

Are boys growing up too fast?

Boys in the U.S. now start puberty as much as two years earlier than they did several decades ago, and scientists are puzzling over the reasons and consequences. Doctors tracking the development of some 4,000 young males found that African-American boys tend to begin puberty at 9, while white and Hispanic boys begin at 10. Previously, male puberty was thought to begin between 11 and 12. The findings mirror research that shows girls are developing breasts earlier than in previous generations, a trend

possibly caused by obesity and exposure to estrogen-mimicking chemicals. Obesity is less likely to be a factor for earlier male puberty, but changes in diet, exercise, and chemical exposure could play a role. The long-term medical effects of earlier maturity—which might include a heightened risk of testicular cancer—may not be as significant as behavioral ones. “There is already a tremendous gap between sexual maturity and when the brain matures, and it’s probably getting ever greater,” study author Marcia



Getting an earlier start on puberty

Herman-Giddens of the University of North Carolina tells *The Wall Street Journal*. That could make younger boys more prone to take the kinds of risks that older teenagers often do.