

Grow up

Glynis Kozma explains the ups and downs of growth spurts

“Mum, these shoes are too small now!” They can’t be; you bought them six weeks ago at the start of term. The previous pair lasted only a couple of months. Your son’s trousers look cropped; fashionable perhaps for your daughter, but not quite the same for a strapping 12-year-old boy.

Rapidly growing feet and hands are one of the first signs of growth spurts which occur anywhere between the ages of eight to 12 in girls, and 10 to 14 in boys. Rapidly increasing height is a sign that your son or daughter is about to experience puberty, as the hormones that stimulate growth also trigger

puberty. Boys can grow by as much as nine centimetres in a year, and girls are a close eight centimetres behind. Growth starts from the outside and works in: hands and feet first, then forearms and shins, upper arms and thighs, spine, then boys’ shoulders and girls’ hips. And if your son or daughter boards, you may see a huge difference in their growth over half a term.

Puberty in both sexes is earlier than ever, owing to better diet and lifestyles. But not all children develop at the same rate. Sometimes a boy of 13 will have hardly begun his growth spurt, whereas a girl may have almost completed hers by 12. Bearing this in mind, it can be hard for young people if they are ahead – or behind – their peers. On average, girls grow fastest between the ages of 12 and 13, and boys from 14 to 15. And while they are growing so quickly, they also need more calories. Be prepared for the constant requests for more food, as soon as an hour after they have eaten a huge meal. It’s easy to say, “You can’t be hungry already!” But they are.

What’s it like to be a pre-teen experiencing a growth spurt? Crashing down the stairs, eating messily, bumping into everything and everyone in the house and talking far too loudly: yes, it’s your pre-teen. You certainly know when they are at home. But wait – before you start nagging and consider this: they may be bigger but their brains are still small. When your child undergoes a growth spurt their body changes rapidly; but the part of their brain that controls co-ordination can’t keep up. This affects everything they do. Lucy told me, “My son’s tennis coach warned me that when Eddie had a growth spurt, his tennis would deteriorate for a while until his coordination adapted to his longer arms and legs and centre of gravity.” Be prepared for your super-sporty child to go off the boil for a while or even ask to give up a sport because they don’t feel so good at it any more. Playing the violin or piano may be harder for a while. On a positive note, it can be a good opportunity to suggest

they try another sport where additional height and strength are a bonus.

Because girls reach puberty earlier than boys, they can experience change from the age of eight. It can be surprising, and somewhat alarming, to see the small signs of puberty in your daughter often many years before you – and she – anticipated them. You may have thought that you wouldn’t be buying a bra for your daughter for several more years, but you’re suddenly re-thinking – fast!

If she is a boarder, waiting another six weeks or a term until she’s home again may be too long. It’s sometimes easy to think that allowing your nine or 10 year-old daughter to have a bra will propel her into womanhood too soon. But young girls are very sensitive about their changing bodies. They can be embarrassed taking off their blouses when changing for P.E or swimming when they have the merest hint of breast development. There is nothing more embarrassing for a girl who obviously needs a bra to be bouncing around in P.E without one! Bras are almost a status symbol among young girls; if your daughter is growing very slowly, a pretty cropped vest top can make her feel less isolated. Most stores’ lingerie sections cater well for young girls and your daughter may feel more comfortable being fitted by a trained assistant.

Boys’ development includes some obvious signs. Some 11 year-olds have an obvious moustache and their voices are starting to break. It can be hard for a boy who is growing fast if his friends haven’t grown much by the age of 14. Conversely, if your son is small for his age, reassure him that he will catch up.

If you are worried about your child – either because they are growing too fast too soon, or not at all – talk to the school or your doctor. In most cases it’s perfectly normal and your biggest worry will be how long those new shoes will last. ■

CHECKLIST ON GROWTH SPURTS



GIRLS:

Starts from 8-12 years

BOYS:

Starts from 10-14 years

- * Growth of up to 9cm per year.
- * Feet and hands grow first, shoulders and hips last.
- * Coordination can deteriorate until the brain re-adjusts.
- * Puberty follows or may coincide with a growth spurt.
- * Boys aged 11-14 need to consume 2,200 calories a day.
- * Girls aged 11-14 need to consume 1,845 calories a day.



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