

In This Chapter

- Puberty
- Body Image Issues
- Sexuality

Setting the Stage

- **Puberty:** Involves hormonal and physical changes that contribute to sexual maturity and adult height
  - Takes an average of five years
  - Today is typically an early teenage change



Fourth graders



High school juniors

Setting the Context

- **Culture, history, and puberty rights**
  - “Coming of age” events scripted to highlight entrance into adulthood
  - Menarche and spermarche
  - Cultural and gender differences

## The Declining Age of Puberty

### • Secular trend in puberty

- 1860s in Europe: Average age menarche over 17
- 1960s: Average age dropped to under 13
- Today: Menarche before 13 for many

- Secular trend is index of nation's economic development

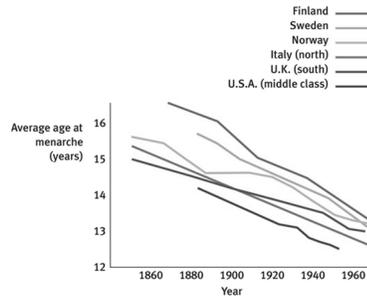


Figure 8.1  
Wolfe, *Experiencing The Lifespan*, 4e © 2016 Worth Publishers

## LEARN THE TERMS

- Puberty
- Puberty rite
- Secular trend in puberty
- Menarche
- Spermarche

## The Hormonal Programmers: Two Systems or Command Centers

### Adrenal androgens: Produced by adrenal glands

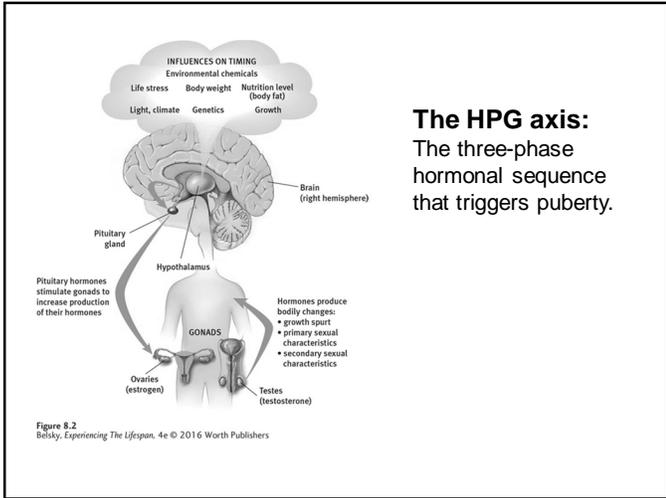
- Program aspects of puberty
  - Promote growth of hair; influence skin changes; program sexual desire.
- Androgens begin secretion in middle childhood.

### HPG axis: (Hypothalamus, Pituitary, Gonad)

- Main hormonal system programming puberty
- Hypothalamus triggers the pituitary to secrete its hormones, which, in turn, trigger the *gonads* to secrete their hormones, which produce major body changes.

## The Hormonal Programmers

- **Gonads (sex organs)**
  - Testes
  - Ovaries
- **Adrenal androgens (testes and estrogen)**
  - Found in both sexes
  - Program sexual desire and skin and bodily hair growth

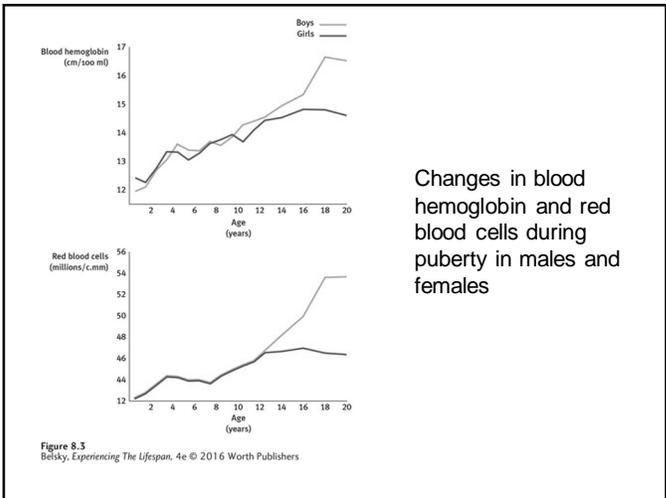


### The Physical Changes

- **Primary sexual characteristics:** Changes that directly involve the organs of reproduction; rate variations
  - Growth of uterus, maturation of the ovaries, onset of menarche
  - Growth of penis, testes, onset of spermatogenesis
- **Secondary sexual characteristics:** Physical changes not directly involved in reproduction
  - Hair growth, voice changes, acne, breast development
- **Growth spurt**
  - Dramatic increase in weight and height

### Puberty Timetables: Gender Differences

Girls	Boys
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Six months after growth spurt begins development of breasts and pubic hair occurs</li> <li>• Menarche begins in middle to final stage</li> <li>• Rate of change is variable; affected by when process starts</li> <li>• Dramatic internal changes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After growth of testes and penis begins, growth of body hair, height, and muscle mass</li> <li>• Change in cardiovascular system, frame, larynx</li> <li>• Hands, legs, and feet grow first</li> </ul>



### Puberty Timetables: Individual Differences

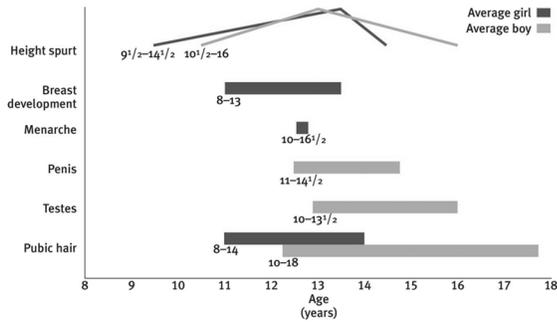


Figure 8.4  
Belsky, *Experiencing The Lifespan*, 4e © 2016 Worth Publishers

Sequence of some major events of puberty

### LEARN THE TERMS

- Adrenal androgens
- HPG axis
- Gonads
- Testosterone
- Primary sexual characteristics
- Secondary sexual characteristics
- Growth spurt

### Overweight and Early Puberty (It's All About Girls)

- **Childhood weight predicts when a girl physically matures**
  - Linked to rapid weight gain during first months of life and high BMI in elementary school
- **Data for boys are inconsistent**



Overfeeding can have another negative epigenetic effect—priming this baby to reach puberty at an early age.

### Predicting Girls' Chances of Early Puberty

- **Questions that predict a female child's chance of reaching puberty at a younger-than-average age.**
  - Did this girl's parents reach puberty early?
  - Is this girl African American?
  - Is this girl overweight? Did she gain weight rapidly during her first year of life?
  - Has this girl's family life been stressful and unhappy? Did she have an insecure attachment?

## An Insider's View of Puberty

- **Basic principle**
  - Changes are exciting and frightening
  - Reactions depend on social norms and reactions of individual family members
- **Breast development**
  - Western cultures = pride
- **Menstruation**
  - Varying responses; 1 in 3 disgusted or ambivalent
- **Spermarche/first ejaculation**
  - Tendency to be secretive

## Being Early: It Can Be a Problem for Girls

- **Special risk of developing acting-out behaviors**
  - Gravitate to older friends
  - Unprotected sex
  - Possible bullying victims
  - Possible disconnect from school (poor grades)
- **Risk of becoming anxious/depressed**
  - Body dissatisfaction
  - Self-consciousness

## The interaction between culture and pubertal timing in predicting girls' problem behavior in Sweden (red line) and Slovakia (blue line)

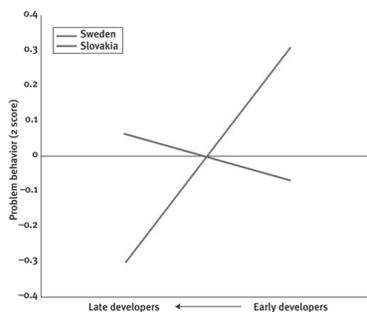


Figure 8.5  
Reilly, *Experiencing The Lifespan*, 4e © 2016 Worth Publishers

## Wrapping Up Puberty

- Environmental context will affect child's reaction to puberty
- With early-maturing girls, arranging the best body environment fit is important
- Especially for boys, communication about puberty can be improved

## Interventions: Minimizing Puberty Distress

### For parents

- Make an effort to communicate about pubertal changes with same-sex child
- Help children get involved in positive activities

### For society

- Recognize importance of school environment
- Provide earlier introduction to sex education (UNESCO global guidelines)
- Provide nurturing environment to set adolescents on right path

## Body Image Issues

### • Harter's research

- Feelings of competence in five domains relates to overall self-esteem.
  - Scholastic competence, behavioral conduct, athletic skills, peer likeability, appearance
- For adolescents, contentment with one's appearance outweighs any other category, more for girls

## The Differing Body Concerns of Girls and Boys

- **Thin ideal**
  - Pressure to be abnormally thin
  - Overweight and underweight female teens felt they were too fat
  - Males want to build up muscles

## Body Concerns of Girls and Boys

- **Peer pressure**
  - Teasing
- **Dating**
- **Media**
  - Presents unrealistic images (digitally altered)
  - Strong influence in promoting body dissatisfaction in both genders

## Eating Disorders

- Anorexia nervosa
  - Characterized by self-starvation to being 85% or less of healthy body weight
    - Starvation can destroy body organs and cause death.
    - Medical emergencies require hospitalization (2/3 of ideal weight or less).
  - Menstruation ceases
  - Distorted body image

## Eating Disorders

- Bulimia nervosa
  - Characterized by at least biweekly cycles of bingeing and purging
    - In addition to forced vomiting, purging may include taking laxatives and/or diuretics, fasting, and excess exercise.
  - Major consequences
    - Mouth sores, loss of tooth enamel (gray teeth), esophageal ulcers, esophageal cancer

## What causes these conditions?

- Strong hereditary component, especially in girls
- Temperamental tendency
  - to be anxious,
  - to have low self-efficacy,
  - to have a great need for approval,
  - and an inability to express legitimate needs.



Janis Grill/The Image Bank/Getty Images

## Is a Teenager at Risk for Serious Body Dissatisfaction? A Checklist

### **Background influences: Has this child reached puberty? Is this child female?**

1. Is this child temperamentally prone to anxiety and depression?
2. Does this child vigorously subscribe to the thin ideal?
3. Is this child becoming obsessed with dieting (or, if male, becoming obsessed with building up his muscles)?
4. Does this child have insecure attachments, trouble expressing her feelings, and excessively low self-efficacy and self-esteem?
5. When this child gets rejected or experiences a negative event, does she automatically think, "I feel fat"?

## Interventions: Improving Teenagers' Body Image

- **Target at-risk girls prone to**
  - Depression and low self-worth
  - Subscribe to the "thin" ideal
- **Focus on**
  - Elevating self-efficacy
  - Promoting true self-esteem
  - Demanding genuine effort
  - Encouraging autonomy ("It's your choice.")
  - Dialectic behavior therapy

## LEARN THE TERMS

- Thin ideal
- Eating disorder
- Anorexia nervosa
- Bulimia nervosa
- Binge eating disorder

## Exploring Sexual Desire

- First sexual feelings programmed by adrenal androgens
  - About age 10
- An interplay of nature/nurture heightens sex hormone levels
  - Nature (androgens)
  - Nurture
    - How we and others react to our body changes

## With whom are teens having intercourse?

- In U.S., 70% girls and 56% boys report first sex with steady partner
- 1 in 5 teens have sex outside of a committed relationship

### With whom are teens having intercourse?

- Research with Ohio teenagers engaging in non-committed sex
  - For girls, having noncommitted sex with a number of partners is a risk factor for depression.

### Is there still a sexual double standard?

- Sexual double standard: Cultural code that gives men greater sexual freedom than women
  - Stereotype suggests boys mainly want sex and girls want committed relationship
  - Research shows that both boys and girls put their highest priority on intimacy

### Interventions: Toward Teenager-friendly Sex Education

- Globally sex education is slipshod
- Parents are divided about what to say to teens about sex
- Teens report about the irrelevance of high school sex education
- Romance (or relationship) class may be an effective approach!