

February 2, 2015 article

TODAYS HEALTH FOR THE EMPOWERED WOMAN

DISCUSSING PUBERTY

My last article answering my granddaughter's health questions was met with much approval. A labor and delivery nurse and very dear friend of mine suggested that an article on how to discuss puberty with an adolescent would be helpful. My daughter, in an attempt to prepare her girls for puberty, has had discussions with them about what to expect and has even bought them books that deal with this subject in a sensitive manner. They have always had the same reaction: "yuck, why do we (girls and women) have to do that?" Well, here is my attempt at a reasonable and logical discussion to share with pre pubertal girls. First these kids are starting to think sexually—media, advertising etc. have made this more problematic. Erectile dysfunction advertisements in prime time? Tampons demonstrations after the evening news? So, I would start with this: "SEX IS SOMETHING YOU ARE, NOT WHAT YOU DO.". That being said, the question was "why do boys and girls get puberty?" I guess part of this explanation has to be a sex talk. Try to explain that loving adults want to make babies and that their babies are an extension of themselves. In order to have a baby a girl's body must mature. This will involve a rise in hormone levels (let's say chemistry changes) and that in girls this usually occurs between age 9 and 13 but body mass index that is high might accelerate the process. Puberty seems to be occurring about nine months earlier than when we were kids and is thought to be due to external forces such as movies and television. Breast budding is first and can be explained that breasts are necessary to nurse a baby. Training bra time is here. Pubic and axillary hair is next. Within two years of these signs the first menses occurs and must be explained that eggs are now becoming mature and without pregnancy the uterine lining is shed as periodic bleeding. If a girl understands these changes they need not be frightening or embarrassing. There are multiple illnesses and conditions in which puberty does not happen but are beyond the scope of this article. Most pediatricians can deal with these explanations also. A gynecologic exam is not indicated until first sexual encounter. But NOW is the time to discuss sexually transmitted diseases in a sensitive manner with emphasis on cervical cancer and vaginal warts. Both of these conditions are caused 90% of the time by the Human Papilloma Viruses 11,16,7 and 18 and are transmitted sexually and are of epidemic proportions. There are hundreds of these viruses and only four causes these diseases. "Wouldn't it be wonderful if they had a cure for cancer?" Well, there is now a vaccine that can prevent, in most cases, infection with these viruses. It is recommended to be given to girls and boys between the ages of 9 and 12 and all the way up to 26 in three shots over a six month period. A small segment of parents will say: "it will make my child think that sex has no consequence". The reality is that all adolescents think about sex and they can and should be protected against the horror of cervical cancer that kills about 12,000 women a year in the United States. It is up to you the parent to teach them morality and behavior. So, I hope this article helps. Sit down with your kids before the school nurse does and engage your child in a meaningful discussion with the iPad turned off and the music off. Above all tell them that puberty is NORMAL if not a little uncomfortable and embarrassing and they will love you for your honesty and help. Remind them that you went through it

also. As a gynecologist of over 40 years, please consider the anti-viral vaccines. I assure you never want to see the ravages of cervical cancer, especially in your loved ones.