KNOW YOURSELF

PUBERTY
For Adolescents
A number of people and organizations have given their input in preparing the *Nijeke Jano* or "Know Yourself" series booklets. This booklet on Puberty is one of four adolescent reproductive health booklets prepared on the basis of information compiled by the Family Health Research Project of ICDDR,B. The other booklets are on *New Feelings, New Passions, Preventing Risks to Our Future,* and *Marriage and Family Health.* The Bangladesh Center for Communication Programs prepared this booklet with financial assistance from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and in collaboration with the following organizations:

- Family Health Research Project, ICDDR,B
- NGO Service Delivery Program (NSDP)
- UNFPA, UNICEF and UNAIDS
- Focus on Young Adults
- Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC)
- BCC Unit, Directorate of Family Planning

A specialist committee with representatives from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, educational institutes and various other non-government organizations met to review the content. The English version was produced with technical assistance from the Johns Hopkins University/Center for Communication Programs (JHU/CCP). We express our gratitude to all who have made valuable contributions in writing, preparing and reviewing this booklet.
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INTRODUCTION

As you know, there are various stages in a person’s life. The period between the time you are born and age 10 is known as childhood. The next period is adolescence, commonly defined as between ages 10 and 19. At this time in Bangladesh, boys are called "kishor" and girls are called "kishori". Puberty is the period during adolescence when boys and girls reach sexual maturity. This is approximately 12 to 13 years of age for girls and 13 to 14 for boys.

During adolescence, some boys and girls grow up fast, while others grow more slowly. You should not get anxious about how fast you grow up. Growth rates are different for different people. A person’s rate of growing up depends on characteristics inherited from parents, hormones, and nourishment of the body.

There are many physical changes during adolescence. Boys grow taller, their shoulders broaden, their voices deepen, and they start growing pubic and facial hair. Girls also grow taller and grow pubic hair, and their bodies change shape as their breasts and hips develop. All of these are signs of growing up.

The adolescent period is very important in a person’s life. Boys and girls have emotional changes as they become more aware about what it means to become an adult. They must address doubts and dilemmas and may become impatient or restless. Adolescents have some feelings for the first time and feel these emotions strongly. Sometimes adolescents may feel depressed and at other times filled with delight.
Some adolescents become beauty conscious and want to wear nice clothes and take special care of their appearance. Some try to attract attention while others may be shy and feel uncomfortable in front of others. These are all normal ways for adolescents to act, depending on the individual. Some of the habits adolescents form will change when they get older and some will remain for the rest of their lives. It is an important time to ask a lot of questions and learn to make good decisions.

Adolescence is an age of curiosity. During this time you may feel like knowing various things about your own body and relationships between males and females. When you want to know something or face a problem, you may not feel comfortable discussing these things with your parents. You may prefer to discuss them with your friends, but your friends may tell you rumors they have heard and may not have the correct answers.

This booklet contains questions, which were collected from adolescents like you. It was written to answer your questions. Besides this booklet, there are three similar booklets called New Feelings, New Passions, Preventing Risks to Our Future and Marriage and Family Health. If you read all these booklets it will be easier for you to understand the reproductive health issues you will face during adolescence. We hope that these booklets will help satisfy the curiosity of adolescents like you.
What are the things we should do to maintain good health?

The body grows fast during adolescence. This growth occurs between approximately 10 and 19 years of age. During this time, you should eat lots of food containing protein and vitamins for growth. The height and structure of a girl's or boy's body depends on nutrition, along with characteristics inherited from parents. A young person will normally grow to his or her full potential if he or she eats a balanced and nutritious diet.

Therefore, to remain healthy, you should have a sufficient quantity of nutritious food, like dal, fish, vegetables, fruits, egg, milk, meat, gur (molasses) and rice. In addition to eating nutritious food, you should also drink plenty of safe water and exercise regularly.

Why do I feel unwell and weak?

There may be several reasons why you feel weak, such as anemia, malnutrition, or various diseases. If you feel weak or unwell, you should eat properly, rest, and perhaps exercise regularly. If you continue to feel weak, you should consult a doctor or health worker.
CLEANLINESS

Keeping neat and clean is an important factor during adolescence.

During this time boys and girls begin to sweat more and their skin becomes oily. The sweat may cause odor, especially under the arms. The odor goes away if you bathe regularly with soap.

Your private parts (genitals) have to be cleaned everyday in the way arms, legs, eyes, ears, nose, hair, and nails are kept clean. For this reason it is necessary to bathe with clean water and soap everyday, keep your genital area clean, wash your hands and face, and wear clean clothes.

Some of you may find pimples or acne appearing on your face. Most will be small and will disappear. Pimples should not be touched or squeezed. Pimples occur due to hormonal changes. Pimples may also appear if the face remains too oily, during times of great anxiety or stress, or if you have a nutritional deficiency. It will help your skin if you eat lots of fruits and vegetables, drink plenty of water, and keep your face clean. Wash with soap and wipe properly. It’s important to wash your face gently. Scrubbing can irritate skin and increase acne. Some adolescents get acne if they eat certain kinds of food. If you find that you have more acne when you eat certain foods, then stop eating those foods to decrease your acne. If pimples leave a lot of spots on the face, then consult a doctor or skin specialist.
Adolescents like you have questions about their own bodies. You may want to know what is inside your body. It is good to want to know about your own body and there is nothing to be ashamed of.

You know that for pregnancy to happen, both a man and a woman are required. The parts of the male and female anatomies that are involved in the process of a female getting pregnant and giving birth to a child are called the "reproductive system".
Male reproductive system

There are many parts of the male reproductive system. Among these, some parts can be seen from outside and some parts are inside the body and cannot be seen from outside.

At the bottom of a boy’s abdomen, between his legs, there is a hanging sack which is known as the "scrotum". There are two round testicles or testes hanging inside this sack. The penis hangs in front of the scrotum sack. When a boy reaches puberty, around the age of 13 or 14, sperm forms in the testicles. Normally, sperm production continues for the rest of a male’s life.

In a boy’s lower abdomen, special glands produce a thick, slippery fluid known as "semen". When sperm is formed inside the testicles, it travels through a tube that carries it to mix with the semen. When a boy reaches puberty, this semen containing sperm comes out through the penis if he is sexually aroused. At this time, if his sperm meets with a female’s ovum after sexual intercourse, the woman may become pregnant.

The penis is used for both urination and for sexual intercourse. Though semen and urine come out through the same passage, they don’t come out together. Under normal circumstances, the penis is small, soft and flexible, but it becomes firm and erect when sexually aroused. The shape and size of the penis are not the same for everyone.
Female reproductive system

There are many parts of the female reproductive system. Some can be seen from the outside. However, there are other parts inside the body which you cannot see from the outside. For example, inside a girl's lower abdomen there are two sacks for ova (eggs). These two sacks are called "ovaries". After a girl reaches puberty, usually at 12 or 13 years of age, an ovum (one egg) matures each month inside one of the ovaries.

There is a uterus in the lower abdomen between the two ovaries. Menstrual blood is formed in the uterus and it is here that the baby grows inside the mother. Canals called "fallopian tubes" connect the ovaries to the uterus. After an ovum matures, it travels through the fallopian tube to the uterus.

The entrance to the uterus is called the "vagina". It is the opening to the exterior of the body. The vagina has several functions. For example, every month menstrual blood comes out through the vagina. During sexual intercourse, the male's penis enters the vagina and may release sperm. During childbirth, a baby is delivered from the mother's uterus and comes out through the vagina.
Why is there discharge from the vagina? What should I do if this happens?

When a girl becomes an adolescent, a kind of white or yellowish discharge may come out of the vagina. The amount of discharge may be large or small and this is a normal phenomenon.

There may be two types of discharge: dry and sticky, or moist and watery. Since vaginal discharge is normal, there is no need to be worried about it, nor to seek treatment for it.

If there is a large quantity of smelly green or yellow discharge, there may be some infection in the vagina or uterus. Sometimes there may also be fever, abdominal pain, itching, or irritation. In such cases, a doctor should be consulted.
My friend Shamon and I are the same age. Why does he still look younger? Among 13 and 14 year-old boys and girls, why do the girls look older?

Girls generally experience sexual maturity and rapid growth at age 12 or 13, while boys experience it at 13 or 14 years of age. Some boys and girls grow quickly, while others grow more slowly. For some, this growth begins early, while for others it starts late. That is why one boy or girl may look younger than another boy or girl of the same age.

During adolescence, boys and girls have several significant body changes. These changes are caused by hormones. Hormones are chemicals produced in the body. Both boys and girls have hormones, but they have different amounts of different hormones and that is why the changes are different.

Both boys and girls grow more hair during adolescence. Boys can grow a beard and mustache and will have more hair on their chests, underarms, genitals, arms, and legs. In general, the beard and mustache grow two or three years after the growth of underarm and genital hair. Body and facial hair do not grow equally for all boys, and having more hair is not a sign of manliness or strength.

During adolescence, girls also have increased hair growth on their genitals, underarms, arms, and legs.
Girls

How will I know when I have grown up?

Between the ages of 10 and 14, a girl's body changes. For example: height increases, breasts and hips begin to develop, menstruation begins and hair grows in the underarms, arms, legs, and genital areas. Girls will notice an increase in overall body fat. Generally, menstruation, (described in the next section) happens one or two years after breasts begin to develop. These are the signs of physical maturity for a girl.

Sometimes younger girls have bigger breasts than older girls. Why?

The physical structure of each and every person depends upon his or her inherited traits from parents, hormones, and nutrition. The size of a girl's breasts may be small or big and girls develop at different rates. For some girls the breasts develop early while for others they develop later. There might be a slight sensation of itching or pain when breasts are growing.

Why does a girl of 13 or 14 years of age have to wear a bra and orna?

When breasts develop, girls wear a bra and orna (piece of cloth worn with the dress to cover the breasts). They wear an orna because they are taught by society that it is not good to show the shape of their breasts in public.
Menstruation

Menstruation is a normal phenomenon in a girl’s body and an indication of normal growth. Menstruation can begin anywhere between 12 and 13 years of age and continues until a woman is between 45 and 49. Some girls start menstruating earlier while others start later and this is normal. Under normal circumstances, menstruation takes place every 28 days and lasts for 4 to 6 days. Once a girl reaches puberty and starts to menstruate, it is possible for her to become pregnant. Menstruation is nothing to be afraid of, ashamed of or embarrassed about.

Why do we have menstruation? Why don’t boys have it?

Every month, a woman’s uterus releases menstrual blood. Since boys don’t have a uterus like girls do, they do not menstruate.

Why does menstruation occur?

Every month, a wall or membrane of blood is formed in the uterus to provide a place to hold and nurture an embryo. (An embryo is created when a man and a woman have sexual intercourse and a sperm fertilizes an ovum).

But if there is no embryo there is no need for this membrane and the membrane sheds and the blood comes out through the vagina.

Menstrual bleeding is not caused by injury or illness. Menstruation is the proof that a girl is growing normally and is capable to becoming pregnant.

Monthly cycle

(Day 1) The first day of menstruation

(Day 5) Last day of menstruation

(Day 14) The ovum comes out of the ovary (ovulation)
Menstruation is a normal process. It is nothing to fear. However, many girls are frightened when they first have their menstruation because they have not experienced it before and may not have heard about it. If a mother or other female, like an elder sister or sister-in-law, tells a girl about menstruation before she starts menstruating, then she will be prepared. If a girl is prepared, then she will be less fearful when it happens.

Most females feel that menstruation is a nuisance. However, it is a fact of life. It is an indication that a girl is growing up in a normal way and has acquired the capability of becoming pregnant. This bleeding usually begins when a girl is 12 or 13 years old and continues until she is between 45 and 49 years old.
Some of my friends have started menstruating, but sometimes their menstruation happens irregularly, once every few months. Is this normal?

When girls start having their menstruation sometimes it is irregular. This is because their bodies are adjusting to hormones during puberty. In some months they may have regular menstruation, while in other months they might not have it at all. The amount of menstrual blood may also vary. After a few years, for most girls, these irregularities disappear.

What should you do during menstruation?

You should use clean cloths, cotton, or sanitary napkins to make sure that the menstrual blood does not stain your panties. These should be changed after every three to four hours. There are various sizes of panties available. These can be worn with the cloth or cotton, which absorbs menstrual blood. If the same cloth is to be re-used, it should be washed with soap every time and dried in the sun. During menstruation you should bathe regularly, wear clean clothes, eat nutritious food – especially food with protein – and lead a normal life.
At first, you may worry that menstrual blood will seep out or leak. You may even feel afraid to stand up. Changing the cloth, cotton or sanitary pad every few hours and making sure that they are placed properly can prevent leaking. To wear the cloth or cotton properly be sure to use the proper size of panties.

Menstrual blood is formed in the uterus and it is not impure. But, after coming out of the body, it may come in contact with bacteria. Therefore, a sanitary napkin, cotton or properly washed cotton cloth and panties should be used during menstruation. The genitals should be washed with soap and clean water and dried each time the napkin or pad is changed.

It is common for girls to have pain in the abdomen or headaches during menstruation. If this happens, rest, apply heat with a hot-water bottle and take light exercise. If the pain is severe, then take a pain-relieving drug according to a doctor’s or health worker’s advice.

I have heard that you should not have fish during menstruation because it causes a bad smell in the blood. Does that really happen if I eat fish?

Menstrual blood does not have a different smell. Eating fish has no effect on the smell of blood. Any dried blood will smell after some time. To prevent odor from developing, change the cloth or pad every three to four hours and keep clean.

Many of you have been told you should not have fish, meat, or eggs during menstruation. That is not correct. Rather, have all sorts of nutritious food during this time.
Boys

Girls experience physical changes between 12 and 13 years of age. Do boys also do that? How do I know whether a boy of my age is experiencing bodily changes?

Usually the physical changes in a boy start occurring at 13 to 14 years of age. For example, weight increases, height increases, shoulders become broader, genitals develop, and muscles grow and strengthen. Also, a boy begins to grow a beard and mustache, and his voice changes.
WET DREAMS

When a boy is 13 to 14 years of age, his semen gland starts forming semen. When the semen comes out during sleep, it is known as a "wet dream". Wet dreams are an indication that a boy is reaching manhood. This is a normal process. Sometimes this is related to sexual dreams or fantasies.

Some boys will not have wet dreams and that is normal also.

Semen is formed inside the body and it comes out in the normal process. There is no way of keeping the semen inside the body. One also does not lose physical strength because of wet dreams.

Wet dreams are common during puberty and gradually become less frequent as you become an adult.

What should you do when you have wet dreams?

Wet dreams are a normal phenomenon, not a disease. Therefore, there is no treatment. Wet dreams do not cause any harm to the body nor make the body weak, and there is no need to worry about this phenomenon.
Are wet dreams caused by excessive hard work?

There is no relationship between excessive hard work and wet dreams.

I have heard that sperm is formed from a boy's blood. Is it correct?

Neither sperm nor semen are formed from blood. Sperm is formed in the testicles of boys. Formation of sperm begins from the age of 13 to 14 and it continues for a male's whole life. A male can never run out of sperm. There is no reason to worry if you have wet dreams. Many boys feel embarrassed when they get their pajamas wet due to wet dreams. There is nothing to be concerned about. It happens to almost all boys, and this will not become a barrier to your growing up.

At this age, it is normal for the penis to sometimes become erect. Usually the penis becomes erect if a boy is sexually aroused, but sometimes it just happens. During puberty, erections may surprise and embarrass a boy. However, as a boy grows older, he learns to control thoughts about sex and control erections.
When adolescents start growing up, why do they become isolated from their parents or other family members?

When a child is born, she or he is completely helpless, both physically and mentally. Parents and other family members look after her or him. She or he goes through many mental and physical changes and passes into adolescence. During this process, adolescents start to consider themselves adults and want to do what adults do. Most parents have difficulty allowing their adolescents independence. That is why, in many families, there is some distance created between adolescents and adults.

In addition to physical changes, you go through some emotional changes. You have a lot of questions, confusion and dilemmas, eagerness and restlessness in you during this time. You become conscious about your body, appearance, clothes, and behavior. Your temperament changes very frequently. You may begin to consider yourself as an adult and expect that others should also consider you as an adult. You want to be free and independent and may want to do whatever you like to do.
If thoughts and problems can be shared with parents or other family members and a friendly relationship maintained, then a lot of problems can be avoided. Try to maintain patience and consider the consequences of your actions.

During adolescence, you discover many entertaining elements in your surroundings, like new friends, music, drama, novels, cinema, games, etc. During this time, it is important that you mix with friends. Through this interaction you become oriented to social life and learn to build relationships with others. Some parents are anxious that adolescents might become inattentive to their studies or get into trouble. Unlimited association with friends can be harmful towards studies and other duties at home.

Adolescence is a time of change for you. You have some of your own thoughts and desires and want to apply them. You may dislike the instructions or advice of your parents at times. You may think that your parents do not understand your thoughts, desires, and feelings. Sometimes you feel uncomfortable when parents disagree with you, but you also have to keep in mind that parents are your closest supporters and they are concerned for your welfare.

Parents have had many real life experiences. They know that there are not only good things in society, there are a lot of bad things as well. You need your parents' guidance when growing up. Their suggestions and advice will help you become established in life, follow the right track and build a happier life for yourself. Therefore, if you talk freely with your parents or another trusted adult about your problems, then you will be better able to deal with them.
Social

When my Mom forbids me to go somewhere, I feel very annoyed. Why doesn’t she understand? Why does Mom suspect me for nothing?

I used to play on the street, now I cannot. I asked my parents, "Why can’t I play outside anymore?"

When a boy or girl is an adolescent, he or she is introduced to many new things. Adolescents go through physical and emotional changes and they want to do as they wish. Parents give them advice and sometimes restrict them so that they do not make mistakes in their lives. If adolescents can freely discuss everything with their parents or other trusted adults at this time, then many of their problems may be solved.

During this time parents become more conservative about their daughters because they are concerned about security and reputation. At this time, girls face more hindrances and restrictions in moving around freely and in selecting girl/boy friends. Parents are extra cautious during this time so that their daughters do not fall victim to sexual abuse.

Furthermore, boys and girls are often not seen as equal and are not treated in the same way in our country. Girls are victims of this discrimination in many ways. Differences in attitude of the parents and other family members toward boys and girls are observed more during adolescence. It is often seen that girls have a lower social position than boys. If they both get the proper opportunity, then both boys and girls can perform equally well in life.

Those of you who are adolescents, it is your responsibility to discuss everything openly with your parents, brothers, and sisters, or others in the family to whom you feel close. If you do not agree with your parents at first, the issues can also be resolved through discussion. Discussing your concerns will put an end to the doubts you have in your mind and will help you maintain a good relationship with your parents.
Teasing, is it alright? Is it really fun?

Sometimes some people tease others in the street and in front of schools and colleges. Usually boys tease girls and sometimes girls also tease boys. However, more often women and girls fall victim to this type of behavior.

If you were a girl, you probably would not like to be teased and would feel uncomfortable and insulted when teased.

If someone tries to tease you, you should walk away as quickly as you can and ignore the teaser. If the teasing continues, seek help from trusted adults and friends.
SEXUAL ABUSE

Sometimes adolescent boys and girls, especially girls, have to face unpleasant sexual harassment, such as comments or physical touch, from boys or men in the streets, buses, and other places. In extreme cases, a man or boy forces a girl or woman to have sex (this is called "rape").

Anyone can fall victim to sexual abuse. Young boys or girls face this situation. Sexual abuse is sometimes carried out by strangers, but more likely by acquaintances, neighbors or relatives. Usually the abuser resorts to scaring, alluring, pressuring or threatening the young person to keep quiet about whatever happened. In such cases, take care to protect yourself and disclose this to a trusted adult, such as a parent, teacher, or health worker. Remember that the person who abuses is at fault, not the person who has been abused.

To help safeguard yourself from sexual abuse, you should not mix with or go out with anyone alone, rather go in a group. If you know about somebody who is an abuser, or you suspect someone, then do not talk or go out with that person alone.

After falling victim to sexual abuse, many young people go through mental torment, lose self-confidence, and some cannot get back to normal life. If anyone among you faces something like this, then you should console that person and express your sympathy so that she or he is able to overcome the situation. Always remember that the person who abuses is the one to blame.
How can you save yourself from sexual abuse?

1. Think carefully before accepting an offer of help or a ride from anybody showing unusual interest.
1. Do not make close relationships with anybody immediately if you are attracted to him or her.
1. Do not go out with any unknown male or female alone.
1. Avoid being alone with people whose behavior or attitude makes you uncomfortable.
1. Be cautious about physical closeness with peers, older individuals, close relatives, or neighbors.
1. Report any incident to an adult you can trust.
1. Do not move about alone, rather go in a group.
1. Discuss any questions or problems with your parents or a trusted adult.
1. If you fall victim to sexual abuse or rape or fear this will happen, inform a parent, trusted adult, or friend, rather than remaining silent.
1. Report to a parent or trusted adult about sexual abusers, so that everyone stays away from this type of person and to ensure so that the abuser is punished.
1. Carefully consider who your trusted adults should be. Confide only in adults who you are certain are looking out for your best interests and will keep your discussions confidential, or will act only if you agree.
Many girls face this kind of problem. Just because a person is educated does not necessarily mean that they won’t try to take advantage. This type of conduct is a kind of sexual abuse. It can take place anywhere, such as a street, bus, workplace, or even at home.

An educated relative of a friend of mine laid his hands on her. How could an educated person do this?

Sometimes people very close to you can also do this. Young boys and young girls can become victims of sexual abuse. The abusers often threaten the victims so that others don’t come to know. If something happens, a young person should talk to a parent or trusted adult about the matter.

What is to be done if someone falls victim to sexual abuse?

1. Tell the abuser to leave you alone, and avoid the person.
2. Report it to your elder brothers/sisters, parents or a trusted adult such as a teacher or health worker about it.
3. Never meet that person alone again.
4. Do not consider yourself at fault for what has happened.
Where do I go to learn more or for health care services?

If you have more questions after reading this booklet, or you want to know something specific, talk to someone you trust and who you think can tell you about these things. This person may be an elder sister, elder brother, someone in the family, teacher, or health worker. You can learn more about adolescent reproductive health by asking them questions.

In case you need any advice or health care, go to one of the various popular NGO clinics, family welfare centers, Smiling Sun Clinics, BRAC Sushasthya Clinics or Marie Stopes Clinics. Find the right person, ask questions and get services, if required.