Menarche)?

The first menstrual cycle or bleeding is called menarche. By and large menstruation or periods begin between the ages of 10-16 years for girls. But, there are many instances when periods could start a little earlier or a little later. If they start too early or do not begin until the age of 16-17 years then you must consult a doctor.

Q6. Is keeping a track of periods helpful?

Keeping a track of your periods helps you to understand the pattern of your menstrual cycle. Usually, the menstrual cycle falls within a range of 21-35 days, the average being 28 days. An occasional change is not a cause for worry but if your periods are not regularly following a cycle then it is advisable to consult a doctor.

Q7. Is it ok to have periods twice in one month or if the period is absent for a month?

This may happen at the onset of puberty and before onset of menopause. Due to hormonal changes, our body is slowly adjusting to the hormones. Thus, in the initial couple of years, it is normal to experience an erratic menstrual cycle. Once in a while, one's periods may not follow the cycle and may come early or late. Once your period settles down i.e., after 2-3 years of menarche and the problem persists then, you should consult a doctor.

Q8. Is it normal to experience changes in your body and mood swings before or during menstruation?

Yes, some females may experience mood changes, cramps, bloating, weight gain, pimples etc. The hormonal system regulates menstruation that may affect energy levels, moods and body changes before or during menstruation.



Sometimes I feel angry, sometimes sad and other times happy. Do you know what is going on with me?

Q9. How to lessen the pain caused by cramps during periods?

Menstrual cramps are common during periods and include throbbing or cramping pain in our lower abdomen. We can lessen them by adopting the following methods:

- Place a hot water bottle on the painful area as this relaxes the cramping muscles
- Exercise to release the body's natural painkillers called endorphins
- Drink warm water to reduce bloating
- In case of severe pain and symptoms like nausea or blackouts, it is essential to consult a doctor

Q10. Do girls stop gaining height after the onset of menstruation?

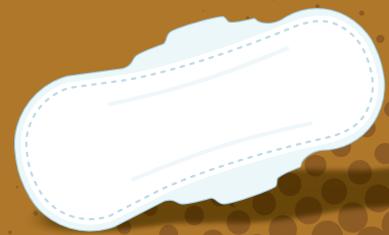
Height has nothing to do with menstruation; it depends on your growth hormone and normally, growth does not stop until the age of 18 years.

Q11. What to use during periods?

There are various options available in the market for menstruation management and one can choose from them based on one's comfort.

These are:

- Sanitary pads/napkins (disposable).
It must be changed every 4-6 hours, no matter how light the flow is, or even if there is no flow
- Tampons (disposable).
It must be changed every 4-6 hours, depending on your flow
- Cotton cloth (same cloth should not be used for more than 3 months. It should be washed after every use properly with soap and must be disinfected by drying in direct sunlight)
- Menstrual cup - this is the most eco-friendly option as it can be reused. Please follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully



Q12. How to dispose off sanitary napkins?

Disposal off sanitary napkins is important to maintain sanitary and public hygiene

Dos

- Wrap the pad in a paper
- Throw it in the dustbin
- After disposal, wash your hands with soap

Don'ts

- Throw in the toilet room or open spaces
- Flush out the pad

Q13. Is it possible to get pregnant before the onset of the menstrual cycle (menarche)?

Yes, biologically it is possible, as females can ovulate before having their first period and getting pregnant is related to ovulation.

Q14. Do periods stop at a certain age?

Yes, this is called menopause. It occurs mostly between the ages of 45 and 55 years.

Q15. Is it normal to have white discharge in females?

White discharge helps clean and moisten the vagina as well as prevents and fights infections. It is normal and healthy.

You need to see your doctor if you notice any of the following:

- discharge that is brownish, greenish, or greyish in colour
- discharge that looks like pus or cottage cheese
- discharge that looks foamy or has a strong or unpleasant fishy smell
- burning, swelling, itching, or redness along with the discharge
- pain in the pelvis or belly

Q16. How to maintain daily genital hygiene in adolescents?

Girls	Boys
Wash genitals daily with water. No soap, antiseptic, vaginal deodorants, creams etc are required unless specified by the doctor.	
While washing after defecating (passing stool), wash in a motion away from the vagina, i.e., front to back to avoid any infection.	While washing after defecating, wash in a motion away from the penis, i.e. front to back, to avoid any infection. Dirt might accumulate as a sticky substance, under the foreskin. Gently move your foreskin back & wash the tip of the penis. It will be easier to do this when you do not have an erection.
Change underwear regularly (at least once a day) and avoid synthetic undergarments.	
Wash undergarments carefully to make sure that you wash off all the detergent. Dry them in the sun because sunlight is a natural disinfectant.	
Avoid waxing or using razors, bleach, hair remover, or other chemicals near or in the vulva because the skin here is very sensitive. If at all you need to, you can carefully trim the pubic hair with a clean pair of scissors.	Avoid waxing or using razors, bleach, hair remover, or other chemicals near the penis or testes because the skin here is very sensitive. If at all you need to, you can carefully trim the pubic hair with a pair of clean scissors.

Q17. What is masturbation? Is it normal? Is it harmful?

Masturbation is when people (female or male) touch themselves and get sexually excited (stimulated) and do things to their bodies that give them sexual pleasure.

Masturbation is the act of touching your own genitals for sexual pleasure and it is perfectly normal. It can be a healthy way to learn about your body.

- Masturbation may involve rubbing, stroking and caressing one's genitals
- It is not something to feel guilty about as it is perfectly normal and does not cause any physical or psychological harm
- It is not harmful as long as people do not hurt themselves, do not violate another person's space and it does not interfere with our day-to-day functioning (like studies, games etc.)
- Masturbation only acts as a way of releasing sexual tension safely

Q18. Does masturbation cause weakness or infertility?

No, these are baseless myths. However, after ejaculation, one may experience fatigue similar to the tiredness experienced after any form of exercise. This tiredness is temporary. Masturbation does not result in the growth of pimples or loss of memory, eyesight and hair.

It does not affect the growth and functioning of the body.

Q19. What is nocturnal emission, nightfall or wet dreams? Is it normal?

Yes, it is normal for males to have nocturnal emission. Semen is a milky white fluid passed out by the penis at the time of ejaculation. Semen contains sperms, secretions of the prostate gland and seminal vesicles.

Sometimes, semen comes out of the body at night, during sleep. This is called nocturnal emission, nightfall or wet dreams. It is important to know that:

- Nightfall is not necessarily accompanied by sexual feelings or sexual dreams
- There is no weakness or loss of semen because semen is produced continuously

Q20. Why do adolescents get pimples?

Pimples, also known as spots or zits, are most likely to occur around puberty, but they can happen at any age. During puberty, hormone production changes. Androgens are hormones that increase in boys and girls during puberty and cause the sebaceous glands to enlarge and make more sebum.

Androgen greatly increases the production of sebum or natural oil from these glands, which is why our skin suddenly becomes oilier at this time. The ducts from these glands get blocked and pimples form. As a result, pimples are most likely to occur during the teenage years and around menstruation for women.

Pimples most often affect the face, back, chest, and shoulders. This is because there are many sebaceous glands in these areas of the skin.

Q21. What can I do to become taller?

Height of a person is determined by their genes, diet and activity. We can reach our potential by eating a nutritious diet and exercising regularly. By the end of adolescence that is around the age of 19 years, both boys and girls attain their maximum height.

Q22. Does the use of fairness creams affect natural complexion and make an individual fair?

Our complexion and skin tone depends on our genes and on the environment that we live in. Our skin colour is determined by the amount of melanin our body produces. Melanin is a protective layer beneath our skin that protects us from harmful ultraviolet rays of the sun.

Fairness creams have melanin inhibitors which affect the production of melanin in our body thus, making us more susceptible to harmful radiation of the sun. It's advisable that we do not use such products.

We should be proud of our skin colour and appreciate and celebrate different skin tones.



I am not beautiful as I have a dark complexion.

Fair or dark, you are beautiful no matter what your skin colour is. Beauty lies within you. Inner beauty refers to the personality of a person, including your mind and character.



Q23. Is attraction during adolescence normal?

Ans. Yes, attraction is normal and healthy during adolescence and is a part of the psychological changes of growing up. With increase in hormones, adolescents start showing more interest in friends, spend more time in mixed groups which could lead to attraction or romantic relationships.



Have you ever felt attracted to someone?



Yeah! It happens the minute I see someone attractive. It feels good and, I feel like talking to her.



I often hear people say a girl and a boy cannot be friends. Is this true?



No child! A boy and a girl can be good friends like any other. But it's important to respect and maintain boundaries in any relationship.

Q24. What is the difference between attraction and love?

Attraction and relationships are central to an adolescent's life. At times, these feelings do not sustain for long because often adolescents may misjudge an attraction, crush or infatuation for love. Sometimes attraction can change into love.

The following table will help you understand the difference between attraction and love:

LOVE	ATTRACTION/ INFATUATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develops with time • Lasts a long time • Shows concern for another person • Deep and caring relationship • Honesty • The partners feel secure and trust each other • Commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate, quick • Fleeting • Based on physical or sexual attraction • Superficial Relationship • Insecurity (no-commitment) • Jealousy • Mistrust

**I WILL BE
RESPONSIBLE IN A RELATIONSHIP**



Q25. What is consent?

Consent means agreeing to do something and being comfortable with that decision. Consent is always voluntary. Consent for any physical relationship can only be given when we have reached adulthood i.e., 18 years.

We must never do anything without the other person's consent.

Q26. How can I handle rejections and breakups?

Many adolescents face rejection and breakups in their growing up years. You can't always avoid rejections and breakups in your life, but what you can do is to use these moments to grow and learn more about yourself.

Below are some ways that can help you to cope with such situations:

- Never blame yourself if a relationship does not work out - Self-blaming or putting yourself down can lower your confidence and lead you to believe things about yourselves that may not be true
- Believe in yourself - believe that you are a good and strong person and that you can handle rejection positively. Respect the other person's decision as well
- Take up new hobbies and activities - divert your mind towards a positive direction by involving yourself in creative activities. Remember you are the only person who can truly change your life
- Take rejection as an opportunity for development - it could help you move in a direction that may help you recognise your talents, personality and all the great things that make you who you are

Q27. Is it possible to develop a positive self-image?

Yes. Self-image is not permanent and gradually changes over a period. We can learn to develop a healthier and a more positive image of ourselves by enhancing our strengths and working on our weaknesses. We must also learn to accept and appreciate our physical self. We should accept our bodies the way they are and take care of it.

LOVE YOUR BODY LOVE YOURSELF





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