



The New Puberty: How to Navigate Early Development in Today's Girls

Louise Greenspan, Julianna Deardorff

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The coming-of-age experience has changed dramatically, with girls maturing sooner than ever. But what happens when a girl has the body of a 13-year-old and the brain of an 8-year-old? Contrary to popular wisdom, early puberty is not merely a reflection of physical changes—it's deeply psychological, too, with effects that can put a girl at higher risk for behavioral problems and long-term health challenges, such as obesity, depression, eating disorders, and even cancer.

The New Puberty is a reassuring, empowering guide for millions of parents—as well as teachers, coaches, pediatricians, and family members—by two notable experts in the field. Compiling original research and clinical experience, Drs. Greenspan and Deardorff offer practical strategies for supporting girls entering this complex stage of their lives. Readers will learn why girls are developing faster than they did a generation ago (it's not just environmental toxins); the potential physical and emotional consequences; how to tell if a girl has reached puberty early and what to do; and how to initiate and continue difficult conversations.

Impeccably researched, comfortingly prescriptive, and a timely antidote to sensationalistic headlines, *The New Puberty* provides the roadmap to help young girls move forward with confidence, ensuring their optimal health and happiness for the future.

The New Puberty: How to Navigate Early Development in Today's Girls Details

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From Reader Review The New Puberty: How to Navigate Early Development in Today's Girls for online ebook

Isabel says

Aside from the sensationalist (and, yes, alarming) examples of girls starting puberty as early as 6 years old, this book is strangely comforting. It's easy to read headlines about estrogen mimickers, increases in childhood obesity and hypersexualization of girls and think, "You're right; it *is* the end of the world as we know it, Micheal Stipe." And yet...

This book is great. It offers a comprehensive look at puberty. Lots of the information is relevant for raising an adolescent regardless of age (era) or gender, really. But then there's the stuff that relates directly to raising *girl* children in an increasingly... well... toxic environment. Toxic as far as society, environment, and lifestyle. So there's that.

But somehow, just when I'm about to slam the book shut, squeeze my eyes closed, cover my ears and pull out my hair with frustration at how the deck is stacked against adolescent girls (and the parents trying to get them through to adulthood), Greenspan dials it back and gives us comforting, solid advice for basically Best Practices. There is no perfect. There is no one-size-fits all (and this applies to children, adults, parenting and scientific answers). We can only do our best, and Greenspan offers some solid resources and decent basic philosophies to help both parents and girls through this time.

The crazy thing is, by the time I finished this book, I had a feeling of Been There, Done That. But how could I? This is the first time I've read this book. Basically, this is Part II of the journey begun with parenting books I came across while my now-tween was my future-second-child. Babies of parents influenced by philosophies of attachment parenting and wholesome lifestyle choices espoused by Dr. Sears and other baby books of almost two decades ago have become the teenagers in this book. It's a very natural followup for the bookish, attachment leaning parents who got their (our) starts in the early 2000s.

This book made sense to me and was a timely reminder that adolescence is a very close re-do of babyhood and toddlerhood. There was a lull during early childhood and now it's time to pay attention and up my parenting game. Or at least be aware that there are challenges ahead and they're healthy, normal and follow a pattern.

Topics that were eye opening: puberty has been on a trend to happen earlier for decades. This is not a phenomenon unique to the computer era. "When Herman-Giddens looked at the average age of puberty in a broad historical context by reading the studies of other researchers, the stark change became even more apparent: In 1860, girls got their first period around age 16. By 1920, the age had dropped to 14; today the median age for a girl's first period is about 12 1/2 years" (12). Greenspan basically lays out the statistics, offers several explanations and lets the reader decide what to make of it and which course of action (if any) needs to be taken. I appreciate that.

She cautions us against knee jerk reactions when she writes, "As human beings, we prefer explanations that show clear cause and effect, and when it comes to matters of health, we especially like to know that X causes Y, or that A triggers B, so we can attempt to control outcomes. But if there is one underlying message we doctors continue to glean from our own ongoing research and hear from other experts in the field, it's that the facts of the new puberty are far from rock solid" (13). I cannot express how much I appreciate this approach. I don't have to blame myself for exposing my child to soy milk, turning on too many electric lights, letting

her eat meat... whatever.

And yet, Greenspan informs us that there are *correlations* that deserve more "teasing out" until we can figure out exactly what (probably something) is going on. The "Three Most Powerful Culprits Potentially Affecting the Pubertal Process [are] Excess fat (being overweight or obese), Exposure to chemicals that disrupt healthy human biology, especially the hormone system [btw, lavender is more implicated than soy products. Who knew?] Social and psychological stressors (e.g., early childhood trauma, poor familial relationships)" (13). That's worth looking into.

Factiod: "It turns out that leptin and puberty share a special relationship, for research has found that the leptin level rises before puberty. So, having more fat cells means more leptin secretion, allowing puberty to start sooner." (15)

"Behavioral health risks associated with early puberty [include]... poor academic performance, deviant activities such as delinquency and aggression; internalizing symptoms (depression, anxiety, worry, fear, self-loathing, abdominal pains, sleep disturbances, headaches, upset stomachs, self-injury, social withdrawal)" (30). This is a list that anyone who works with or spends time around adolescent girls would benefit from being aware of. Still, these are not prescriptive descriptions of what Will Be (I feel like the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come), but only of what may happen if circumstances in childhood facilitate them. Greenspan offers clear advice on how to create a supportive environment for girls that mitigates against these negative outcomes.

Factiod: "As Julia Graber's research has shown, early maturers, particularly girls, often experience poorer quality relationships than other youth during adolescence and even young adulthood" (32). This resonated with a recent Judy Blume book I read. I think it was *Are You There God?* One well developed girl is ostracized and becomes the object of rumor. The protagonist assumes that this girl has had sex with the lawn mowing boy she herself has a crush on. This was a very peripheral part of the plot line, but the unfairness of it, the small-mindedness of the protagonist, the rush to judgement... It all made me so angry when reading the novel and sadly, it seemed very plausible. Now Graber's given us the science to back it up. Damn.

Alarming Factiod: "In 2013, researchers at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York published an analysis of 20,928 postmenopausal women that showed the taller a woman is, the greater her risk for a number of cancers, including breast, colon, and skin cancer" (36). Greenspan goes on to explain some of the possible explanations for this. They're all pretty depressing and feel fairly inevitable.

Unlike this factoid: Fewer menstrual cycles mean reduced odds of some kinds of cancer. Basically, the more estrogen flowing in our systems, the more prone we are to some cancers. Greenspan explains that cavewomen had more children and nursed longer leading to reduced cycles. So, the takeaway here is that perhaps the World Health Organization has more than just infants' health to recommend extended breast feeding for children. Hmm... (Greenspan didn't go there, BTW. It just crossed my mind. I mean, you figure if a girl hits puberty two years earlier than most and nurses her child two years longer, she cancels that one out, right?)

Another factoid for anyone working with tweens: Hormones don't make kids crazy. Life makes kids crazy. (Heh heh. Kinda like, Guns don't kill people, people kill people. But seriously, there is logic to the hormone thing.) Basically, hormones don't *create* emotions. However, they can intensify emotions. So there's that.

There's also a distinction between breast development and "true" puberty, which is signified by the onset of menarche. Only brain released GnRH which is caused by stimulation of the pituitary gland prompted

puberty. Estrogen-caused breast growth is not real puberty. (50)

Factiod: Contrary to popular belief, fat cells are not inactive. "Our total body fat mass can be thought of as our largest endocrine (hormonal) 'organ,' much bigger than our pituitary, adrenals, thyroid, and sex glands combined. That generates a multitude of substances, including enzymes, hormones, and chemical messengers, that can have a commanding role in our physiology and biochemical processes." (52-53)

Reasons to love working with middle schoolers: "However, there seem to be critical periods within which these processes [of neurogenesis] are most malleable or 'plastic,' and the pubertal transition to adolescence is believed to be one of them." (163)

And now to explain those little middle schoolers: Prefrontal cortex's chief duties are still "under construction" during the teen years. These functions include "control impulses, organize multiple tasks, set goals and priorities, practice self-control, empathize with others, make sound judgements, strategize and problem solve, control emotions, plan ahead, behave appropriately based on events, stop an activity upon completion, have insight" (169). So ELA teachers can start scaffolding this stuff, but don't beat yourself up if it doesn't seem to "take." The prefrontal cortex is "the area of sober second thought" (169), so no reason to think less of these kids if they are a bit--ah--deficient in this department for a while.

Online Eccentric Librarian says

More reviews (and no fluff) on the blog <http://surrealtalvi.wordpress.com/>

The focus of the New Puberty book is early development in girls - with examples as young as 5 year old hitting puberty (but mostly geared at the 8-9 year range). Yet ideally this is also a book for parents with young girls who haven't started showing puberty signs yet to give them an idea of what to look for and some insight into why the modern girl is hitting puberty so much earlier/younger than her predecessors. The book is extremely informative and ideal for both parents (written in a friendly and accessible way) and practitioners (many recent studies are published and put together). As a parent, I look for these types of books to be informative and yet not have all the answers - I don't want another 'fad' or narrowminded perspective on parenting. What I do need is to know what recent findings there are and have those put into perspective of our past approaches to dealing with girls hitting puberty (earlier or otherwise).

The book is broken down as follows : Part 1: Causes of Early Puberty (defining puberty, potential repercussions, and puberty prompters). Part 2: Strategies (is medicine necessary, precautionary steps, healthy habits, the brain of a developing girl, the "talk"). In effect, the "Why" and then the "what to do."

This isn't a hype book with a lot of call outs or pretty pictures. It's a very straightforward, informative, intelligent approach to the subject with the understanding that we are still learning so much about the subject (and will probably never know completely about the process of turning girls into women). And, although hitting puberty early is natural, it can also be very problematic for the girl and create issues that will need to be dealt with by parents.

Also important is that there are steps parents can take to help prevent the onset of puberty at an earlier age. The book notes that the three most powerful forces at work in early puberty deal with weight, exposure to

chemicals, and social/psychological trauma. Simply working toward a better diet at 5-6 years old could have great benefits toward discouraging the body to kick into puberty early.

This is a very good read for parents of young girls, whether or not they are seeing signs of puberty. Sometimes, parents really need an intelligent and straightforward presentation of factors that are (or may) affect the growth of their child. Especially since we are bombarded with 'answers' from relatives and media that are without basis or fact.

Reviewed from an ARC.

Lisa Harvey says

I geek out on science, so the mixture of biology, anthropology, and sociology in this book was highly appealing to me. I also appreciate the concrete tips and the overall positivity.

Kshotwell says

Very helpful book - This book addresses the 'new puberty' or the early onset of puberty. The authors set a conversational tone to discuss the science behind the changes occurring in our children at increasingly younger ages. If you are struggling to understand early puberty or have a child experiencing it, this book is a serious source for information and guidance.

Overall, I found this book reassuring. If you have questions about 3rd graders with breast buds and body hair, this is a safe and accessible book. It takes the news headlines and responds with calm and research. The authors provide useful, practical advice, and strategies for supporting a daughter (or son) through the new puberty.

Keith says

Tedious. You have to wade though an awful lot of filler to get to the content.

Ken Rideout says

First off, this book clearly establishes the fact that girls ARE entering puberty earlier in modern times than they have historically (First menstruation at age 16 in 1860, age 14 in 1920, age 12.5 in 2015). They then go on to establish clear criteria for whether your girl is abnormally early for modern times: breast budding at age 7 or younger, menstruating at less than age 10. If your girl is developing earlier than your comfort level, but not as early as these ages, then she is within the "new normal." The book is a strange blend of facts, anecdotes, fear-mongering, don't-worry-about, and common sense parenting advice.

Part I: Causes of Puberty

Broadly speaking, the authors cover three possible causes:

1. Being fat or sedentary (A girl's weight at age 3 can predict the chances of an early puberty; every point higher of BMI indicated a statistical month sooner in the onset of puberty)
2. Exposure to chemicals in the environment (No hard data on this one – the authors include it simply because people talk about it and the authors are strangely sympathetic to the idea. The authors specifically un-demonize soy and hormones given to animals but then demonize digital screens as beaming radiation right into the pineal gland (a pretty preposterous supposition IMO))
3. Social and psychological stressors (girls not living with their biological fathers are twice as likely to experience early puberty as those living with both parents). Black and Hispanic girls go through puberty 6 months earlier than whites for some reason.

Why worry about early puberty? Girls who go through puberty early do have higher rates of body-image issues, eating disorders, substance abuse, unhealthy internalizations such as depression, and even breast cancer later in life. They also tend to be shorter. The authors emphasize that early puberty may not be the cause but may be just correlated – after all, going through puberty is normal.

So called “hormonal” behavior is not caused by hormones – the hormones just exacerbate the emotions that are already there..

Part II: Strategies to Help

A fair amount of repetition ensues here with a detailed description of the cascade of events that is puberty; when and why to see a doctor about early puberty (see above). The authors also spend an entire chapter talking about brain development and how preteens and teens engage in risk taking, are more responsive to emotion, and lack some of the executive functioning that adults have. An entire chapter is spent a disturbing level of unscientific fear mongering on all the “chemicals” in our modern world that might be harming us. Although the authors do state there is no hard evidence for this they preach the “precautionary principle” (when in doubt – take it out) of acting on every media story about “bad” foods or “bad” plastics and to buy organic, etc.

A chapter on eating right says all the obvious things: less sugar, more water, less processed food, sleep more, exercise more. Then they say buy organic milk even though they tell us ALL milk is tested to be free of antibiotics in America. Also they caution again cell phone use since “scientists don’t yet know what effect they have on the developing brain”.

After several disappointing chapters, there is a gem at the end of part II: “Don’t have ‘The Talk’ - start a Conversation”. Instead of waiting for one big-time, high stakes talk about puberty, sex, and all that – keep open lines of communication with your daughter and meet her where she is at and perhaps a little glimpse into what is coming ahead. Don’t wait for the ‘right’ moment – seize the opportunity to discuss when she brings something up or bring it up yourself (e.g. if you notice some body odor – time to have a talk about body changes now!). Don’t problem solve for them –listen carefully and brainstorm with them. Model the think ahead strategy of “and what do you think will happen next if you do that?”. Don’t tell them they must use deodorant now or wear a bra right away. Start the conversation but don’t force them into habits because you are concerned other will judge you as a bad parent. Don’t blow up when she is unreasonable – her most important asset in puberty is her bond with her parents (or, as the authors put it: with her mom (but 'don’t forget Dad', they add in one of their principles).

Jennifer says

I am a child and adolescent counselor (LCSW) working in a private practice and I found this book to be a great addition to the current discussions surrounding early puberty in young girls and the associated concerns. The authors made the book very "readable" for parents and practitioner alike. Anyone that would like to have a general understanding of the current trends in this area will find "The New Puberty" to be very satisfying, it covers everything from symptoms, possible causes, cultural differences, and current research findings. As someone with a science background, I would have liked to have had better footnotes for the research, although cited studies were listed in the back of the book by chapter, there were no direct citations within the text. I received this book free from Goodreads First Reads.

Curly Carla Celebrity Readers says

[https://celebrityreaders.com/2018/08/...](https://celebrityreaders.com/2018/08/)

I didn't get a chance to finish this book but I skimmed it. My daughter developed early and I wanted to educate myself and see if there was any good advice. I was a late bloomer so I had no idea there was any reason or rhyme to early development. This book is in depth but I had a hard time focusing on the details for some reason. Maybe because the ideas seemed a bit abstract to me.

So I skimmed most if it and while I did get a better understanding of the why's of early development, I don't think I found any tangible practices for dealing with a child going through early puberty. So...I'm winging it! So far, she doesn't hate me....yet.

nicole says

When an interesting NPR piece on this book popped up in my books RSS feed, I wondered if I would be crazy for reading it when I only have an infant. It was a great resource for any puberty, not just early onset, and worked for parents of any age as there were lots of recommendations for building an early foundation of support for your daughter. I unintentionally started this on a day my husband attended a saving for college workshop, so we are definitely well-matched long term planners and our little lady will be forever rolling her eyes at us.

The writing style was clear, unpacking different issues and current research carefully and without hysteria. I appreciated the comprehensive view the authors took, with equal measure given to the emotional, sociological, and environmental components at play. I highly recommend this book, along with the companion website, to anyone with a daughter approaching or currently in this transformative stage.

Samantha Penrose says

I went in to this book with a bias towards chemical exposures, and came out of it with an understanding that, although chemical exposure is certainly not benign, there are a slew of things that affect early puberty in far more significant ways. From diet and sleep habits, to family dynamics, media influences, screen time,

poverty, and ethnicity, which in the bigger picture is related to your lot in life. Impoverished families have high stress, strained relationships, less access to healthy foods, more exposure to chemicals (both in environment and food/beauty products), etc.

We are physiologically designed to mature and reproduce faster when we are raised in difficult and unpredictable circumstances.

It's impossible to summarize everything that this book covers without rewriting the book. Expect to be schooled on neuroscience, psychology, nutrition, epigenetics, parenting, and much, much more.

I highly recommend this to anyone and everyone. I loved it, and learned lots.

And for the record, I'm the mother of three boys. No daughters.

Lauren Wallace says

"Early puberty, does not typically occur from a single toxic influence, lifestyle issue, or dietary flaw. Rather, many different environmental exposures- chemical, psychological, and nutritional- are likely interacting to accelerate maturation in some girls, bringing along with it the associated risks for health and wellbeing."
(117)

I would like to thank Rodale for providing me with an advance copy of this book!

The one thing that I really loved about this book is that anytime they stated a fact, they always backed it up with a medical study to back it. This book is filled with the author's own research in the lab and raising their own daughters; plus many other experts in the field. This book was very easy to follow and understand.

This book was a very quick read, as I read it in about a day.

I would recommend it to anyone raising girls!

Vickipedia says

I received a copy of The New Puberty through Goodreads and admittedly was a bit apprehensive diving into it since I don't fare well when reading what I thought would be a textbook. What can I say? I love fiction but I wanted to give this a chance for two reasons:

1. There is a young girl in my life
2. This fits into my personal goal of reading something out of my literary comfort zone

Five stars and here's why:

It doesn't read exactly like a college textbook and the context is quite easy to understand yet engaging. In fact, I thought it was pretty insightful.

The authors offer a variety of tips and research that I felt would come in handy for someone in my position in the near future. I now have an idea on what signs to keep an eye out for should my girl experience early puberty, how environmental factors such as home life may affect the onset of puberty, and most importantly, that puberty shouldn't be a taboo topic. I'd be interested to read any additional research/literature about it.

There are so many things about puberty in general that I never even considered, probably because it's been so long since *I* experienced that tough time!

I've already recommended this book to a few friends. It's not the ultimate bible to parenting or puberty, but it's a helpful guide to have on the bookshelf.

Beth Lorow says

I found this book very helpful. The authors do a fantastic job of explaining the various aspects of puberty in easy-to-understand terms. There's still much to learn about the causes of early onset puberty, but I'm very thankful for this helpful explanation and the resources provided that will help me with my girls as they undergo this significant life change.

Nancy Netherland says

Haunting, important, and life changing... This book surprised me and challenged some my assumptions around the decreasing age for the onset of puberty in girls.

It's empowering - great use of data to provide targeted and evidence-based change and solutions. I love that the researchers provide concrete solutions and ideas to help promote health on an individual and population basis.

I think for anyone with kids in their lives- this is a must read. For anyone parenting or helping raise girls its an essential book to become familiar with. I was just discussing this book with my daughters' pediatrician and we ended up having a fantastic conversation about not only about nutrition but the possible impact of exposure to things like flame retardants.

Like so many things- the new puberty is not merely the result of individual or family choices- but a complex blend of environmental, political, social and economic factors that requires individual and population level change.

I look forward to learning more about the policy implications and promises for population level changes in pre-adolescent health. In the meantime, I am appreciative to have such a well informed book in my parenting library.

Robin says

Informative and well-written. I would recommend the sections on brain changes and building emotional closeness for anybody who has preteens in their life. Recommended for adults.
