



## Curve Lurve

# What makes breasts normal?

Breasts come in all shapes and sizes, so there are lots of different versions of 'normal'. The key thing is knowing what's normal for you. Being familiar with your breasts and getting to know how they feel at different times will help you understand what's normal for you. At your age, just looking and feeling and getting comfortable with you is the best thing you can do.

### Breasts the basics

- Breasts are mainly made up of fatty tissue.
- The main function of the breast is to produce milk for breastfeeding. They sit high on the front of the chest and extend down and around into the armpit. The breast tissue is supported behind by ligaments and the large chest muscle that extends over most of the ribs.
- The darker area of skin around the nipple is called the areola. On the areola are some little raised bumps. They're called Montgomery glands, and they're quite normal - they actually produce fluid to moisturise the nipple.
- In each breast there are a number of glands, known as lobules, which produce breast milk during pregnancy. This breast milk is carried through tubes called ducts to the nipple, ready for breastfeeding.
- The nipple is a small projection of skin, and it's there to deliver milk to babies.
- From puberty onwards oestrogen and progesterone play a vital part in regulating a woman's menstrual cycle, which results in having periods. These hormones are the reason why you may notice changes in your breasts just before your period.
- Before a period, breasts may feel heavier and fuller. They may also be tender or lumpy. After a period this lumpiness becomes less obvious or may disappear altogether, although some women have tender, lumpy breasts all the time. Many girls also have breast pain linked to their menstrual cycle.
- Everybody's breasts look different! And as mentioned before, 'normal' comes in all shapes and sizes.

## What's the deal with puberty?

- During puberty, the body starts to develop and change. This is because it has started to produce certain hormones called oestrogen and progesterone. These hormones can also affect our moods and the way we feel.
- For girls, puberty means the development of breasts and growth of armpit and pubic hair. Body shape may change e.g. hips may get wider, stomach, bottom and legs may get bigger and waist may begin to slim down. Later, periods will start and usually occur every month. Once a girl starts having periods it's possible for her to get pregnant during sex.
- For boys, puberty starts with a growth spurt in height anywhere between nine and 15 years. Later, the testicles and penis begin to grow. Sperm production begins and once sperm are produced they can be released from the body through ejaculation. Public and underarm hair also starts to grow, and body hair will become more prominent.
- The age puberty starts depends on lots of different things, such as ethnic origin, weight and the genes we inherit from our parents. Everyone goes through it, but different people's bodies change at different rates - some people start early and develop quickly, whereas others start late and develop slowly. This is nothing to worry about - whatever rate your body changes at is normal for you.
- You will probably notice that you and your friends grow in different ways. Bodies don't develop in any set order and everyone is different.

## When breasts first appear

- Girls' breasts will usually start to develop around age 9 to 11, but it's quite normal for them to start earlier or later than this. Breasts are usually fully developed by about the age of 17.
- Everyone's breasts develop at different rates, so don't worry if your friends' breasts are bigger or smaller than yours.
- If your breasts start to develop at a younger age, this doesn't mean that you'll have bigger breasts than someone who starts to develop later - nor the other way round.
- Breasts can start to develop before or after you get your first period - either way round, it's quite normal.
- Your breasts will change at different times of your life: when you have your period, if you have a baby, and when you get older and your periods stop.
- Boys have breast tissue too.

## How breasts develop

- When the breasts start to develop a small bump, called a breast bud, grows under the areola and the nipple. As your breast buds grow, you may notice tingling, aching or itching in your chest and your nipples may swell or become tender. This is all quite normal.
- The breasts get bigger and rounder as the fatty tissue and milk-producing glands inside the breasts continue to grow. The areola also gets bigger and darker and the nipples may stick out.
- Some breasts may develop asymmetrically (unevenly). This normally sorts itself out over time so don't panic.

## Feeling good about your body

### What makes a perfect body?

When your body is changing in weird and wonderful ways, like it does during puberty, it's really hard to know what's 'normal'. Many of us look to the media for guidance. We assume that the bodies we see on TV, in magazines and online are what we're supposed to look like.

Unfortunately, these bodies usually don't represent what's real, natural, normal or even healthy. In the land of celebrities and gossip magazines, girls always seem to be tall and thin, yet miraculously have big breasts, while guys are muscly and buff. In real life, very, very few people look this way. In other words, what's normal in the media in terms of body often isn't even possible for most of us.

The truth is, there's no such thing as 'the perfect body'. Airbrushing and Photoshop techniques have a lot to answer for. Even Hollywood celebrities who go on crazy diets and have personal dieticians on call 24/7 do not look the same in reality as they do in the media.

### Perfect bodies don't exist. Healthy bodies do.

While aiming for a perfect body is not a healthy thing to do, you can still aim to have one that's beautiful. So what makes a body beautiful? Well, it can be big, small, voluptuous, petite or straight-up-and-down. It can be fair, dark or any shade in between. What makes it beautiful is that it's healthy, fit and taken care of. And that is something we can all aim for - and more importantly, achieve.

### The way to a beautiful body

The things below will help you love the skin you're in... as you should!

- Regular exercise. Whether it's walking with friends, jogging, playing sport at school or doing weight-bearing exercises, get moving! It will keep you fit, healthy, and of course, more toned. Aim for 30 minutes, 3-4 times a week.
- If you're overweight or underweight, gaining or losing the kilos you need to will help you feel more positive.
- Look after your skin. That means using sunscreen, washing your face and using a moisturiser. And it means limiting your time in the sun. Spending too much time in the sun e.g. sunbaking will leave you looking like an old paper bag by the time you're 30. Not a good look.
- Eat a healthy diet. It'll nourish your body and brain and keep you at the correct weight.

## Bras: the ins & outs

### How bras can help you look after your breasts

The main purpose of wearing a bra is to give support to the breasts. Breasts are mainly made up of fatty tissue and don't contain any muscle. They're supported naturally by the ligaments and muscles behind, but wearing a bra gives them extra support and a defined shape. As you get older a bra can also help stop the breasts from drooping too.

It's a personal choice whether or not to wear a bra when your breasts are developing. It can be a good idea to wear one for support when playing sports or exercising. Most people don't wear a bra at night, but sleeping in a bra won't do any harm or stop your breasts from developing. Basically - it's up to you.

### Buying a bra

There are lots of shops that sell bras, so there are many different places to choose from when buying a bra. If you're choosing one for the first time, it may be worth going to a department store to see what styles and sizes are out there.

Many department stores also have trained bra fitters who can help you find a bra that fits you properly. They usually measure you over your clothes to get a general idea of your back and cup size - which may sound embarrassing but it can be a great help! Of course, bras vary heaps between brands, so the only way to be sure they fit is to try them on.

### How to find a well fitting bra

Just like when you buy shoes, you need to try on a bra before you buy it, so you know it fits properly. Because bra sizes vary a lot depending on the style, make and fabric, you may need to try on quite a few before you find one that's just right. Be patient! It's worth it to find the right one.

A bra fits well if:

- it's not too tight or too loose
- your breasts fill the cup of the bra without bulging over the top or out the sides
- the strap at the back doesn't cut in
- the shoulder straps don't carry the full weight of your breasts, it stays in place when you lift your arms above your head, and fits closely to your body without cutting in
- the strap round the back and the front underband lie close to your body and are at the same level at the front and back
- with an under wired bra, the underwire lies flat against your body and supports the underneath and sides of your breast without digging in or gaping

If a bra doesn't feel right, the best thing is to try another one. Try on different makes and slightly different sizes - just because a 10C bra fits in one style, this doesn't mean that size will fit in another make.

A good way to test out if the bra works for you is to jump up and down a few times, twist and stretch when you're trying it on. Does the bra stay in place? Does it stay on? Do your breasts fall out? Do the straps fall off your shoulders?

Wearing a bra may seem strange at first, but if it fits properly you won't notice it after a while. Whenever you choose to wear a bra, and whatever style, just be sure to choose something comfortable - a tight or scratchy bra will drive you crazy by the end of the day.

#### When to get a new bra

While you're going through puberty (and sometimes even after that) your breasts are constantly changing. That means your bra size will change too. If you notice your bra isn't fitting as well as it used to, it may be because your breasts have grown, you've gained or lost weight or your bra is just worn out. No matter the reason, it usually means it's time to buy a new one.

## What's normal, what's not & what you can do about it

It may come as a surprise, but all these things are normal, and nothing to worry about!

#### Breasts: different shapes and sizes

Breasts come in all different sizes and shapes. If you look around you'll see a huge variety of sizes and shapes of breasts - for example - big, round, flat, pointed, small, pear-shaped and sloping.

Breast size and shape is determined by the genes inherited from our parents. Everyone's breasts are different, and no one has breasts that are exactly the same as another person's; you shouldn't expect your breasts to look the same as anyone else's.

What can you do?

In women, breasts change at various life stages (during puberty, pregnancy, when you're breastfeeding and during menopause). Breasts will constantly change while they are developing, so if you're still growing, your breasts could end up looking quite different to how they do now. One thing that you can do to subtly change how your breasts look is to try different bra styles - this can make them look larger or smaller.

### Nipples: different shapes, sizes and colours

Nipples, as well as breasts, come in all shapes, sizes and colours. They can point up or down, be flat, be dark or pale, big or small - and can look different on each breast. Some people have nipples that get hard and stick out (become erect) when they're cold, or when they're rubbed. Others have nipples that stick out all the time.

What can you do?

There's nothing we can do to change the size, shape or colour of our nipples - they are the way they are. If you're embarrassed about having erect nipples, choose a bra that's padded at the front or try using skin coloured stick-on nipple covers.

### Uneven breasts

It's not unusual to have breasts that are slightly different sizes, or for one to sit higher or lower than the other - sometimes one breast just grows quicker than the other. This usually evens up over time. And don't worry - while it may be obvious to you, other people generally won't even notice.

What can you do?

There's nothing much you can do about uneven breasts. Most differences will even out as you get older, and a good bra will help make any differences between breasts less obvious, so speak to an expert bra fitter

### Inverted nipples

Some people have nipples that are inverted (turned inwards). These are quite normal, and can be like that from birth or occur as the breasts are developing. If you've always had inverted nipples, that means it's normal for you and nothing to worry about. Sometimes inverted nipples will stick out if they are rubbed, and they may eventually stick out once the breasts have finished growing - or after childbirth and breastfeeding.

What can you do?

While having inverted nipples is quite normal, you could try a nipplette if it bothers you. This is a thimble-like device worn for a while that can help train the nipples to stick out.

### Hair around the nipples

Some people have a few hairs growing around their nipple and areola. Once again, this is completely normal and nothing to worry about.

What can you do?

If you're bothered by hair around the nipple you can carefully cut it off close with small scissors. This is better than plucking or shaving the hair, which can cause infection.

#### Stretch marks

Girls who have breasts that develop and grow very quickly may get stretch marks. These are red spoke-like lines that appear on the skin. Lots of girls get them during puberty, and they can also appear during pregnancy. During puberty, stretch marks on the breasts and body are very common, and over time they'll usually fade to match the colour of the rest of the skin.

What can you do?

Nothing much can be done to stop stretch marks appearing, especially if your body develops quickly. Keeping the skin well moisturised may help. The red marks will fade over time to match the natural colour of the skin.

#### Tenderness and pain

You may experience tingling and an aching feeling in your chest when your breasts are developing. Changing hormones can also make breasts feel tender, painful or sore a week or so just before your period starts, and oral contraceptives can also cause these feelings. Luckily, not everyone experiences breast tenderness.

What can you do?

If you feel tenderness or pain in your breasts that doesn't go away, go and talk to someone about it. Your mum, school nurse or GP (local doctor) will be able to help.

#### Smooth or lumpy breasts

It's normal for breasts to feel either smooth or lumpy, or to feel different around the time of your period and settle down again when it's over. While breasts are growing, lumps may also develop due to normal changes in the breast tissue. Very occasionally lumps are a sign of a benign (harmless) breast condition, which may need to be checked out by a doctor.

The most common benign lump as the breasts are developing is known as a fibroadenoma. A fibroadenoma is a solid lump of tissue, usually around 1 to 3 cm in size, that feels smooth and moves easily under the skin. They are usually painless, though sometimes they can feel tender or even painful. They're very common and don't usually need any treatment once they've been checked out by a doctor.



What can you do?

If you find a lump in your breast that you are worried about, do go and visit your doctor. Although it's very unlikely that there's anything wrong, the doctor will be able to check it out and should put your mind at rest. Don't forget that you can request a female doctor or the practice nurse if this will make you feel more comfortable. Consultations with doctors are confidential, even if you live in a small country town or see your family doctor.

### Cysts

Some girls may develop a cyst or cysts, which are fluid-filled sacs within the breast. They can be round or oval lumps, and feel either firm or like a soft grape or a water-filled balloon.

What can you do?

Cysts can change or remain the same over time, and may increase and decrease during the menstrual cycle. While cysts can be painful, they are normal. If you have a cyst and it is concerning you, have a chat to with your doctor.

### Extra breasts and nipples

A small number of people have an extra breast or pair of breasts. These are known as accessory breast tissue and usually occur in the lower armpit. They're often present from birth, though sometimes can appear during puberty. Also, some people have an extra nipple or nipples, which are usually below the breast or above the belly button.

Accessory breast tissue and extra nipples can often cause anxiety and embarrassment, but they are actually quite normal. They are not a health concern and don't need to be removed. However if they bother you later in life you could explore surgical options.

What can you do?

If you have accessory breasts and/or extra nipples you may feel embarrassed and worried about them. You also may notice normal changes (such as a heavy feeling and tenderness) in the accessory breast as well as in your natural breasts when you have your period. If this is upsetting or uncomfortable, talk to your doctor or school nurse to get some advice or support.

### Excessive growth

A small number of girls experience excessive growth of breast tissue during development where the breasts grow large and out of proportion to the rest of the body. This is known as breast hypertrophy. It's not known what causes this, but it's thought that it may be due to increased sensitivity to hormones. Girls with breast hypertrophy often feel embarrassed and it can also cause physical symptoms such as backache.

Are you a teenager?

What you can do?

Dieting and losing weight won't help reduce the size of the breasts if you have breast hypertrophy. If you have any concerns do go and talk to your GP. If as an adult your breast is size still concerns you, you could explore surgery.

## Be breast aware

Your breasts will change throughout your life. Being familiar with your breasts and getting to know how they feel at different times will help you understand what's normal for you.

At your age, just looking and feeling and getting comfortable with who you are is the best thing you can do.

### Getting advice

If you have any questions or worries about your breasts, talk to your mother, someone in your family, teacher, school nurse or GP.



*together we can make a difference®*

[www.mcgrathfoundation.com.au](http://www.mcgrathfoundation.com.au)