

## **ARE GIRLS HITTING PUBERTY EARLIER?**

Adolescence is a beautiful journey of becoming a woman from a girl. During this phase, there is marked increase in height and weight and also girl attains sexual maturation rightly known as Puberty.

Puberty is an essential component of Adolescence. The hormonal changes occurring in puberty are responsible for growth and development, increase in the size of reproductive organs like uterus and ovaries and also the appearance of signs of sexual maturation known as secondary sexual characteristics. Let's see what these characteristics are.

### **Thelarche:**

- Breast development is the first sign which often precedes growth spurt.
- The breast growth could be asymmetrical on both sides initially but this usually resolves with time.

### **Pubarche:**

- Breast development is followed by appearance of pubic hair and also hair growth in underarms.
- The hair becomes coarser with time.
- Pubic hygiene is a matter of concern during this time.

### **Menarche:**

- The beginning of menstruation starts usually within a year of Thelarche and Pubarche.
- This stage brings a lot of physical and emotional turmoil for girls.
- They need a lot of support and guidance which is our responsibility as mothers.

Nowadays girls have started showing signs of puberty as early as 8 years of age which is definitely around 5 years earlier than what it used to be about 2 to 3 decades back. It's alarming for mothers as well as girls. It becomes difficult for them to cope.

Many factors have been implicated as the cause behind this paradigm shift. Some of these factors are:

**Obesity:** The girls who have a body mass Index (BMI) above 25 are likely to have early puberty. Studies have proved a direct link between the two.

**Dietary Patterns:** Kids are consuming high calorie diet in form of fast food like burgers, chips, sugary beverages like cola and canned juices. This high salt and sugar diet loaded with empty calories plays culprit.

**Sedentary Lifestyle:** Our kids are living in an extremely competitive world where academic excellence and achievements matter a lot. Apart from this, our teenagers have their hands full of gifts of virtual world like social media and Internet. They hardly find time to exercise or indulge in physical activity. This laid back sedentary lifestyle is another contributing factor.

***Environmental Impact:*** In the past few decades, the world had witnessed a sea change in economy and globalization. But the use of chemicals and environmental pollution is undoubtedly all time high. There have been studies to prove the correlation between early puberty and environmental chemicals.

***Stress:*** Stress has become a part and parcel of our life and teenagers are no exception. Academics, social norms, parental expectations, peer pressure, body image issues ....the reasons could be many. It attributes to early puberty and further aggravates the stress.

***Genetics:*** Although most of the mothers complain that their daughters started menstruating much earlier, still by and large the maternal age of menarche does matter. Roughly it could be 2 to 3 years earlier than mother's age of menarche.

***Medical Illness:*** In some cases there are medical complications like hormonal imbalance or endocrine tumours which lead to precocious puberty.

Early puberty leads to emotional stress.

As mothers, it's your responsibility to understand the scientific basis of puberty and educate your girls. Once you start noticing the early signs, it's imperative to get her clinically evaluated as well as counseled and also guide her about the implications.