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Dear Parent:

The HealthRock® website was conceived to help parents and children learn about health in a fun, educational way. To help you, I put together this page of information.

DocRock™

Puberty

What is puberty?

Puberty (PEW-bur-tee) is the time in a child's life when their body and minds change from being a child into being an adult. Boys become men, and girls become women. Whether you are a boy or a girl, an athlete or a musician, everyone goes through puberty. Boys usually start to go through puberty between the ages of 10 and 15. For girls, it usually starts between ages 8 and 13, and it can last a number of years.

What causes puberty?

At a certain age, a part of the brain right between the eyes called the hypothalamus (high-poh-THAL-mus) begins making a **hormone** called Gonadotropin (go-nad-oh-TROPE-in) Releasing Hormone (GnRH). GnRH turns on a small gland called the pituitary (pah-TU-ah-teh-rhee) gland to make two hormones, Luteinizing Hormone (LH) and Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH), into the blood stream. In boys, LH and FSH cause the body to make testosterone (test-OS-ter-own) and sperm to begin. In girls, LH and FSH cause the ovaries to make estrogen (ES-trow-jin) and eggs begin to grow each month. Testosterone and estrogen are what cause the physical changes in boys and girls.

How does a boy's body change during puberty?

- Boys have growth spurts - they get taller, wider, and stronger
- Their voices will start to "crack" and later deepen
- Penis gets longer and wider
- Testicles get bigger

- Hair begins to grow in the pubic region, under arms, and on the face, chest, arms, legs and abdomen
- Acne comes on the face, chest, and back
- Boys get adult body odor due their sweat changes
- Boys get **erections (e-RECK-shuns)**, a hardening of the penis. It's cause by blood coming into the penis. This occurs when guys fantasize about sexual things or for no reason at all.
- When erections start, boys will begin to have **nocturnal emissions**, also referred to as wet dreams. Sometimes while asleep, a boy will get an erection and ejaculate semen, which houses sperm. Boys may wake up with wet underwear and sheets. They happen less over time and may stop.

How does a girl's body change during puberty?

- Girls get more curvy, and gain weight in their hips, buttocks, thighs, arms, and breasts
- Breasts first get a small lump underneath the areole (the dark circle under their nipple) and then the breasts fill out and get larger.
- Hair will begin to grow in the pubic region. Sometimes it grows on the inside of the thighs and up to the navel.
- The vagina lining gets thicker and darker in color
- The uterus and ovaries will increase in size
- Acne comes on the face, chest, and back
- Girls get body odor
- **Menstruation** (men-strew-A-shun) or menstrual periods start. That is the name for the bleeding that happens every month. The first menstrual bleeding is called **menarche (MEN-are-key)** and often starts at age 13. Each month, an egg is released from one of the two ovaries into the uterus and tissue and blood in the uterus increases. If the egg is fertilized with sperm, it can become a baby. When the egg isn't fertilized, the lining of the uterus sheds as a period and builds up again the next month. A period usually lasts five to seven days.

What psychological changes occur during puberty?

Puberty affects the mind and the body and start feeling new emotions and urges. They develop sexual urges and fantasies, which often make them confused and embarrassed, and they become more aware of their body. They might lose their temper quicker. All of these feelings are completely normal and happen to everyone.

If it's embarrassing talking to parents about sex, ask teachers, your doctor or someone you are comfortable talking to that can answer questions. Puberty and sex is extremely important and understanding it can help prevent feeling uncomfortable.