H ave you ever wondered why your body is changing or why you have not yet developed breasts or pubic hair like your friends? Do not get worried. If you haven’t noticed any body changes, be patient, yours too will come at the right time.

Young Talk visited Iganga and Kamuli districts and some of you shared stories of your changing bodies. Read on!

Hadijah Mugonza, P7, 15, Busota PS Kamuli says:

“I started menstruating when I was 13 years. I got worried. I thought something had cut my private parts. I told my step mother. She said it was a normal body change for girls. She gave me pieces of cloth to pad myself. I dig to get money for pads.”

Kamanda Ibra,15, P7, Bulubandi PS, Iganga says:

“When my voice changed, I thought I was developing cough. I took sweet pepsi but the voice remained big. Our Senior Man Teacher said it wasn’t a disease but a sign that I was growing up well.”

Bamoga Angela, Senior Woman Teacher Nakalama PS Iganga,says:

“Between the age of 8 and 16, children like you go through puberty. At this time, your body starts to change and you grow mentally, emotionally and physically from a child to a young adult.

Every child starts puberty at his or her own time. Some of you may start menstruating or experience wet dreams before others. Your bodies are different and they grow at a different rate.

How change happens:
The brain produces messengers called hormones that tell your body to grow.

As you grow from childhood to adulthood, your body will change in many ways. Your friends may laugh at you just because your voice has deepened or you have started menstruating.

When this happens, ignore them and appreciate what God has given you. Learn to love yourself. Think about the things you like most about yourself or the way you look. This will help you worry less about what others say or think about you.

Puberty doesn’t last forever. Soon, you will be through it. Your parents, guardians, teachers, uncles and aunts went through puberty. Talk to them about how they managed body changes during puberty.

Key messages
• Feel good about body changes. They are natural and normal.
• Body changes are not a sign to start sex or get married.
• Always ask a trusted adult for the right information.
• Talk to your Senior Woman or man Teacher, parents or Straight Talk staff.
• Abstain from sex and stay in school for a bright future to avoid risky behaviour.
Body changes are not a sign to start sex

Body changes are normal and a sign that your body is growing well. They are not a disease and do not mean that you are ready for sex or marriage. Always get the right information.

Menstruation
Nangobi Rashidah, 14, P7, Nakalama PS
Iganga says: “When I started menstruating, I thought I was suffering from a strange disease.”

Menstruation is not a disease. It is normal and happens to all girls. During menstruation, a girl’s body releases blood from the womb through the vagina. The blood flows slowly and continues for 3-7 days. Girls start menstruating between the ages of 10-15. Everyone has their time of starting menstruation. Some may start at 8 years. Others may start at 16 years. However, if you are 17 and above and you have not started menstruating, see a health worker.

Breast size
Kisakye Dorcus, 13, P7, Kabukye PS
Kamuli says: “A certain boy advised my friend to have sex so that her breasts could grow big.”

This was wrong. Sex does not make breasts or any part of the body to grow. During puberty, a hormone called estrogen is produced in a girl’s body. This hormone causes the breasts to grow. You cannot speed up or slow down breast growth.

Body smell
Gerald Gabula 13 P7 Busota PS
Kamuli says: “When I got hair in my armpits, they started smelling. I told my father. He advised me to bathe regularly.”

During puberty, hormones cause your body to sweat. When sweat dries, your body starts to smell. To smell good, shave the pubic and armpit hair, wash your clothes and bathe at least twice a day.

Wet dreams
Mwesigwa Albert, 15, P7, Kabukye PS
Kamuli says: “I started experiencing wet dreams last year. I thought I had HIV/AIDS. I told my mother and she said I was growing up. She advised me not to misbehave with girls saying I can make a girl pregnant.”

A wet dream is when semen is released from a penis while a boy is asleep. Semen is a milky sticky fluid. It contains sperms. Wet dreams happen naturally during adolescence.

Wrong information causes you to make wrong decisions. When you are not sure about something you have heard, seen or read about, talk to an adult you trust.

Wambu Isaac, 15, P7, Itanda PS
Iganga says: “My friend told me to use herbs to enlarge my penis. I told our Senior Man teacher but he said it was wrong information. I did not follow my friend’s advice.”

Wambu and Basirika are brilliant children. They did not follow their friends’ bad advice.

Basirika Margret Buzibira PS

Youth Talkers, always say NO to bad advice and stay safe.

Get the right information, stay safe

Science corner

Can cervical cancer be cured? Lucky Prossy, P6, ABC PS, Wakiso.
Cervical cancer is one of the commonest cancers among girls. This cancer is caused by Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).

You can get infected with HPV virus when you have unprotected sex with an infected person. Cervical cancer can be cured if it is detected and treated early. There is also a vaccine given to girls who have not yet had sex to prevent it. Once a girl is exposed to the HPV virus, vaccination may not help her.

Abstain from sex and go for vaccination to avoid cervical cancer. At Mulago hospital, vaccination is done every Friday from 8:30 – 12:30 at the adolescent clinic.
Josephine Nabukwasa SLF Youth Program Coordinator, Makerere University Johns Hopkins University (MUJHU)

BODY CHANGES FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

Girls
- Breasts
- Menstruation
- Pubic hair
- Pimples
- Sexual feelings

Boys
- Wet dreams
- Voice deepens
- Pubic hair
- Pimples
- Sexual feelings
- Erections

Science corner

Can cervical cancer be cured? Lucky Prossy, P6, ABC PS, Wakiso.
Cervical cancer is one of the commonest cancers among girls. This cancer is caused by Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).

You can get infected with HPV virus when you have unprotected sex with an infected person. Cervical cancer can be cured if it is detected and treated early. There is also a vaccine given to girls who have not yet had sex to prevent it. Once a girl is exposed to the HPV virus, vaccination may not help her.

Abstain from sex and go for vaccination to avoid cervical cancer. At Mulago hospital, vaccination is done every Friday from 8:30 – 12:30 at the adolescent clinic.
Josephine Nabukwasa SLF Youth Program Coordinator, Makerere University Johns Hopkins University (MUJHU)
**Fight hunger, stay in school**

Everyday, millions of children in Uganda go to school hungry. The situation has been worsened by the drought that has caused famine. When Young Talk visited Kamuli and Iganga, many children said they did not have lunch. Others had been forced to get married in exchange for food. This is sad.

**Bridget Bakumwa, 9, Itanda PS Iganga says:**

“During lunch time, I eat mangoes. I get them from our compound. Hunger makes me doze in class.”

**Mwesigwa Albert, 15,17, Kabukye PS says:** “A woman in Buli Village forced her daughter to get married so that they could get food for the family. The man gave them a goat and food for the family. The daughter to get married in exchange for food. This is sad. The headteacher of Bulubandi PS, P7, Itanda PS Iganga says: I’m an orphan. I make bricks during holidays to raise money for food and my fees. Last year, I bought two goats.”

Young Talkers, you too can make money in a safe way. However, your work should not interfere with your studies.

**HIV BASICS:**

I don’t have lunch at school. Whenever I take my ARVs when I’m hungry, my body becomes weak.

What should I do? Boy, 14, Waluwerere PS, Bugiri.

Sorry about that. Many children living with HIV go hungry at school yet they have to take ARVs every day to stay healthy and strong.

Dr Mariam Nabwire, Mulago Hospital says: Since your school does not provide lunch, pack some food from home to eat before taking your medicine. Some medicines are strong and if they do not find food in the body, they will make you feel weak.

Your body needs food to help the medicine work well. It will also help to stop side effects from the drugs, like nausea and diarrhoea.

**Parents, play your role**

**The Headteacher of Bulubandi PS, Iganga Mwanja Mwamadi says:** Many children drop out due to hunger or lack of scholastic materials. Over 100 pupils of this school have not reported back. Most parents say education is free. We need to sensitise them.

**The Deputy District Education Officer Kamuli, Mulemezi Betty says:** Every child must get something to eat so as to learn well. Parents pack some food for your children. The UPE policy clearly states the roles of different stakeholders. Parents your role is to provide for your children lunch, uniforms and scholastic materials. Do not leave everything to the government.

**Grow your own food**

Now that it has started raining. Plant crops like maize, beans, Tomatoes, vegetables and cassava.

James Godwin Okurut, the Livehood and Environment Officer at Straight Talk Foundation says: Open up gardens at school or at home. Talk to your headteachers if there is land you can use. Help your parents to dig during weekends. If there is no rain, use drip irrigation to keep your crops healthy. Fill a plastic bottle with water. Create a tiny hole in the bottle for the water to drip. Hang the bottle on a wooden pole, placed close to the plants. When the water reduces, re-fill the bottle.

**Disco, Bibanda, not good for you**

Sometimes, children escape from school or home to go to clubs (Discos) or video halls (Bibanda). This is dangerous.

**Taaya Arafat, 16, Nakalama PS, Iganga says:** I went to the disco with my friends. A certain girl followed us. On our way home, the girl was raped. She got HIV and got pregnant.

**Nanangwe Immaculate, P7, Bulubandi PS says:** There are many smokers and drunkards in Bibanda. My mother warned me never to go there.

Young Talkers, you too can make money in a safe way. However, your work should not interfere with your studies.

**Sarah says:** Spend your free time wisely. You can play football, revise your books or learn a skill like knitting. Avoid such places. You can be defiled.

Watching movies during class time affects your performance. You may steal money to watch movies or learn bad habits like fighting, taking alcohol and smoking.

Pornography exposes you to early sex. I found three boys in P3 drawing pictures of people having sex. They said they watched it from a video hall. This is dangerous.
# Why does a girl produce a white porridge-like substance from her vagina? Kibirige Abdulnoor, 13, P7, St Andrew Kagwaa PS.

Dear Kibirige, the white porridge-like substance is called vaginal fluid. Every girl produces this fluid. It keeps the vagina clean. The normal vaginal fluid is whitish and does not smell. If the vaginal fluid is yellowish or has a bad smell, a girl should talk to a health worker.

# If you abort, will it affect the reproductive organs for example the uterus? Lochoro Anna Gracious 15, P7 Lia Ps Moroto.

Dear Lochoro, Abortion is the removal of an unborn baby from a mother’s womb. It is true abortion can damage your uterus and you will fail to have children in future. You can also bleed to death. Besides, abortion is illegal in Uganda. You can be arrested. Abstain from sex to avoid getting pregnant.

# What can I do when my father tells me to have sex with him? Mercy, 14, ABC PS Wakiso.

Dear Mercy, it is wrong for your father to force you to have sex with him. Having sex with relatives is called incest and it is a crime. If your father is telling you to have sex with him, tell a trusted family member or a teacher you trust so that they can talk to your father. If he doesn’t stop, report him to Police.

# What is child trafficking? Lokol Jeremiah, P7, Naitakwea PS.

Child trafficking is when children are stolen from their parents or guardians with the intention of selling them for purposes of forced labor and sexual abuse.

# Why are people living with HIV treated with ARVs? Denaya Patrick, 12, P7, Abele PS, Koboko.

Dear Patrick, Anti retroviral drugs (ARVs) do not cure HIV but reduce the virus in the body of someone living with HIV. When they take their ARVs, they feel strong and healthy and continue studying or doing their work without falling sick often. If you are living with HIV, take your ARVs as advised by the health worker.

# Why is it that many sugar mammys who defile boys are not arrested? Mwebaze Ben James, Luwafu Junior school Wakiso.

Dear Mwebaze, some sugar mammys who defile boys may not be arrested when no one reports them. If you and other children are defiled, report to Police, parents, LC or teachers. You have a right to a violence free childhood.

Counselor: Josephine Nabukenya SLF Youth Program Coordinator, Makerere University Johns Hopkins University (MUJHU)

Know Your Body

How do STDs cause infertility? Akfiera Isaac, 12, P7, Buzibirira PS, Kamuli.

STDs stand for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). They are diseases transmitted through having unprotected sex with an infected person.

Fertility is the ability to produce children. People who cannot produce children are said to be infertile. Both men and women can be infertile. The most common cause of infertility is sexually transmitted diseases. If a girl or boy suffers from an STD and does not treat it early, their reproductive organs get blocked and they cannot have babies in future.

You can avoid STDs by:

- Abstinence from sex is the best protection against STDs.
- Stay in school
- Report people who force you to have sex. By Dr Chris Agaba, Mengo Hospital Kampala

Quiz

Some young people drink alcohol. Based on your experience or what you have seen in your community, tell us how alcohol has affected you or your friend’s education or health. What should young people do to stop taking alcohol?

Write an essay of not more than 500 words in English. Indicate your name, age, class, School, and a telephone contact. Send your essay to Straight Talk Foundation PO BOX 22366 KAMPALA. Straight Talk Club Patrons are encouraged to collect the essays and submit them to Straight Talk Foundation office or any of our Youth Centers in Gulu, Nwoya, Kitgum, Adjumani, Moroto.

Deadline is 31st May 2017.