

# Early Adolescence (12–14 years)



## Physical development

What is happening?	How can I tell?	How can I help?
<b>CHANGES IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY</b>		
<b>Participation in physical activity is changing</b>	<p>Levels of physical activity begin declining, time spent playing sports and exercising decreasing</p> <p>Becoming aware of personal physical strengths and limitations</p> <p>Able to demonstrate accuracy, consistency and proficiency in activities</p> <p>Beginning to want to gain competence in particular interest activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote or create safe environments where youth can feel comfortable trying new things (for example, without a fear of being teased for failure)</li> <li>Provide access to a variety of opportunities for physical activities that reflect the youth's needs, skill-level, ability and commitment levels</li> <li>Acknowledge that motivation is external at this stage, consider providing rewards and incentives to motivate participation (for example, hosting ceremonies to recognize the accomplishments or participation of youth in an activity)</li> <li>Support access to or provide fun, positive and encouraging experiences that can impact future healthy active lifestyle habits. Enjoyment is critical to physical development at this stage</li> <li>Provide access to activities that take into consideration barriers such as cost, equipment and transportation (for example, highlight low-cost options such as skateboarding, basketball, soccer, offer opportunities in central locations)</li> </ul>
<b>Physical fitness capacities are changing</b>	<p>Increasing cardiovascular endurance, naturally more able to sustain vigorous activity levels (for example, running)</p> <p>Natural levels of muscular strength (for example, the amount of weight that can be lifted) and endurance (for example, the number of push-ups they can do) start to reach a peak for females around age 12</p> <p>Males will experience a rapid increase in muscular strength and endurance during puberty</p> <p>Without training, flexibility begins to decline (for example, gradually less able to sit with legs extended and reach beyond toes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage youth to learn about their bodies and abilities through experiences with different activities</li> <li>Provide instruction and access to a safe environment where youth can learn about their changing abilities and establish their own healthy limits</li> <li>Activities should teach youth how to avoid and deal with injury</li> </ul>
<b>CHANGES IN GROWTH AND PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT</b>		
<b>Puberty produces a variety of physical changes</b>	<p>Physical changes occurring, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>height and weight change</li> <li>a growth spurt (more typically for females than males)</li> <li>increased perspiration</li> <li>oilier hair and skin (which often results in acne)</li> <li>growth of body hair</li> <li>growth of primary and secondary sexual characteristics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage and create open communication that is two directional and allows youth to ask questions and be provided with age-appropriate information about their changing bodies and emerging sexual characteristics. This can help youth to develop healthy attitudes about their own bodies and sexuality</li> <li>Provide or connect youth to information from a range of reliable sources (for example, pamphlets, medical professionals and websites)</li> <li>Normalize changes where possible (for example, remind youth that acne occurs for almost everyone at some point)</li> <li>Share your own experiences (for example, if you had experience being shorter or taller than your classmates)</li> <li>Establish routines and provide information about hygiene as youth develop (for example, a reminder about the need for deodorant)</li> </ul>
<b>Hormonal changes cause sleep and waking cycles to change</b>	<p>A natural tendency to stay awake and alert later at night, and have difficulty waking in the morning</p> <p>May become sleep deprived, which can contribute to moodiness and irritability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schedule activities and programs at times that are comfortable for a later sleep cycle (for example, don't hold events first thing in the morning)</li> <li>Help youth develop strategies and routines for going to sleep and waking up at appropriate times (for example, turning off the computer one hour before bed)</li> <li>Encourage youth to get a minimum of 9–9.5 hours of sleep every night</li> </ul>
<b>BODY IMAGE AND NUTRITION</b>		
<b>A sense of body image begins to develop</b>	<p>For females, the onset of puberty results in an increase in body fat, which may have an impact on body image</p> <p>Makes more social comparisons about body type</p> <p>Dissatisfaction with body types may begin to appear (negative perceptions of body image can vary for youth from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be aware that youth may have an increased sensitivity to comments about body shape that were not present in childhood</li> <li>Encourage youth to focus on the parts of their bodies that they like and can feel confident about</li> <li>Role model a healthy attitude about body image (for example, avoid disparaging remarks about your own body)</li> <li>Share your own experiences managing low body image (for example, if you were shorter than others in your class but eventually caught up in size)</li> <li>Help youth to refocus on what they can do and who they are—not just how they look</li> </ul>
<b>Interest in nutrition and healthy eating is increasing</b>	<p>May begin to express interest in managing own diet (for example, by making own meals)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide information about nutrition, which plays an important role in development (for example, check out Canada's Food Guide)</li> <li>Continue to reinforce healthy eating habits and routines (for example, involve youth directly in grocery shopping or meal preparation)</li> <li>Teach youth to manage specific individual dietary requirements, if needed (for example, if an allergy exists)</li> <li>Be a role model and lead by example (such as cooking healthy food, providing healthy options in youth spaces)</li> <li>Provide information about nutrition and being healthy alongside sport and physical activity</li> </ul>