

Points to remember

Puberty describes the stage in an adolescent's life when the body's reproductive organs begin to function.

Other essential changes relate to that one change. For a boy, this includes fast growth in height and muscle, the voice breaking, and hair appearing on the face and other body parts.

The principal sexual organ in both men and women is the brain which controls all the other reproductive organs as well as the way we think and feel. This is different in men and women.

The male reproductive organs are held outside the body. The testicles produce millions of sperm every day at a temperature cooler than the rest of the body. They are insulated by the scrotum in which they hang.

The brain controls the reproductive function through 'chemical messengers' called hormones, which travel through the blood stream. The receiving organs have receptors, which take hold of the hormones as they pass.

The hormone testosterone is made in the testicles. Testosterone controls sperm production and the development of male characteristics. It in turn acts on the brain, affecting the way a man thinks and feels.

It takes between two and three months for sperm to mature. There are about two to three hundred million of them in each ejaculate. The rest of the seminal fluid is largely composed of a protective fluid made in the prostate and seminal vesicles.

A healthy man keeps the capacity to father a child for the rest of his life. A healthy woman becomes less fertile as she grows older, and ceases to be so in her late 40's or early 50's.

At maturity, the sperm and egg cells have 23 chromosomes each, ready to fuse into one new cell of 46 chromosomes at conception.

Boys may experience wet dreams or nocturnal emissions when seminal fluid is ejected spontaneously during the night. This is the body making sure that everything is in running order and is nothing to worry about.