

# Are You Normal?

## They're All Normal

All five of these kids are 13 years old. They vary in size and shape, but that's **NORMAL!**

6'

5'

4'

3'

2'

1'



Very weird things are happening. One day you're an ordinary kid, minding your own business, eating three meals a day, happy after a good night's sleep. The next day, your body is transformed into a ravenous eating machine.



Your new sneakers shrink as you lace them. Your clothes never fit quite right. Oddly enough, a changing face and body looks back at you in the mirror. Weird.

What gives? You just hit that crazy time in your life called *adolescence*.

That's right, adolescence: when your body gears up for its biggest growth spurt since you were a baby. Hold on to your hat because, by the time it's over, you're likely to be 20 percent taller and 50 percent heavier than you were before it started.

What's going on in your body is perfectly normal. Really. It's all part of transforming you from a kid to a grown-up.

## Where Does All That Food Go?

Hungry all the time? Relax. It's just your body's way of saying it needs more fuel for some very important work. You need food to grow. Now, let's quickly look at where all this food is going . . .

## . . . To Your Bones

Almost half your adult skeleton forms during your teenage growth spurt. Still wonder why your jeans might be too short and your shoes too tight?

Girls, this is when your hips begin to widen. Your body fat increases as part of maturing. That's normal. And boys, watch out: your shirts might be a little too small as your shoulders start to broaden.

As your bones get longer, they also get stronger. But your body can't build bones by itself.

Bones need calcium. Now is a really, really important time for you to eat and drink calcium-rich foods, such as milk, yogurt and cheese.

Calcium-fortified fruit juice, spinach, and tofu are among the other foods that provide calcium.

Remember to move, too. Sitting on your butt won't help your bones.

Physical activities that carry your weight, such as walking, playing ball, and dancing, help strengthen your bones.

## . . . To Your Muscles

Besides stronger bones, physical activity also builds muscles. You need muscles to drag your body out of bed, brush your teeth, carry your books, sit up straight . . . you name it. You can't even blink without using a muscle.

So keep these mighty machines working by feeding them. Muscles need overall good food choices, not just extra protein, to thrive and grow.

## . . . To Your Red Blood Cells

Your bones are growing. Your muscles are growing. Along with everything else that's growing, your body is pumping out more red blood cells, too. Of course, you don't even realize it—just another reason why your body is so great.

To keep in tip-top form, your blood cells need iron from food. Healthy blood cells use iron to bring oxygen to all your body cells. Once it's there, your body uses oxygen to make energy.

The Meat Group is loaded with iron-rich foods. So are some vegetables and many enriched grain products. To pump up the iron in your food choices, eat chicken, cooked dry beans, a burger, spinach, whole wheat bread, or fortified cereal.

Girls need more iron than boys do, to replace iron lost through their monthly menstrual flow. Guys and gals, keep your energy levels up. Eat enough iron-rich foods. In fact, eat some today!

## Bone Up On Calcium

As bones grow longer, calcium gradually fills in their framework so they grow stronger, too. Calcium is like the cement that fills in the structure of a building. It adds strength—in this case—to the structure of your bones.

