



Precocious Puberty in Girls

Our presentation is intended to serve as a “beginning” of a conversation for how younger girls can be empowered when faced with physical changes that are not IN SYNC with their emotional/cognitive stage



What is Normal Pubertal Timing?

- It is the time in life when the body changes from that of a child to an adult.
- Characterized by rapid growth of bones and muscles, changes in body shape and size, and development of the body's ability to reproduce

Age of Normal Puberty

- Puberty normally takes place in girls between ages 8 and 16 and in boys between ages 9 and 14.





Racial Differences on Normal Puberty

- On average, African American girls show signs of puberty, with breast development and chemical changes in their bodies, almost two years sooner than Caucasian girls, at age 8.8.
- By age 8, nearly 50% of the black girls, but only 15% of the white girls had begun pubertal development



What is Precocious Puberty?

- Defined as beginning physical maturation process **BEFORE** the age of 8
 - Late toddler (4T-7)
 - The current recommendation changes the age limit for precocious breast and pubic hair growth to age 6 years for black girls and age 7 years for white girls.
 - Age at menarche has remained constant:
 - 11.5 AA girls
 - 12.5 Caucasian girls

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What Causes Precocious Puberty?

- Two Main Theories

- Central

- Suggests that pituitary gonatropins are stimulated earlier due to a CNS lesion(s)

- Idiopathic/Peripheral

- No underlying cause

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Central Precocious Puberty

- In this type of precocious puberty, the entire HPG axis simply starts too soon.
- Although they begin earlier than they should, the pattern and timing of the steps in the process are normal.
- For the majority of children with this condition, there's no underlying medical problem and no reason that can be identified for the HPG axis to begin when it did.



Peripheral Precocious Puberty

- This type of precocious puberty, which is less common than central precocious puberty, happens without GnRH.
- Instead, the cause is release of estrogen or testosterone into the body because of problems with the ovaries, testicles, adrenal glands or pituitary gland.



Possible Explanations


- Emerging Research

- Biological toxins

- Hormones in food (milk, chickens, beef- artificial bovine growth hormone); Didn't pan out because this is a protein hormone, destroyed in human digestion, not a steroid hormone like estrogen.
 - Plastics and insecticides can break down into chemicals similar to estrogen. This is thought to cause hermaphroditic fish.

- Environmental context Eisner (2001)

- Older sibling
 - Conflict in the home
 - Absence of biological father
 - Early exposure to graphic media

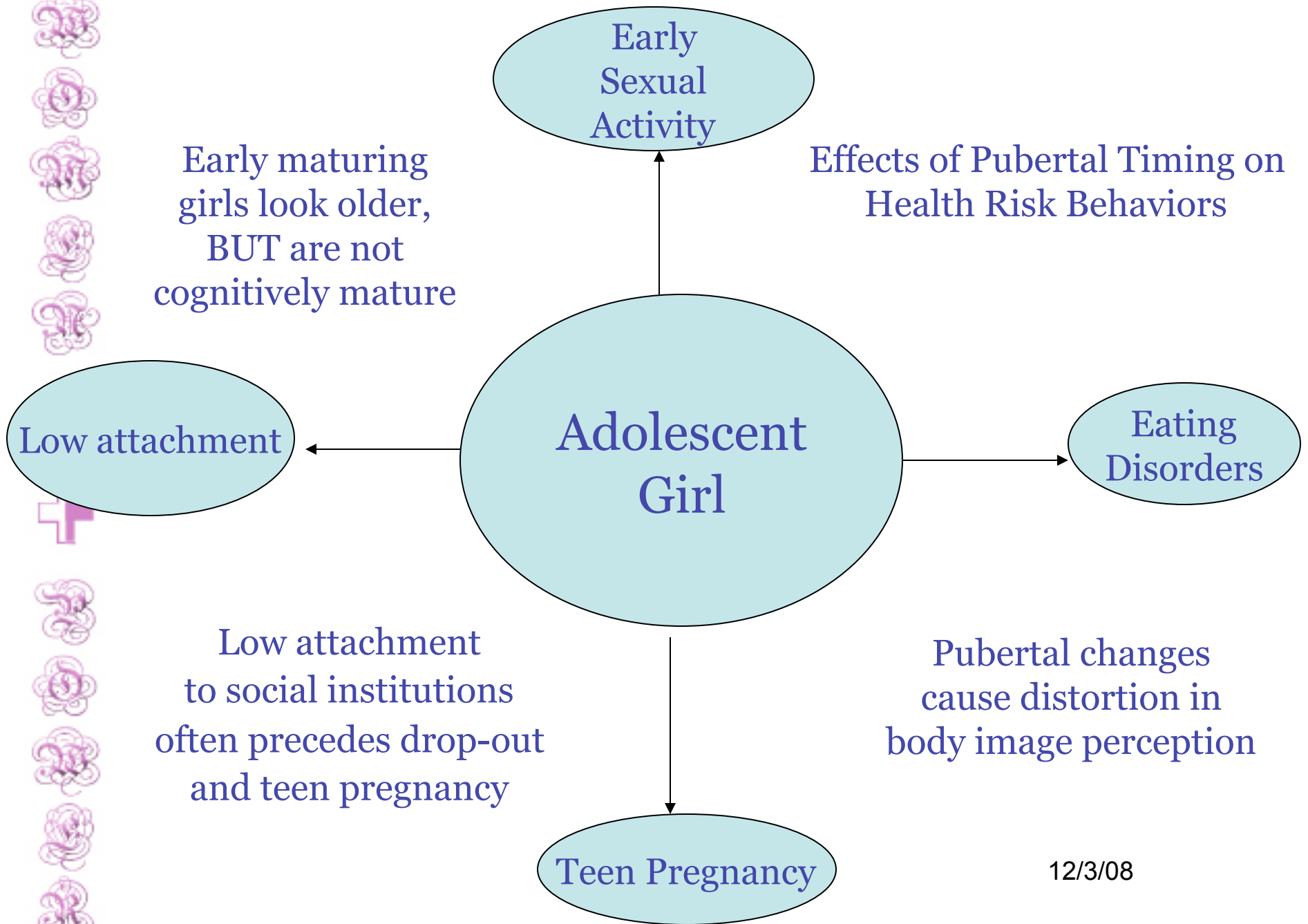


How does Pubertal Timing Influence Sexual Behavior?

- Early maturation often leads to earlier than expected sexual debut



Effects of Pubertal Timing on Health Risk Behaviors



Precocious Puberty as a Risk Factor for Teen Pregnancy

- Psychosocial Factors

- Precocious puberty has negative psychosocial consequences (Brooks-Gunn & Ruble, 1993; Ge et al, 1996)

- Increased menstrual distress
- Increased levels of depression
- Negative body image
 - Leading to disordered eating behaviors





Risk Factors for Teen Pregnancy for Early Maturing Girls

- Behavioral
 - More difficulty relating to peers
 - Loss of interest in school as teenagers
 - Difficulty sleeping
 - Family adversity – conflict with adult figures
 - Success with social popularity
 - More likely to initiate dating and intercourse earlier



Precocious Puberty + Risk Factors for Teen Pregnancy =

- Girls who develop early
 - Are expected to act the age they look
 - Dress the age they look
 - Are often “coerced” into sexually advanced relationships BEFORE their emotions catch-up
- Children who begin puberty early feel isolated from their peers
- Parents may feel uncomfortable with an early developing child

Georgia Trends

- Georgia has the 8th highest teen birth rate in the nation.
- Over 22,500 teen pregnancies occur each year in our state.
 - That's 62 new teen pregnancies each day –or over 2 teen pregnancies an hour.
- According to the State Division of Public Health, the teen pregnancy rate in Georgia is over 67 pregnancies per 1,000 girls ages 15 to 19.
- While the teen birth rate has declined by 30% in Georgia over the past decade, there was a 3 percent increase in Georgia's teen birth rate in 2006.
- The pregnancy rate for African-American girls has declined the most over the past decade
 - current pregnancy rate for African-American girls is still almost twice the rate of Caucasians in Georgia
- Over the past decade in our state, the pregnancy rate for Latina girls actually increased, while rates for other groups decreased.

Georgia Trends

- Nearly 28% of teen pregnancies in Georgia occur among girls who have already been pregnant at least once before.
- Georgia ranks 2nd highest among the states in the rate of repeat births to teens
 - Teen parents and their children face educational and economic challenges that are compounded by repeat births.
- The Georgia Campaign for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention set a goal of “15 by 15” for teen pregnancy —15 percent reduction in the teen pregnancy rate (15-19 year olds)



Empowering Young Women

- Teachers/guidance counselors, nurses, health educators, other social service entities need to work together to address psychosocial & behavioral risk factors that increase risk for early unintended pregnancy
 - Community coalitions that specifically serve to improve outcomes for women and children
- Address the notion of the “Cinderella/Rapunzel syndrome”
- Teachers/guidance counselors, nurses and health educators need to address submissive behavior in young girls





Empowering Young Women

- Perceptions need to be put into realistic contexts
 - Correct ‘normative beliefs’ that everybody is ‘doing it’
- All who work with young girls help to correct body image misperceptions
- Develop opportunities for pro-social involvement
 - Involvement in athletics and other extra-curricular activities
 - Early diagnosis of learning disorders to reduce academic failure
 - Membership in community/civic organizations
 - Boys and Girls Clubs
 - Big Brothers/Big Sisters

Girl Scouts

12/3/08