

# A Guide to Teenage Girls' Health and Well-Being

Adolescence is a time of big changes – physical, hormonal, emotional and psychological. While these changes are natural, they can bring challenges that, if ignored, may lead to long-term health issues, especially in young girls.

## Hormonal Changes

Puberty is when a child becomes sexually mature. It is regulated by the endocrine system and begins when the hypothalamic-pituitary-gonadal axis is activated. The hypothalamus (part of the brain) releases gonadotropin-releasing hormone, which prompts the pituitary gland (an endocrine gland) to produce the follicle stimulating hormone and the luteinising hormone. These hormones stimulate the ovaries to produce oestrogen and progesterone, triggering physical changes in a girl's body and menstruation.

For many teenage girls, menstrual cycles may be irregular for the first few years. However, extreme and persistent irregularity may indicate polycystic ovarian disease (PCOD), affecting 1 in 10 girls. PCOD disrupts ovarian function, leading to weight gain, irregular cycles, and excessive hair growth (hirsutism). It is also linked to insulin resistance, a condition where the body has difficulty processing blood sugar properly. If left untreated, this increases the risk of infertility, type 2 diabetes, obesity and heart disease. Early diagnosis through regular health checks along with lifestyle changes can manage symptoms and prevent complications.

*Ensure a balanced diet, regular exercise (30 mins/day), restful sleep (from 10 pm-6 am to maintain circadian rhythm), stress management, and good lifestyle habits.*

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## Nutrition, Weight, and Mental Health

Hormonal shifts affect skin, mood, and energy levels. Many girls experience acne, mood swings, and fatigue, which can feel overwhelming with academic stress and peer pressure. Social media often promotes unrealistic body standards, while

fast food culture normalises unhealthy eating habits, leading to nutritional deficiencies and poor bone health.

A balanced diet with calcium, protein, and whole grains is crucial for bone development and hormonal balance. Physical activity supports insulin sensitivity, weight control, stress reduction, and a sense of well-being. Many girls drop out of sports due to self-consciousness or lack of time. Encouraging enjoyable activities like dance, swimming, or yoga can make fitness a lifelong habit.

Stress, social media comparisons, and lack of sleep also increase the risk of anxiety and depression. Excessive phone use, especially at night, disrupts the circadian rhythm, impacting metabolic health and increasing the risk of non-communicable diseases. Teenage substance abuse also disrupts hormones, raising long-term reproductive and metabolic risks. A supportive environment, strong friendships, open communication, and social media boundaries can help girls build mental resilience. Encouraging digital detoxes and awareness about addiction risks is essential. If there are signs of mental health struggles or eating disorders, seek professional help.

## Importance of Health Checks

Regular health checks detect hormonal imbalances, anaemia, thyroid issues, and PCOD early for better management. Monitoring growth, menstrual health, metabolic parameters, bone health, and mental health provides valuable insights into a young girl's health. Preventive healthcare can empower girls with the knowledge and tools to take charge of their current and future health. Prioritising both physical and mental health from an early age sets the stage for a healthier, more confident adulthood.

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