

# Understanding Physical Development

## Activity Sheet

### Before You Begin

Puberty is a natural and healthy part of growing up. Physical changes happen at different ages and stages for everyone. You are in control of what you choose to write or share.

#### Key Reminders:

- There is no “normal” timeline that everyone follows
- Bodies grow and change in many different ways
- Learning about physical development helps people take care of their health and decision-making
- You are not expected to share personal information unless you choose to
- All bodies, identities, and cultures deserve respect

### Part 1: What is Physical Development?

Physical development during puberty includes changes to body composition, physical features, and the reproductive system (internal and external organs) as you transition from childhood to adulthood. These changes are driven by hormones - chemical messengers in your brain and body that trigger growth and development. Understanding these changes and the role hormones play helps you navigate this important time in your life, make informed decisions about your health and well-being, and know when and how to access available support systems.

#### In your own words:

1. What does physical development mean to you?

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2. Why do you think learning about physical development is important during adolescence?

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3. What is one thing you already know about physical development, or one question you have?

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### Part 2: Body Changes, Personal Hygiene, and Self-Care

Some physical changes happen to many people during puberty, regardless of one's gender identity. These changes are driven by the hormonal shifts we discussed earlier. While some changes are universal, others may vary based on biological sex and signal the development of sexual maturity.

Check (✓) the physical changes you have learned about:

- Growth spurts (that is, rapid increases in height and weight changes)
- Changes in body shape (for example, fat distribution, muscle development, and body proportions)
- More body hair (in areas such as the face, legs, arms, underarms, pubic area)
- Stronger body odour and/or increased sweating
- Skin changes (for example, oilier skin and/or acne breakouts)
- Voice changes (for example, cracking, deepening, or fluctuations)
- Increased hunger, appetite, or changes in metabolism
- Genital development (that is, growth and maturation of reproductive organs: penis, testicles, vulva, vagina)
- Changes in energy levels or sleep patterns (for example, needing more sleep or feeling tired more often)
- Breast development (for some individuals)
- Broadening of shoulders or hips
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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Experiencing puberty is a natural and healthy part of growing up. Physical changes can occur at different ages and stages for everyone. In this activity, you are in control of what you choose to write or share. You may skip any question that doesn't feel right for you.

### Remember:

- Bodies grow and change in many different ways
- There is no "normal" timeline that everyone follows
- Learning about physical development helps people take care of their health and feel empowered
- All genders, bodies, cultural practices, and identities deserve respect

### Questions:

1. Physical development during puberty includes changes to the body, growth patterns, and the reproductive system. In your own words, please share:

- What does physical development mean to you?

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- Why do you think learning about physical development is important during adolescence?

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2. During puberty, personal hygiene and self-care can become more important - but what this looks like can vary a lot. Different families, cultures, religions, budgets, skin types, and living situations can shape:

- What products people use

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- How often they shower or wash hair

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- What foods are available

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- What “self-care” looks like

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Read each practice below and check (✓) one box:

- Helpful for me
- Helpful sometimes
- Not helpful for me right now

HYGIENE & SELF-CARE PRACTICE	Helpful for me	Helpful sometimes	Not helpful right now
Showering or bathing in a way that works for your body and schedule			
Washing hands regularly			
Changing underwear regularly (when possible)			
Brushing teeth twice daily (or as close as you can)			
Flossing or cleaning between teeth			
Wearing clean clothes when possible			
Using deodorant or antiperspirant (if you choose)			
Washing face gently (especially if you have acne)			
Drinking water during the day			
Getting enough sleep most nights			
Getting some movement (walk, sport, dance, stretching, etc.)			
Getting fresh air or time outside (if possible)			
Eating regular meals when you can			
Choosing foods that help you feel energized			
Learning how to use hygiene or menstrual products safely (if needed)			
Using sunscreen when you're in the sun (if available)			
Using safe shaving practices (only if you shave)			

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3. Choose **one** area you want to work on and answer the question below (optional):

- Skin care
- Body odour
- Sleep
- Nutrition
- Stress
- Dental care
- Menstrual care
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

One small step I can try that feels realistic for me:

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4. People experience physical development differently. Respecting yourself and others is an important part of health.

- What does it mean to respect different bodies and experiences during puberty?

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- Who are trusted people or places you could go to if you have questions about physical health or hygiene?

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5. Final reflection: One thing I want to remember about physical development and hygiene is:

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### Reflection:

1. Which physical change might require new hygiene or self-care habits?

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2. One hygiene habit that I think is especially important during puberty is,

because:

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## Part 3: Physical Development and Sex Organs

During puberty, the reproductive system develops as hormones trigger significant changes. Some changes are more common for people with different biological sex organs. However, everyone's puberty experience is unique - people develop at different rates, at different ages, and may experience different combinations of these changes.

### People with female sex organs may experience:

- Breast development (for example, changes in size and shape, nipples may differ in colour and shape, and it's normal for one breast to be bigger than the other or for nipples to look different)
- Changes in body shape and size (for example, height and weight increases and hips widen)
- Vaginal discharge (that is a clear, whitish fluid—a natural sign the body is changing)
- Menstruation beginning (that is, monthly menstrual cycles, uterine lining is shed as menstrual blood)
- Growth of body hair in underarms, legs, and pubic area

### People with male sex organs may experience:

- Growth of the for example, penis and testicles
- Voice changes (for example, deepening, cracking during the transition)
- Changes in body shape and size (for example, height and weight increases, increased muscle mass and broader shoulders)
- Erections happening more frequently (often without control)
- Nocturnal emissions or "wet dreams" (normal during sleep)
- Growth of body hair on face, chest, back, underarms, legs, and pubic area
- Sperm production (that is spermatogenesis)

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### Part 3: Physical Development and Sex Organs (continued)

#### Reflection:

1. Why is it important to understand that both menstruation and sperm production are natural, healthy processes?

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2. How can learning accurate information about these changes help reduce worry, embarrassment, or myths you might have heard?

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3. What is one thing that might have surprised you about physical development during puberty?

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## Part 4: Understanding Reproductive Processes

All the changes you experience during puberty are part of your natural growth and maturation. It's important for people of all gender identities to understand reproductive processes of different sexes, as learning about sex organs is just as important as understanding any other organ system in the body. This knowledge can help you advocate for yourself, make informed decisions about your health, and ask questions when you need support or want to support others.

### Menstruation

Menstruation is the monthly shedding of the uterine lining when pregnancy doesn't occur. The menstrual cycle typically lasts 21-35 days, with bleeding lasting 3-7 days. Periods may be irregular at first, and this is completely normal - it can take several years for cycles to become regular as hormone levels stabilize.

Answer at least one of the following questions:

- One fact I learned about menstruation:

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- One question or myth about menstruation I want to better understand:

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### Sperm Production

During puberty, testicles begin producing sperm through a process called spermatogenesis. This process takes about 74 days to complete and continues throughout adulthood. The body produces millions of sperm cells daily, which are stored until they mature and are ready for release.

Answer at least one of the following questions:

- One fact I learned about sperm production:

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- One question or myth about spermatogenesis I want to better understand:

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### Reflection:

1. Why do you think understanding both reproductive processes (menstruation and sperm production) is important for everyone?

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2. How might this knowledge help you support a friend or caregiver?

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## Part 5: Physical Development and Physical Activity

Physical activity is beneficial for everyone during puberty, including those going through menstruation. Engaging in regular physical activity (at least 30 minutes daily) can help your body adapt to the changes happening during puberty (that is, physical, emotional, social) while also supporting your overall well-being.

### Benefits of Physical Activity During Puberty:

Check (✓) any of the possible benefits of physical activity during puberty below that you already know about or have experienced. Leave blank anything you are unsure about:

- Managing mood changes and reducing stress through emotional regulation
- Building stronger bones and muscles as your body grows
- Improving sleep quality and energy levels
- Boosting confidence and self-esteem
- Promoting overall physical health during periods of rapid growth
- Reducing menstrual cramps and discomfort (for those who menstruate)
- Providing social interaction and connection with others during a time of change
- Supporting healthy development, as regular physical activity can positively influence the timing and progression of pubertal changes
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### Reflection:

1. Based on the information above, which benefits of physical activity during puberty are most important to you, and why?

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2. How can physical activity support physical and emotional health during puberty?

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3. What are some reasons people might feel unsure about being active during puberty?

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4. What would you tell a friend who was worried about exercising during menstruation or other physical changes?

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### Part 6: Respect, Comfort, and Support

People experience physical development at different rates, in different ways, and at different times during puberty. Respecting yourself and others during this process is an essential part of maintaining both physical and emotional health. Creating supportive environments helps you and your peers navigate these changes in spaces where everyone feels comfortable, safer, and valued.

#### Remember:

- Growing and changing is part of being human, and puberty is a natural and healthy process
- Everyone deserves respect regardless of their developmental stage, culture, and gender identity
- All bodies grow and change in many different ways and timelines
- Learning about your body (reproduction and hygiene) helps you take care of yourself and others
- Your experiences and feelings are valid and important
- You have the right to set boundaries and ask for help when you need it
- You are growing at your own pace, and that pace is perfect for you
- It's normal to have questions about changes - asking questions shows you're learning and growing
- Asking for help or support shows maturity and self-care

#### Reflection:

1. What does it mean to respect different bodies, experiences, and timelines during puberty? Give specific examples.

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2. How can you support a friend or classmate who might be experiencing physical changes differently than you?

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3. Who are trusted people or places you could go to if you have questions about physical health, hygiene, or changes you're experiencing?

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4. What is one thing you can do to take care of your physical or emotional health as you continue growing and changing?

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