



Mind and Body Wellness Supporting Girls Through Puberty

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Abstract : *Puberty marks a significant and transformative phase in life, brimming with emotions and unprecedented growth. As embark on this journey of self-discovery, it's crucial to understand the emotional changes that come with puberty and to prioritize your well-being through self-care. Emotions are a natural part of being human, and during puberty, may experience a wide spectrum of feelings. Remember that it's entirely normal to have mood swings, to feel more sensitive, and to encounter new and unfamiliar emotions. Embrace these changes with acceptance, for they are the stepping stones to becoming the incredible person you are meant to be. Throughout this transformative time, be kind to yourselves and embrace the power of self-compassion. Recognize that it's okay to experience a range of emotions, and there's nothing wrong with you for feeling this way. In this article, I explore the emotional aspects of puberty and suggest self-care practices that can help young girls navigate through these changes with a sense of well-being and self-assurance.*

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is increasingly recognized as a critical period in the life course, a time when rapid development of the brain, body, and behaviours opens a window of opportunity for interventions that may affect health throughout life. Puberty results in very rapid somatic growth, brain development, sexual maturation, and attainment of reproductive capacity. It is accompanied by final maturation of multiple organ systems and major changes in the central nervous system and in psychosocial behavior. The discovery of continued brain development through adolescence is one of the great advances of neuroscience in the past 20 years. A dramatic spurt in brain development begins during adolescence and continues until the mid-20s, with marked development of both cortical and subcortical structures. This rapid development in the body and brain interacts with social changes, including increasing individuation and new peer

groups, to facilitate transitions important for individuals to function as productive adults. A range of social determinants of health arise in adolescence, with peers, schools, and eventually the workplace becoming strong determinants of health and well-being as the influence of the family wanes. These social changes are apparent even in traditional or more sociocentric cultures. More than half of the top 10 risk factors identified in the Global Burden of Disease study are largely determined during adolescence.

Adolescence is also a time when young people may modify or alter the pathways to adult health or illness. Early life experiences may reinforce both good and poor trajectories. Similarly, resilience during adolescence may improve outcomes for young people born into adversity. The transfer from primary to secondary school, sexual debut, and entry into the labor market may be critical points for preventing the accumulation of health risk.



OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the emotional changes during puberty
2. To encourage, open communication and support
3. To Importance of self-care adolescent girls

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on the analysis of the secondary data and published in the varies journals, annual reports and websites.

Descriptive research includes surveys and fact finding enquires of different kinds. The major purpose of descriptive research is description of the situation as it exists at present. The researcher used secondary data for developing understanding of the pivotal role in the current issue of “Mind and body wellness Supporting Girls Through Puberty”.

What to expect during puberty

The changes of puberty are physical, sexual, social and emotional. Puberty starts when changes in your child’s brain cause sex hormones to be released in the:

- Ovaries (usually around age 10 or 11, but can range from 8 to 13 years)
- Testes (usually around age 11 to 13, but can range from 9 to 14 years).

You can’t predict how long your young person will go through puberty. It may be anywhere from 18 months up to 5 years. Genetic, nutritional and social factors determine when puberty starts and for how long it runs.

During puberty, most children will experience:

- ❖ Oily skin (acne is possible)
- ❖ Oily hair, possibly requiring frequent washing
- ❖ Increased perspiration and body odour (frequent showering and deodorant help)

- ❖ A growth spurt (of around 11 cm a year in girls and up to 13 cm a year in boys). Teens continue to grow about one to 2 cm a year after this main growth spurt. Some body parts (such as head and hands) may grow faster than limbs and torso. The body eventually evens out.

Girls will experience:

- Breast development and possible tenderness
- A change in their figure, including widening of the hips
- Growth of pubic and underarm hair
- The start of menstruation periods may be irregular at first. Some discomfort, like headaches and stomach cramps, is normal but see your doctor if you have concerns
- A clear or whitish vaginal discharge this may occur before periods. See your doctor if your daughter experiences itching, pain or strong odour.

Boys will experience

- Growth of the penis and testes (testicles). Sometimes the growth of the testes is uneven (that is, one testis grows faster than the other). This is not something to worry about
- Growth of pubic, underarm and facial hair
- The start of testosterone production, which stimulates the testes to produce sperm
- The start of erections and ejaculation
- Growth of the larynx or voice box the voice ‘breaks’ and eventually deepens. Voice variations are normal and will settle in time.

What to expect socially and emotionally

Mood changes and energy level variations are normal parts of puberty, as are swings between feeling independent and wanting parental support. Your child



will want to establish their own identity. This can mean exploration of relationships and the world that exists outside of their immediate family increases. This may include new friendships and experiences, and learning how to navigate the inevitable challenges that can occur when a young person expands their understanding of their social world. They may also start to explore their sexual and gender identity through dating and romantic relationships. These are all vital learnings for young people, as the experiences create a foundation of understating for an adolescent about how to identify unhealthy relationships and how to engage in healthy ones that will develop throughout their adult life. Puberty and adolescence is a time for children to become more independent (such as getting themselves to and from school). They may also be looking for more responsibility, such as taking on a leadership position at school, or finding a part-time job. A young person may also be sensitive about how they look and their new body changes. Privacy and personal space may become very important to them. They may alternate between feeling self-conscious about themselves one day, to feeling 'bullet proof' the next.

Mood swings may be expected at the adolescent stage as young people are still learning how to control their emotions while so many physical and hormonal changes are occurring in their body. A young person may take more risks, push boundaries and question their parents' rules as they start to learn how to individuate, or separate and form their own identify from their parents. These social and emotional changes are a standard milestone in a young person's development, along with growing their decision-making skills and learning to

recognise and understand the consequences of their actions.

The Importance of Self-Care

During this time of change, taking care of yourself becomes a crucial aspect of nurturing your emotional well-being. Self-care is a fundamental necessity to help you thrive during this transformative time. By prioritizing self-care, you can lay the groundwork for resilience, develop effective coping skills, and build a strong foundation for your overall health. It is a unique journey for each individual, and it's essential to explore various ways to find what works best for you. Engaging in activities that you enjoy and that bring you a sense of fulfilment can be a great way to release pent-up emotions and stress. Whether it's reading a captivating book, expressing yourself through art, or participating in sports, these activities can provide a positive outlet for your emotions and create a soothing sense of balance.

Stages of Puberty.

The process of puberty begins earlier than most recognize, that is, between the ages of six and eight years with the early phase of adrenarche, the turning on of the adrenal glands. Adrenarche has few phenotypic signs in most children, but increasing evidence indicates that adrenal androgens may contribute to the structural and functional development of the brain and associated behaviors in adolescence. The timing of adrenarche affects the risks for mental health problems and a range of cardiometabolic issues. Body Mass Index (BMI) is associated with adrenal androgens' children exhibiting premature adrenarche have been found to have higher levels of insulin and insulin resistance and a predisposition to higher BMI. The second phase of puberty is gonad Arche, the process of sexual maturation and achievement of



reproductive capacity. The production of gonadal steroids stimulates the growth and development of secondary sexual characteristics; it also kindles development across all organ systems, including the central nervous system. Other endocrine systems mature during puberty, including the growth hormone/insulin-like growth factor and thyroid axes. Marshall and Tanner developed a system for identifying stages in the external signs of puberty. The earliest external changes breast buds in girls and testicular enlargement in boys typically appear about age 11 years, but vary among individuals. Despite a similar age of gonad Arche in boys, these early changes are more visible in girls. Menarche, the onset of menstrual periods (menses), typically occurs in late puberty, approximately two years after breast budding. While menses appears to signal reproductive maturity for girls, it largely signals maturity of the uterus because early menstrual periods are irregular and girls are rarely fertile immediately after menarche.

Encourage her to take care of her mind too

As hormones do their thing, you might notice your daughter feeling more anxious, irritable, or teary. Powerful moods are totally normal, but they don't have to be debilitating.

Just like any other body part, brains need some TLC, especially when it comes to handling big feelings like anxiety. Mindful breathing is one way to unravel anxiety quickly. Try this with your daughter: Take a deep breath in while counting to four, hold for four seconds, then let it out while counting to four again. Repeat as needed. Lastly, remember this: Actions change first, then thoughts, then feelings. It's impossible to just think our way out of a bad mood. So if you notice your daughter

is having a rough day, go on a nature walk, break out the arts and crafts supplies, or blast some Taylor Swift tunes and have a dance party the sillier the moves the better.

Guide her toward fostering healthy relationships

As your daughter grows up, it's natural for family relationships to become a bit more complicated. But there are ways to deepen your bond even during what can be a tricky time. Ask each other questions like these at the dinner table, in the car, or during a lazy weekend afternoon:

- What's your idea of a perfect day?
- What's something you'd like to learn how to do this year?
- Tell me about a time you felt super proud of yourself.

Specific yet open-ended questions like these are more likely to create meaningful conversations with your child, rather than simply asking "how are you feeling?" and getting the standard "fine" in response. Friendships during the puberty years can certainly ebb and flow. Guiding your daughter toward participating in activities she enjoys like sports, dance, theatre, or art classes is a great way to help her find a circle of supportive, like-minded friends. Encourage your child to stick with whatever it is that lights her up. Social media is, for better or worse, a big part of many tweens' worlds. If your child is on these sorts of apps, be sure to set some ground rules with her, like these:

- When posting, she should practice the same core values she would online as she does IRL. That means being polite, inclusive, supportive, etc.
- She should feel free to unfollow or block any accounts that make her feel bad about herself.
- Never share any private information that means keeping her location,



phone number, and travel plans off of social media.

- Ditch the devices after one or two hours of screen time per day.

SUPPORT HER BIG DREAMS

Your daughter has plenty of time to figure out what she wants her future to look like but it can be fun to start imagining the possibilities. One way your tween can do that is by creating a vision board. Vision boards can be made with poster board, glue, and pictures from newspapers and magazines or on sites like Canva and Pinterest. Have your daughter find a mix of these images:

- Inspirational quotes or lyrics
- Real women she considers heroes, like activists fighting for causes or writers telling important stories
- Pictures of places she'd like to visit
- Inspiration for her life right now, like a fashion trend she wants to try.

As your daughter looks toward the future, helping out in her community can also be empowering. If she's a math whiz, perhaps she can tutor younger kids after school. If she plays an instrument, maybe there's a retirement community looking for musicians to play for residents. Using her superpowers to give back is an excellent confidence booster. Now is the time when your daughter is forming her world view. Paying attention to current events will help her figure out what issues are important to her. Check out kid-friendly news sites like BBC News Round and Time for Kids together. And when scary things happen, talk about what's going on. Highlight the people and organisations who are trying to help, rather than those who are stoking the flames. This is the world your child is growing up in, and it's important to show her how beautiful it is and how much more beautiful she will make it.

How you can support your child during puberty?

One of the best strategies during your child's puberty is reassurance and ensuring they know you are a safe adult that they can trust to share difficult conversations, without fear of judgement or embarrassment. Explaining that puberty is an exciting time that means adulthood is approaching can be a positive way to introduce this time of change. Try to show compassion for the changes they're experiencing and reassure them the changes are normal, and that many are only temporary. If you are worried or are unsure about your child's development, you can contact a range of support services which are listed at the bottom of this page. Puberty is a time when role-modelling body acceptance is extremely important. Your child will compare their body to those of their friends, and may feel worried about their own development, body shape and size. The best thing you can do is listen non-judgementally, show them you understand and explain and normalise that bodies come in all shapes and sizes. Modelling a healthy lifestyle will also help your child.

Be accepting of your child's need for privacy, and that your child may be exploring their body through masturbation. Always knock before entering their room. Respecting your young person's need for privacy will directly strengthen your relationship with them. If your child is early or late to puberty, it can help to normalise their experience by offering lots of reassurance and support. They may feel embarrassed, a common experience for young people. You can let them know everybody develops at their own pace.



You may also find it useful to keep the following tips in mind:

- Praise your teenager for their efforts, achievements and positive behaviour.
- Put yourself in your child's shoes. If you experience them pushing back on boundaries, try to see their behaviour for what it often is: your child struggling to become an individual.
- Try to stay calm during angry outbursts from your child. Wait for your child to cool down before talking about the problem. They will be learning how to regulate their own emotions from how you react when there is conflict in the home.
- Stay interested and involved in your child's life, and always let them know you are available if they want to talk.
- Chat to your partner or other parents of teenagers. Sharing concerns and experiences can help normalise the process and make you feel more supported, in turn you can support your young person.
- Try to support your child in their self-expression, even if some of it seems odd to you, such as an extreme haircut or strange or different clothing choices.
- Try to tolerate long periods of time spent on personal care, such as hours in the bathroom, but chat to your child about reasonable family time limits.
- Talk to your child about any permanent changes they want to make to their body, such as tattoos and piercings, and discuss temporary alternatives, such as henna (removable) tattoos.
- If your child has acne, talk to them about how they feel about it. If it is bothering them, ask if they would like to see a doctor. Your doctor may refer your teenager to a skin specialist or dermatologist.

Adolescence as a Time of Opportunity

Adolescence is a key time for interventions to improve health. The benefits of intervention in early childhood are well described, and nations have made significant investments in maternal and child health and primary education. Adolescence presents an opportunity to preserve investments made in childhood and to switch trajectories, while the emergence of new social determinants of health, such as peers, and connection with school, neighbourhood, and workplace, offer new vehicles and venues for intervention.

Young people make five key transitions on the pathway to adulthood (World Bank 2006):

- Learning: Transition from primary to secondary schooling and from secondary to higher education
- Work: Transition from education into workforce
- Health: Transition to responsibility for own health
- Family: Transition from family living to autonomy, marriage, and parenthood
- Citizenship: Transition to responsible citizenship.

Transitions are accompanied by new behaviors, including the initiation of many health-related behaviors that track strongly into adult life. They are a time of great opportunity to tread new paths and embark on new trajectories toward health and well-being.

CONCLUSIONS

Adolescence is a time of great developmental plasticity and risk for the onset of a range of disorders that can carry a high burden of disease throughout the lifespan. It offers a critical developmental window of opportunity for intervention and prevention. Puberty and brain



development during adolescence are responsible for dramatic shifts in burden of disease, away from childhood conditions toward injuries and emerging noncommunicable diseases. Knowledge of the unique developmental processes that characterize adolescence and the role they play in both risk and opportunity during this phase of life is expanding rapidly. What remains is the task of translating this knowledge into intervention and prevention methods that target modifiable, developmentally sensitive mechanisms to maximize the effectiveness of intervention approaches during this phase of life.

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