Have 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 when and how to grow.

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.

FOR TEACHERS
Dear teachers, help children deal with body changes safely. Give information on puberty and staying safe to your pupils. Use materials like Young Talk to discuss body changes. Identify doctors, counselors or parents to talk to your pupils.

Give the right information. Encourage them to ask questions and participate in discussions. Use simple language when talking about body changes. Avoid words that may stigmatize pupils. By Gandi Majid, teacher Itanda PS, Iganga.
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.”

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.

Science corner
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

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 Nabukunya SLF Youth Program Coordinator, Makerere University Johns Hopkins University (MUJHU)

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.

Kamuli says: “When my breasts started growing, a friend advised me to hit them with a miling stick so that they could go back. Straight Talk staff told us that breast growth happens naturally.”

Basirika Margret Buzibira PS

Get the right information, stay safe.
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 Buia Village Forced her daughter to get married so that they could get food For the Family. The man gave them a goat and money."

That was wrong. Early marriage is a crime. It denies boys and girls their right to education and good health. Hunger should not be the reason for you to leave school, get married or accept gifts from older men. If you or any child is forced to get married, report to your teachers, LCs. Police or your parents. Always seek help when faced with a problem. If your parents have no food, talk to a relative who can help.

Alitwa Rebecca, 12, P7, Kiroba PS Kamuli says: "I help my grandmother to sell bananas after school. We use the money to buy food and pay my fees."

Dhabalamu Geoffrey, 16, 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.

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 sensitize 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."

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.

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 says: "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.

S husband, 45, P7, SDA Light School, Iganga says: "I went to a club to enjoy life. When I entered, a certain man bought me wine. My mother came and slapped me. I fell down because I was drunk."

The Deputy Head Teacher Nakalama PS Iganga, Namulemeri says: "I'm an orphan. I make bricks during holidays to raise money for food and my fees. Last year, I bought two goats."

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**Dear Young Talk**

### Why does a girl produce white porridge-like substance from her vagina? Kibirige Abdulnoor, 13, P7, St Andrew Kaggwa 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 doesn’t smell. A girl should talk to a health worker if her vaginal fluid is yellowish or has a bad smell.

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

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

Dear Mwebaze, some sugar mummies 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.

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### High Young Talk

**Know Your Body**

**How do STDs cause infertility?** Akifera 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

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**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. Submit or email: info@straighttalkfoundation.org

Deadline is 31st May 2017.

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**PLEASE ADVISE**

**MOITA**

There is boy who usually disturbs me by asking for sex and that if I refuse, he will do it by force. What can I do? Moita Josephine, Komukiny Girls PS, Kaabong

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**Couselor:** Josephine Nabukenya Silf Youth Program Coordinator, Makerere University Johns Hopkins University (MUIHU)

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**Pupils of Kasimeri PS Moroto say:** Stay in school to avoid early marriage

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**Pupils of Father Hilders PS Soroti say:** Your bodies are special protect them from any kind of harm

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**Pupils of Nyangilia PS Koboko say:** Boys too can be virgins. Do first things first. When you rush, you get problems.

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