

What hurts when you go through puberty?

Physical pains

Breasts

As breast tissue grows and throughout the menstrual cycle, the influence of the female hormones oestrogen and progesterone can sometimes cause breasts to become tender or painful.

When breasts start to develop, a small bump called a breast bud grows under the nipple and areola (the darker area of skin around the nipple). As the breast buds grow, you may notice tingling, aching or itching in your chest, and your nipples may swell or become tender. This is all normal. It is also normal for one breast to start to develop before the other.

The breasts get bigger and rounder as the fatty tissue and milk-producing glands inside the breasts continue to grow. The areola also gets bigger and darker and the nipples may stick out.

Some girls worry that doing too much exercise will damage their breasts or make them grow larger. Breasts are mainly made up of fatty tissue rather than muscle, so exercise won't affect breast development. However, exercise in general will help keep the pectoral muscles behind the breast in shape, as well as help toning the body.

Having a well fitted bra is very important. It's always a good idea to get measured by a qualified 'bra fitter' to ensure you get the right size and support. A good bra will also give you a nice shape. Most clothes shops that sell underwear have specially trained staff who will help you choose the best bra for you. You might feel a little nervous or embarrassed at first but they will reassure you and never need to see you completely undressed.

Having a bra to sleep in is a personal choice – most people don't, but it won't affect breast development. If you do sleep in a bra, make sure it's comfortable and not too tight.

A good place to find out more information is <http://www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/1740.aspx>

Period Pains

Adolescent girls often have anovulatory cycles (no egg released) so it is common for periods to be erratic and irregular. The bleed will also vary in how long it lasts, how much blood is lost and how painful it is.

Period pain is normal. It's a cramping of the uterus and a variance in hormones that can cause pain and discomfort. Walking or any form of exercise will help by triggering off chemicals within your body that act like natural pain killers – the correct name is endorphins. These endorphins help to reduce pain and also help to improve how you feel mentally. Some people call endorphins our own 'happy chemicals'. So, exercise is good for our physical, emotional and mental health especially around the time of your period. Even when you feel like you just want to curl up on the sofa with a hot water bottle, try a nice walk – it really does help! Also the use of a hot water bottle and simple pain killers, for example, paracetamol or ibuprofen can help.

Itching and vulval soreness

All women have a vaginal discharge. A normal discharge is usually clear to cloudy-white, smells slightly acidic (like vinegar), may be thick or thin, and changes throughout the menstrual cycle. It is very common for girls to notice a pinky coloured discharge just before their period starts.

Sometimes the vulval area can get itchy and sore. The discharge should not have an unpleasant odour, be itchy, contain blood, or appear thick and sticky. It is important to get anything that is abnormal for you checked out by a health professional.

It's a really good idea to get to know what your special and unique body looks like. When you know what is normal for you it's easy to spot changes that might need to be checked out.

A good place to find out more information is-

NHS Choices-

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Sexandyoungpeople/Pages/Girlsbodies.aspx>

Respect Yourself Gloucestershire

<http://gloucestershire.respectyourself.info/bodies/girls-bits/>

Testicles

Testicles don't normally hurt when you are growing and going through puberty. It's a really good idea to get to know what your special and unique body looks and feels like. When you know what is normal for you, it's easy to spot changes that might need to be checked out.

It's important that you examine your testicles so that you can check that nothing has changed. Testicles can become painful through trauma, infection or lumps/cysts.

Sometimes through sport or play fighting, a male can be kicked or punched in the testicles ('balls/nuts'). This can be a very painful experience and can damage the testes (where the sperm is made). Bruising and swelling can result from this type of injury and should settle down after a few days. If it continues to be painful it's very important that it is checked out by a health professional.

Penis and foreskin

Some males have a foreskin. The penis is a sensitive and important part of the male reproductive organs. The foreskin is a fold of skin that protects the head of the penis, you should be able to roll back over the head of the penis and wash underneath it with water (avoid using perfumed soaps and shower gels as they can cause soreness). A substance called smegma is produced under the foreskin and can build up and become quite smelly if you don't wash underneath it.

Many men have a circumcision; this is when the foreskin is removed. Sometimes this is done because of a person's religious or cultural beliefs. Some males have problems with their foreskin. Sometimes it's too tight to roll back over the head of the penis, sometimes an infection can make it very swollen and uncomfortable. It's really important to get anything that is not normal for you checked out by a health professional.

A good place to find out more information is-

NHS Choices-

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Sexandyoungpeople/Pages/Boysbodies.aspx>

<http://www.nhs.uk/chq/pages/878.aspx?CategoryID=61&SubCategoryID=618>

Respect Yourself Gloucestershire

<http://gloucestershire.respectyourself.info/bodies/boys-bits/>

Joints/muscles, knees and legs

Some young people get pains and aches in their legs and muscles as they grow taller. Sometimes this can cause pain and discomfort during or after exercise. Usually growing pains will go away on their own but if they don't, it's important to get checked out by a health professional. Some young people need to have physiotherapy to strengthen certain muscles as they grow taller.

A good place to find out more information is-

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/growing-pains/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

Feelings

Growing up brings about many physical changes but there are also many emotional and mental health factors that can often be overlooked (attributed to hormones). These include:

- Emotional pain
- Mood swings
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Worry
- Disagreements within relationships

As you grow not only does your body alter but also your brain changes and you develop new thinking pathways. Just as different parts of your body grow at different rates, so do the different parts of your brain. This affects the way that you respond to situations and means that younger people respond and behave differently to older people. See the Puberty Fact File for more information on brain development.

Another good place to find out more information is-

Respect Yourself Gloucestershire

<http://gloucestershire.respectyourself.info/about-you/coping/>

<http://gloucestershire.respectyourself.info/about-you/happy-being-you/>