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## *Preteens/Tweens: Nine to Twelve*

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**N**ot quite teens, but no longer young children, preteens embark on the journey to adolescence. This time can be met high by academic, social, mental, and physical expectations. Preteens interact in a number of separate yet related settings such as home, school, community, and sites for extracurricular activities. This can create new opportunities for identity formation and success. It can also present challenges.

### ***Physical Development***

At the beginning of this stage, growth in height and weight is slow. Even though growth is slow, children need about twice the calories and protein per pound that adults need for optimal growth and development. Many of the foods that adults stay away from such as fats and cholesterol, beef, and eggs are essential for the healthiest development. Foods high in fat are particularly important for brain development. They also need such important minerals as calcium and minerals as these items facilitate growth and development as well.

*Boys* Towards the end of this stage, as preteens' bodies prepare for puberty, growth can be very fast.

Boys' hands, arms, legs, and feet grow faster than other parts of their body. There may be hair in the pubic area, under their arms, and on their face. The voice may begin to crack as it prepares to deepen. Finally, the penis and testicles get bigger, erections become more frequent, and ejaculation may occur.

*Girls* Girls show signs of developing breasts. They may have pubic hair and hair under their arms. Some even get their first menstruation (period).

*Motor Development* Motor skills become more refined and improved. Even though young people are stronger and more agile, they need lots of repetition and practice to master certain skills.

### ***Cognitive Development: Reasoning and Problem Solving***

Thought processes and problem solving skills are more logical and intentional. Towards the latter part of this stage, thinking becomes more abstract and they can do higher order math and science problems.

### ***Social and Emotional Development: Feelings and Interaction***

Knowledge about people and situations are more advanced. They have the ability to take another person's perspective and they can "read" how someone is feeling based on nonverbal communication.

Peer interaction, friendships, extra-curricular activities, and sibling relations play a big role in kids' lives. In fact, the amount of time that parents and children is greatly reduced. This is because a great majority of their time is spent outside of the home and the context of the family in school, school-related activities, playing, and socializing.

## *Quick Facts*

- Girls' growth spurt starts around 10 1/2 and peaks at about 11-12.
- Many preteens may have pubic hairs and hair under the arms.
- Many girls may have their menstrual cycle.
- It is important to establish rules and boundaries and to consistently give consequences when they are broken.
- Suggested ideas from parents and teachers may be challenged.
- Friendships become very important.
- Even though young people spend more time with friends and in school/extracurricular activities than with the family, they still rely on parents.

### **References**

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