

Developmental Characteristics of Adolescence and Young Adulthood



	Physical Development	Cognitive Development	Social and Emotional Development
Early Adolescence (10-14)	Puberty: growth of body hair; increased perspiration and oil production in hair and skin; physical growth (both height and weight); breast and hip development and onset of menstruation (girls); growth of testicles and penis, wet dreams, and deepening of voice (boys).	Growth in capacity for abstract thought; mostly interested in present with little thought for future; expansion of and increased importance placed on intellectual interests; deepening of moral thought.	Struggle with sense of identity; feel awkward about themselves and their body; worry about being 'normal'; developing critical lens of and heightened conflict with parents; increasing identification with peer group; increase in desire for independence; prone to mood swings; beginning to test rules and boundaries; increased interest in privacy; increased awareness of sexual desire.
Late Adolescence (15-19)	Physical growth slows for girls, continues for boys.	Continued growth in capacity for abstract thought; increased and evolving capacity for goal-setting and decision-making; interest in moral reasoning; growth in connection to peer group, community; questioning of faith, beliefs, and meaning of life; growing interest in social justice, equity, and fairness.	Intense self-involvement alternating between high expectations and poor self-identity; adjustments to changing body and corresponding swings in self-esteem and confidence; worry about being 'normal' and comparing self to others in peer group; occasionally fluid or rapidly changing understanding of sexuality and gender; heightened sense of justice and fairness; increased drive for independence with resultant distance from parents or other authority figures; increasing awareness of responsibilities to family and community; greater reliance on friendship networks and peer group; heightened capacity for emotional regulation; experience feelings of love and passion; increasing interest in sex.
Young Adulthood (20-24)	Young women are typically fully physically developed; young men continue to gain height, weight, muscle mass, and body hair.	Ability to plan ideas from beginning to end; increased ability to delay gratification; examination of inner experiences; increased concern for the future; deepening of moral reasoning.	Firmer sense of independent identity, including sexual identity; increased emotional stability and self-reliance; deeper connection to peers, community and family relationships; regrowth of interest in social and cultural traditions; development of serious romantic relationships.

Source: Sawyer S., Afifi R., Bearinger L., Blakemore S., Dick B., Ezeh A., Patton G., Adolescence: a Foundation for Future Health, The Lancet Volume 379, No. 9826, p1630–1640, 28 April 2012