



YOUR CHANGING BODY

Now that you know a little more about what puberty is and what you can expect to see along the journey, let's dig into the specifics about the changes you may experience during this wild and wonderful time. The most valuable thing you can carry into puberty is confidence and power. Your body is perfect exactly as it is today, and it will be perfect during and after puberty, no matter how it changes! Let's explore all the fascinating details of these exciting changes.

HEIGHT AND WEIGHT

At the end of the last chapter you discovered that there is no way of knowing what your body will look like after you go through puberty because only your body knows. How is it that your body has all this secret information? One word: Genes.

All humans are born with genes and they hold the key to what sort of body you have now and what sort of body you will have after you go through puberty. Genes decide whether you will be short or tall, heavier or lighter, whether your eyes are an enchanting brown or a mesmerizing green. Every human on the planet has a set of genes and each set of genes is different.

While everyone has their own set, sometimes we will have genes that are like our family's genes. Knowing this can give us a small clue as to what our bodies may look like after puberty. If most of the women in your family are shorter, chances are good that you will be shorter. This is true of hair color, breast size, and weight.

But there is no 100 percent guarantee that your body will look like your family members' bodies. Your genes have their own top-secret recipe that will make your body one of a kind.

Growth Spurts

Puberty means your body is going to get bigger and stronger. It also means you can expect to grow out of your clothes much faster than usual. This season of rapid growth is called a growth spurt. During a growth spurt your arms, legs, feet, and hands all get bigger. For a short period of time you may feel a bit like a baby giraffe learning how to move around with new longer limbs. Baby giraffes are adorable, and just like them, you will soon start to feel at home in your changing body.



How Fast and How High

Your growth will continue over the next four to eight years, and other parts of puberty will happen between these spurt seasons. For instance, around 85 percent of girls will develop breast buds after their first growth spurt. Pubic hair and acne usually follow next. Not too long after these changes, you are likely to have another growth spurt, which is often one of the biggest of your growing years. In fact, most girls can expect to grow anywhere from two to three inches in just a few months during this time. Usually there is one more big growth spurt that occurs after your period has begun. Girls often grow an additional one to two inches around this time, but it is not uncommon to grow as much as three additional inches.

Ouch! Will It Hurt?

Don't worry, your body is ready for this ride. During this time of extra growth, some girls experience what we call "growing pains." Growing pains are not actually a result of your body growing (most of your bone growth happens while you are sleeping), but are common aches and pains in your muscles that come and go. Doctors are not sure what causes these growing pains, but doing exercises like stretches before bed can help you navigate some of the discomfort.

★ ★ GET SOME CALCIUM ★ ★

During any growth spurt, it is especially important to make sure your bones are healthy and strong. One of the best ways to care for your growing bones is to be certain you are getting enough calcium in your diet. Calcium is the mineral that gives your bones strength, and without it you can develop some serious bone diseases later in life. Doctors say girls between the ages of 9 and 18 should have about four servings of high-calcium foods and drinks per day to give their bones what they need to stay strong. Milk happens to be high in calcium and is a simple way to get calcium nutrients to your growing bones, but it is not the only way to stock up. Leafy green veggies like kale and broccoli, yogurt, and sardines are all high in calcium, too.

Getting enough sleep, exercise, and good food will also go a long way toward easing many of the uncomfortable side effects of puberty, including growing pains. We will talk more about some healthy habits later. For now, just know that growing pains are a regular part of having a growing body. However, talk to an adult if you feel serious pain in your joints (your knees, ankles, or elbows).

Ask an Adult: Scoliosis

As you go through puberty there will be lots of new things you will notice about your body. Most of them will be typical changes most girls go through while moving into the teenage years. But occasionally your body might be alerting you to a more serious issue. In those cases, you should always tell a trusted adult what's going on.

Some young people discover that, as their bodies begin to grow quickly, their spines stop growing straight and begin to curve like the letter S. This curve in the spine is called scoliosis. Sometimes scoliosis is easy to notice because it may look like you are leaning to one side or one of your shoulders is higher than the other. The school nurse or your pediatrician may give you an exam to check your spine. Most scoliosis is minimal and doesn't require any treatment, but some might need more help. To learn more about scoliosis you should talk to your school nurse, doctor, or another trusted adult.

Shape and Weight Changes

Shape and weight changes are just another stop on the puberty train. One thing you should absolutely remember during this time is that your body knows what size and shape it is supposed to be, and if you take good care of your body you will help it become the best body it can be for you.

Girls get lots of messages about their bodies and what they “should” look like. Well, those messages are silly because we each have our own unique body that doesn’t need to look like anybody else’s. Earlier in this chapter we talked about how your genes determine much about how your body will look after puberty. Genes also determine what shape your body will have. Maybe you will be short and lean like your aunt, or perhaps you will be tall and round like your grandma. Your genes hold all your top-secret body information, which also means that you can be as tall and weigh just as much as someone else and still have bodies that look completely different.

During puberty you may notice that your body is getting softer and rounder around the hips and thighs.

