

Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP)



GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

Early and Late Puberty



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10 FAQs on EARLY AND LATE PUBERTY

1. My son is 13 years old. He was doing well till 1 year back, then I noticed his classmates are all becoming taller, and now some of them also have moustache, but he looks so small. Should I be worried?
2. My daughter had her 10th birthday a month ago, and she started her menses yesterday. Will she stop growing now?
3. My son is 11 years old. I am not worried about his growth (150 cm tall and 60 kg in weight), but I am worried that his penis is very small. Please guide.
4. My daughter is just 2 years old and her breasts have started developing. What to do?
5. My daughter is turning 8 years this month. I have noticed she has a few underarm hairs as well as a few long and curly hairs over the private parts. There is no breast development yet. Is this normal?
6. My 12-year-old son has small penis size. He is very shy and is not ready to go to the doctor. I am not sure what to do. Please guide.
7. My daughter is 13 years old. She started her menstrual periods 6 months back, had two cycles, and then none till now. I am worried, please advise if I should see a doctor.
8. My 12-year-old daughter has started her periods 4 months back. There is a lot of abdominal and back pain especially on the first 2 days of her periods. Can I give any medicine to decrease the pain?
9. My 14-year-old daughter has been having menses for the last 2 years. Of late, there is very heavy bleeding, going on heavy for 8–9 days, and each day she fully uses up 6 pads. Please advise.
10. My son is 13 years old. He has hair in the private parts for 6 months. He is worried that in the last 4 months he has prominence of both breasts, which hurt when he touches them during bathing. Please advise.

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Early and Late Puberty

Q1

My son is 13 years old. He was doing well till 1 year back, then I noticed his classmates are all becoming taller, and now some of them also have moustache, but he looks so small. Should I be worried?

The normal age for starting hormonal changes for boys is anywhere from 9 years till 14 years of age. The boy who starts changes (increase in growth of testes is the first sign) at 9 years will look quite tall and grown up by 13 years, would even have some moustache. In comparison with him, the boy who starts hormonal development at 12 or 13 years of age is also normal, but he will get his height and moustache only over the next 2–4 years. Finally, both boys will look similarly grown up at the age of 17 years. So, it is most likely your son is in the second group. If he does not develop change in the size of testes or get hair in the private parts in another year, you should see a doctor.

Similarly, for a girl, the normal age to start breast development can be from 8 years to 13 years. From the start of breast development till the appearance of menstrual periods, there is usually a gap of 2.5 years, but it can be as early as 1.5 years and as late as 4.5–5 years.

Q2

My daughter had her 10th birthday a month ago, and she started her menses yesterday. Will she stop growing now?

Ten years of age is the beginning of the normal time when girls can start their menses. The fact that she is tall in her class means that she started her hormonal changes (called puberty) early in the normal range. You may have noticed breast development around 8 years of age, followed by gain in height. Menses appear on an average about 2.5 years after onset of breast development but can be as early within 1.5 years and as late as 4.5–5 years after the start of breast development. An important fact to share with you is that height does not stop immediately upon the start of menses. Girls still have a good amount of growing left in their bones even after the start of menses, so do not worry.

Q3

My son is 11 years old. I am not worried about his growth (150 cm tall and 60 kg in weight), but I am worried that his penis is very small. Please guide.

It appears that your son is quite overweight (for a height of 150 cm, he should weigh at this age no more than about 45 kg). One of the places in the body where fat gets deposited is on the pubic area (above and around the penis). Thus, it is likely that his penis is just “buried” in the surrounding fat, not really small. This is especially so if we consider that you noticed it to be of normal size when he was a baby. So, it would be good to keep a watch on the type of food and exercise and the amount of time sitting in front of the TV, for the whole family. If he gains no more weight in the next 5 years, it will be good. And his penis will start looking more normal as the fat melts away and he starts puberty.

Q4

My daughter is just 2 years old and her breasts have started developing. What to do?

Breast development in girls before the age of 3 years is a very normal occurrence in the majority cases. The girls develop small amount of breast tissue, which is not associated with other signs of puberty such as appearance of hair in the private parts or underarms, or rapid gain in height. It will not lead to early menses. You need not worry if no other feature comes up. Breast size will remain the same or go down on its own. This happens because sometimes in little girls, the ovaries may wake up and temporarily produce a tiny bit of female hormone, and then go back to sleep until the normal age of puberty. No investigations and medications are required. In the small chance that any other features of puberty do appear, you should consult your doctor.

Q5

My daughter is turning 8 years this month. I have noticed, she has a few underarm hairs as well as a few long and curly hairs over the private parts. There is no breast development yet. Is this normal?

During the normal process of maturation of a child to adult, development of underarm hair as well as hair over the genital region usually follows breast development, but sometimes underarm hair can come up as the initial change. This pattern is seen more often in children who were born underweight or are very heavy in early childhood. In most cases, this is not a harmful variation and you can expect your girl to progress through the normal stages of puberty in the coming years and mature into a normal adult woman. If the hair growth progresses very fast without any breast development or if you notice any abnormality in the genital area you may consult your pediatrician for an expert advice.

Q6

My 12-year-old son has small penis size. He is very shy and is not ready to go to the doctor. I am not sure what to do. Please guide.

The size of the penis stays almost the same from infancy all through the childhood till puberty. Usually, the increase in size of penis is a late event in puberty, after the increase of testicular size and appearance of pubic hair. The usual age of increase in penile size is around 12 years of age which can start 1 or 2 years later also. So, for the time being you can wait and may consult a doctor if no changes including increase in the testicular size is observed by 14 years of age which will rarely be necessary. Application of so-called hormone creams without a proper advice from a specialist (pediatric endocrinologist) can be harmful for your child, this should not be done unless a qualified doctor advises it.

Q7

My daughter is 13 years old. She started her menstrual periods 6 months back, had two cycles, and then none till now. I am worried, please advise if I should see a doctor.

The menstrual periods happen every month in women of the reproductive age group due to very intricate balance of hormones, which produces the growth and later periodic shedding of the internal lining of the uterus. In the early years of puberty while a child is maturing to an adult, there can be infrequent cycles, less or more bleeding, etc. This will improve into a normal regular pattern of once in 28 days usually within a period of 2 years. Meanwhile, do remember that this is the age group when girls really need extra care for nutrition, with foods containing iron, protein, calcium, and plenty of sunshine for vitamin D.

Q8

My 12-year-old daughter has started her periods 4 months back. There is a lot of abdominal and back pain especially on the first 2 days of her periods. Can I give any medicine to decrease the pain?

Pain with menses is common in adolescent girls. Abdominal and back pain may have associated symptoms of nausea, vomiting, loose stools, headache, and dizziness. Pain usually starts with the onset of periods and gets subsided on its own in 1–2 days. Reassure your daughter. You may use hot water bag/bottle over her lower abdomen and lower back to provide some relief in pain. She may also use some painkiller tablet for relief.

Q9

My 14-year-old daughter has been having menses for the last 2 years. Of late, there is very heavy bleeding, going on heavy for 8–9 days, and each day she fully uses up 6 pads. Please advise.

Majority of adolescents have menstrual cycles of 21–45 days with 2–7 days of menstrual bleeding. If menses last for >7 days and/require change of pads in <2 hours or during night, it may be considered heavy bleeding. Since your daughter is having periods for 8–9 days, she seems to have increased bleeding. You should consult your doctor. The doctor will do a physical examination and if needed will advise required investigations and may prescribe some medicines to stop the heavy bleeding.

Q10

My son is 13 years old. He has hair in the private parts for 6 months. He is worried that in the last 4 months, he has prominence of both breasts, which hurt when he touches them during bathing. Please advise.

It seems your son has entered puberty as evident by growth of hair in his private parts.

Enlargement of breasts during puberty is common in boys and results from puberty-related hormonal changes. It is usually transient and regresses on its own in 1–2 years. Reassure your son regarding its benign and transient nature. If he is still very anxious/has persistent pain/no decrease in breast size by the end of 1 year, consult your doctor.