Dear Alice,

I feel that I do not fit in at all. I am a thirteen-year-old boy who has not yet hit puberty. I am also uncircumcised. When I am in the locker room, I am the only one without hair under my armpits. My dad tells me that puberty will come soon enough, but I'm tried of waiting.

Answer

Dear Reader,

It is hard to feel different. Your dad, however, is right. You will reach puberty. In boys, puberty begins between the ages of nine and sixteen. So although you feel frustrated waiting, and you feel different from your peers, your body sounds as if it's on a normal timetable.

Puberty is a pretty gradual process. The first changes usually aren't seen with your eyes. They involve the chemicals in your blood called hormones. As your body begins to produce greater amounts of these hormones (testosterone, in particular), you will begin to see signs of puberty. Here are some of the things you'll notice:

- Hair will begin to grow in new places: in your underarms, as you mentioned, as well as above your penis, on your chest, in the facial area (beard and mustache), and on your arms and legs.
- Your penis and testicles will start to increase in size. Your penis will grow longer, and your testicles will get heavier and hang lower. You may notice that you are getting erections more often.
- While your penis and testicles are growing, the machinery inside your testicles will be kicking into gear as well. You may wake up sometimes with wet underpants. It's not pee, though. It's ejaculate, sperm, and seminal fluid. This is called a "wet dream" (in technical terms, a nocturnal emission).
- Your voice will begin to change, growing deeper. During this time, you might find that your voice occasionally cracks, switching from its new low register into a high-pitched squeak.
- Your skin will become oilier and more prone to pimples and blackheads (acne).
- You'll notice that you sweat more, and that your body has a stronger smell.
- At some point, you'll have a growth spurt during which you'll become considerably taller than you've been. Your muscles will get bigger, and your shoulders will grow broader.
- Some boys worry because their breasts (yes, men have "internal" breasts) grow and/or
become tender during puberty. This is very common, and almost always goes away on its own within a year or two.

- You may notice some emotional changes. It's common to feel self-conscious and sensitive, and you might feel happy one minute and angry the next.

You also mention that you aren't circumcised. You probably already know this, but whether someone is circumcised or not doesn't change when puberty begins. However, you might ask your dad or an older brother (if you have one) when they started puberty ? began to get a beard and mustache, or grow hair on their arms and legs ? because sometimes the timing of puberty seems to be about the same within a given family. Also, if you still feel different because you're not circumcised, you can tell yourself (or others), if you are in the United States, that most boys and men outside of the U.S. look just like you do, so it's really the other guys that look "weird." After you go through puberty, you may feel more similar to your peers than different. If you still feel different, and if it bothers you, you have the possibility of being circumcised ? but if you do, you'll lose part of what makes you special.

It may be cold comfort and hard to believe, but lots of other boys are in the exact same spot that you are in. Plus, the guys who started puberty early usually feel worried that they don't fit in, either!

Alice!
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