

## Paediatric department

# Early (precocious) puberty in children

## What is precocious puberty?

**Puberty is when a child's body begins to develop and change as they become an adult.**

'**Precocious puberty**' is a medical term which means that your son or daughter has started puberty (started developing) at a very early age. The term precocious puberty is only used by doctors when a girl starts puberty before the age of 8 or a boy does before the age of 9.

In most cases there is no underlying cause (particularly in girls) – the hormones which control puberty have simply been activated earlier than they should have.

## How do you know if your child has started developing early?

The most obvious sign of puberty in girls is development of the breasts. They may also have some pubic and underarm hair. Your daughter may have had a growth spurt, have some vaginal discharge (or sometimes, periods) or monthly tummy cramps. They may also have greasy hair and spots (acne) or new body odour. You may also have noticed that your child is beginning to behave like a teenager – being a bit moody, irritable and tearful.

In boys, the main signs are developing a larger penis and testicles (also called testes or "balls"), a deeper voice and a more muscular appearance. They could develop pubic and underarm hair, greasy hair and spots (acne). They may also have a growth spurt and become more moody.

## Book an appointment for your child with their GP if

- you think these changes are happening in your daughter before they are 8 years old
- these changes are happening with your son before they are 9 years old.

Your child may be referred to a hospital-based Paediatric outpatient clinic to rule out any underlying cause.

## What causes early puberty?

It's not always clear what causes early puberty. Sometimes, early puberty runs in families.

Occasionally, early puberty can be caused by an underlying medical problem, and this would be discussed with you in clinic. Your child may need some medical tests to look into this.

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## What tests might be organised for my child?

Your GP or Paediatrician may consider organising:

- blood tests to check hormone levels.
- hand x-ray to determine likely adult height (this looks at bone maturity)
- an ultrasound scan of the tummy to look at the internal female organs (womb/uterus and ovaries)
- in certain situations, an MRI scan of the brain.

If your child's GP or Paediatrician thinks any tests are needed, they will discuss these with you and your child.

## What treatment will my child receive if needed?

Early puberty can be treated by:

- treating any underlying medical cause
- in some cases, using medication to reduce

hormone levels and pause sexual development for a few years

- if medication is recommended, the risks and benefits will be discussed with you and your child at the time

Treatment with medication is usually only recommended if it's thought early puberty will cause emotional or physical problems, such as a very short stature or early periods in girls, which may cause significant distress.

## For more information

Please visit these trusted website for more information

<https://www.speg.scot.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/6.-2019-Precocious-puberty-in-girls-Final.pdf>

<https://www.speg.scot.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/17.-2019-SPEG-Precocious-puberty-in-boys.pdf>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/early-or-delayed-puberty/>

