

PRECOCIOUS PUBERTY- AN URBAN PROBLEM

The phenomenon of girls attaining puberty at unusual ages is termed as 'precocious puberty'. Dr Nilescha Chitre of SRV Hospital, Mumbai, says "By medical standards, breast development before the age of seven years, pubic hair (pubarche) before eight years of age and menstruation before 10 (menarche) constitute precocious puberty in girls. A large number of studies have confirmed a rising trend of precocious puberty in this decade, with girls being biologically ten-times more prone than boys to the same". Dr Poomima M, from St. Martha's Hospital, Bengaluru, explains that obesity is a prime cause for

this problem because, "The Gn-RH hormone not only gets triggered from the ovaries, but also from the fat deposits in the body. Also, if the child has received radiation treatments to cure tumour or other conditions early in life, this can also increase the chances of early puberty." The trend of obesity leading to the problem seems more pronounced among urban girls due to eating of more junk food than a balanced diet, leading a sedentary lifestyle and thus having an imbalance in Body Mass Index (BMI). Dr Shivani Sachdev Gour of SCI Healthcare, New Delhi, says, "There is a sharp rise in obesity in India. The high levels of energy availability markers, such as leptin and insulin, lead to an early onset of puberty. Protein content of food in early life could also be a determinant. A high ratio

causative agents. Early usage of deodorisers and air fresheners are also known to cause menstruation before time." Since all of these are predominantly urban factors, early onset of puberty is more synonymous with urban girls than among rural ones.

WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS?

When girls begin to develop breasts and curves faster than their counterparts, they suffer from peripheral problems, both, physical and emotional. Dr Rahul Manchanda, PSRI Hospital, New Delhi, elucidates saying, "Early puberty can set the stage for emotional and behavioural problems, and is linked to lower self-esteem, depression, eating disorders,



of animal v/s vegetable protein between the ages of three-five is associated with early puberty even after correcting for body mass. Apart from that, exposure to certain environmental chemicals that act as oestrogen in the body have been found to be associated with early puberty. Substances like flame-retardant fabrics, plastics, cosmetics, pesticides, can be the

alcohol-use, and earlier loss of virginity, more sexual partners and an increased risk of sexually-transmitted diseases. There is also evidence that suggests these girls are at an increased risk of diabetes, heart disease and other cardiovascular diseases, as well as cancer, later in life." Dr Kiran Coelho, Consultant, Hinduja Healthcare Surgical, Mumbai, adds to