

# Common questions about...

## PUBERTY



Puberty is an exciting part of growing up! It's when your body and brain start changing a lot. It happens to everyone as they go from being a child to becoming an adult.

Usually, puberty starts between 10 and 16 years old. That's when your body starts making hormones that make the changes happen. For girls, it might mean breasts grow and periods start. Boys might notice facial hair growing, voices getting deeper, and their bodies getting bigger with more muscles.

Being a teenager and starting puberty can also change how you feel. Your brain is growing too, which affects how you think and feel about the world and yourself. It's all normal!



Puberty happens differently for everyone and at different times. Sometimes it might be a bit tough or worrying, but understanding why it happens can help you feel better about it.



All the questions in this Q&A are based on frequent examples received from young people through UNICEF digital platforms, social listening reports and loGT analytics. The answers were developed in collaboration with a reference group of young people from the ESAR region and reviewed by technical staff from UNICEF, UNFPA and UNAIDS.

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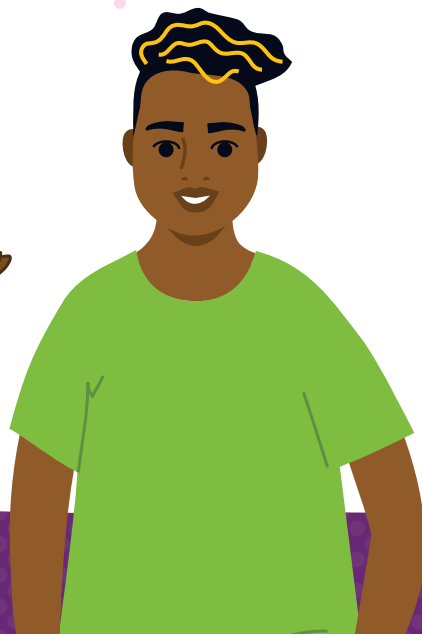
**What will happen to me during puberty?**



Puberty is a totally normal part of growing up! It usually happens between 10 and 16 years old. Puberty helps your body and brain get ready for when you're all grown up and prepares your body for things like having babies.

Not everyone will want to have a baby, but our bodies are designed to change so we can do that if we want to.

So, puberty is just a natural thing that happens to everyone.



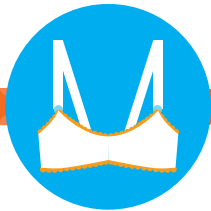
# 2

## What will happen to me during puberty?



When you're waiting for puberty to start, you might feel a bit worried about what's going to happen and when it will happen. But don't worry, puberty is just when your body starts to change, as you grow up.

You might notice that you start getting taller and your body starts to look different, like girls growing breasts and boys getting more muscles. Your voice might even get deeper, and you might start feeling more emotional sometimes or you might start liking people in a different way.



All of these changes are totally normal, and everyone goes through them at their own speed. So, it's OK if you're ahead or behind other people – everyone's different!



# 3

## Why haven't I started puberty yet?



Puberty starts at different times for everybody. It's like a slow journey that takes many years, so not everyone starts or finishes at the same time. Some people might start early, while others might start later.



**Sometimes, things like living with HIV or having a disability can make puberty happen at a different time. But remember, puberty isn't a race, and changes will happen when your body is ready.**

If you haven't hit puberty yet, don't worry! Just be patient, and it will happen when the time is right. But if you have any worries about puberty ask an adult you trust or speak to a nurse or doctor.



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**Can I stop puberty, I don't want my body to change?**



You can't stop puberty without special medicine – it's something that happens to everyone as they grow up. Even though it might feel a bit confusing or scary, it's just a normal part of getting older.



**Sometimes, all the changes can feel weird or hard to understand, but learning about them and why they happen can make it easier. And guess what? Lots of other people feel the same way!**

If you're feeling unsure or worried, it can help to talk to an adult you trust about how you're feeling. They can help you understand what's going on.



# 5

## Why do some people get pimples during puberty?



When you're going through puberty, it's normal for your skin to change. It might become dry or oily, and you might get pimples, spots, or acne.

This happens because of the hormones released in your body during puberty, which make your skin make more oil and sweat. Pimples happen when dirt and bacteria get stuck in this oil and sweat.

Having not-so-great skin, especially on your face, can sometimes make you feel embarrassed. But lots of people go through this during puberty. Taking care of your skin can help stop spots and pimples.



Drink lots of water and eat fruit and vegetables to keep your skin

healthy. And remember don't pick your spots or use chemical creams or soaps unless the doctor told you to.



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**Why am I not getting a good 'shape' in puberty?**



During puberty your body changes shape. Female bodies become curvier, breasts grow, and hips widen. In male bodies, muscles develop, and shoulders get wider.

For some people these changes do not happen in the way they imagine. If your body doesn't develop in the way you expect or hope, it can be difficult and can make you feel shy or embarrassed.

Sometimes this is just the way it is, we all have different body types and body sizes. But for some people this can be because of growth issues as a young child or due to conditions that affect where fat is stored in the body.



**Young people living with HIV who are taking ART can often have changes in their body shape due to the medicine they take. This might be putting on weight or losing it. If you are worried talk to your doctor.**

Remember we are all special and there is no perfect body out there, we need to learn to love the one we have!





# 7

## Why are my breasts so different from my friends?



When you're going through puberty, your body starts to change shape. Girls might notice their bodies getting curvier, with breasts growing and hips getting wider. Boys might see their muscles getting bigger, and their shoulders getting wider. But sometimes, these changes don't happen the way you expect or want them to.

That's OK! Everybody's body is different, and we all grow in our own way. Sometimes, it's just how it is, and other times it might be because of things that happened when we were babies or because of certain conditions.



For example, children living with HIV who take medicine might see changes in their body shape because of the medicine they take.



But remember, there's no such thing as a perfect body! We're all special in our own way, and we need to learn to love the body we have!



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**Why is the friend I sit next to so sweaty and smelly when they are not doing exercise?**



During puberty, your body goes through lots of changes because of hormones. One change is that you start to sweat more, and having body odour is totally normal. Even if you're not exercising, your sweat glands are working hard. Sweat itself doesn't usually smell, but when it mixes with bacteria on your skin, it can start to smell.

Sometimes, people can't smell themselves, so if you notice a classmate has body odour, it might be helpful to let them know nicely, or you can ask a teacher to help give them some advice.



# 9

## Why am I getting white stains in my underwear?



During puberty, your private parts also grow and change, both on the outside and inside. Inside a girl's body, her vagina gets longer, and her uterus gets bigger to prepare for maybe having a baby someday.

While all this is happening, the body starts making more of a hormone called estrogen. This can cause the vagina to release a clear or white liquid. It's usually thin and just a little bit, but it can leave marks in underwear. If you have any discharge that looks or smells bad that might be a sign of an infection and you need to visit a nurse or doctor.

Don't worry, though! This is totally normal and helps keep the vagina lubricated, like tears in your eyes or saliva in your mouth.



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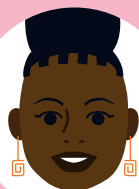
## When will my periods start?



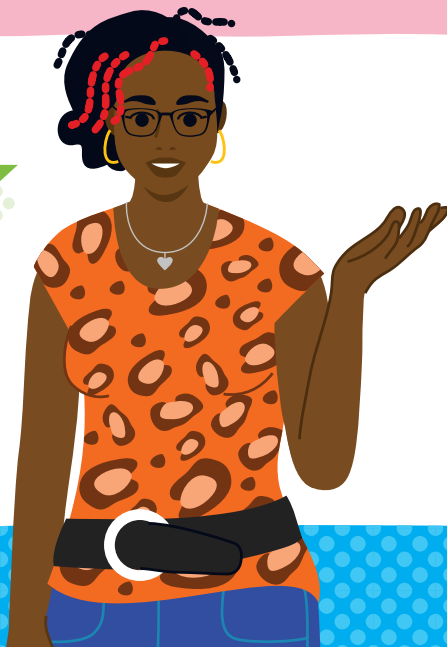
Menstruation, or your 'period', is when your body lets out blood and tissue from the uterus every month. It's a sign that your body is getting ready for the time you might want to have a baby.



Periods usually start during puberty, around 10 to 16 years old. But for some people, it might happen earlier or later. Everybody is different, so there's no set rule for when it'll happen, which is why it's good to be ready. Your period might start unexpectedly, so it's a good idea to have pads or tampons or menstrual cup handy just in case.



And if you need help or advice, you can always ask a parent, big sister, aunt, or another person you trust. Just remember, it's a normal part of growing up.



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**Why is there so much hair growing on my body? How do I get rid of it?**



Getting body hair is a normal part of growing up for everyone. You'll notice hair growing under your arms, in your private area between your legs, on your legs, and sometimes on your body. Boys also get hair on their face.



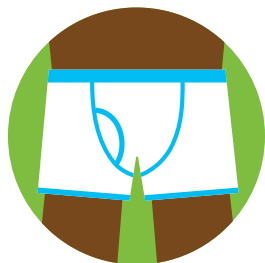
**Hair grows in different places to protect you from things like bacteria and to keep your skin safe. Some people think hair is really cool and a sign that you're growing up, but others prefer to get rid of it.**

You can shave, pluck, wax, or use cream to remove hair, but it'll keep growing back, so it's OK to leave it too.



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**What size should my penis be? I don't think it is growing fast like other people's.**



The penis is a part of the body that grows and changes during puberty. The shaft of the penis gets longer and wider, and the testicles also grow and usually drop down into the scrotum sac (the bag of skin they sit in). Sometimes, the skin of the sac might also get darker.

Penises come in all different shapes and sizes, and they'll look different when they're hard or soft. A small soft penis can get much bigger when it's hard, so don't worry about the size. Even though some people say that 'bigger is better,' that's not true for most people.

Having fun and feeling good during sex isn't about the size of the penis.



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## What is a wet dream?



A 'wet dream' is something that happens to your body while you're asleep, usually when you're having a special dream. Your body gets a nice feeling, and sometimes you might wake up feeling wet around your private parts.

In boys, this wetness comes from semen, which is a mix of sperm and fluid from your body, and it comes out of the penis during something called 'ejaculation'. Girls can also have something similar, where fluid comes out of the vagina when they're feeling aroused.

It's totally normal! It's like your body's way of getting ready for feelings you might have when you're older.

You don't need to feel ashamed or scared about it – it's just a natural part of growing up.



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**Why do I keep getting erections when I am not thinking about sex?**



An erection is when the penis fills up with blood and gets hard, standing up or sticking out. It usually happens when you're excited or feeling aroused, and it's the body's way of getting ready for possible sexual activity. Sometimes, you might get an erection when you're not expecting it.

Erections actually start when you're a baby, but during puberty, they happen more often because your body is releasing hormones that are linked to growing up.



**It can feel embarrassing to get an erection for no reason, but it's totally normal. It also happens a lot in the mornings when you wake up.**

There's not much you can do to stop them from happening – just try to relax, and eventually, the penis will go soft again on its own.





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## Why am I suddenly feeling attracted to people?



During puberty, our emotions can feel really strong because of all the changes happening in our brains and bodies. We might start thinking about people in a different way and feel attracted to them. Having crushes on people is really common as we start noticing others in a new way. It's just part of growing up.

Puberty is often when we experience our first crushes and sometimes even heartbreak.



But it's all part of figuring out who we are and what we want from relationships and what makes a healthy relationship.



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**Why do I feel so sad and angry all the time?**



During puberty, mood swings happen a lot because of changes in hormone levels! Sometimes you might feel super happy and excited, but other times you might feel really sad or angry for no reason. These big feelings can lead to arguments with family and friends and might make you feel less confident.



**But guess what? It's all normal! It's just part of figuring out who you are and how you get along with others. It can help to talk to someone you trust about your feelings and be honest about how you're feeling, even if it's unexpected.**



Doing things like exercise or finding activities to relax can also help improve your mood.



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**Why am I feeling so angry towards my parents and like I just don't want to be with them?**



When you're going through puberty, it's normal to want to make your own choices and spend more time with friends instead of parents or caregivers. This happens because your brain is changing. You might feel like your friends understand you better, and you might feel braver about trying new things and taking risks.

Sometimes, it can feel annoying when adults try to protect or guide you because you want to do things your own way. But remember, they care about you and want what's best for you.

They might not realise how you're feeling, so talking to them can help them understand better.



## Further information and contact details

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