

Factors influencing that age at which girls begin puberty

By ACSH Staff — February 5, 2015



Last week, [we exposed the flaws of a study](#) ^[1] published by a

group from the Harvard School of Public Health claiming that girls who drink more sugar sweetened soda have their first period a few months earlier than those who don't. ACSH's Dr. Josh Bloom concluded that although this study made for a great headline, the science was lousy. However, according to research done by Dr. Louise Greenspan, a pediatric endocrinologist at Kaiser Permanente, and Dr. Julianna Deardorff, an associate professor in the Maternal and Child Health Program at the University of California, Berkeley, some girls are now starting puberty before the age of 10. They've been following girls since 2005 and found that by age 7, 23 percent of black girls, 15 percent of Hispanic girls and 10 percent of white girls began to develop breasts.

They [point to a number of factors contributing](#) ^[2] to this phenomenon in an op-ed in the *New York Times*, some of which we can get behind. The real culprits, they say, are obesity and family stress. We've [written about the link between obesity](#) ^[3] and the declining age at which girls reach puberty before. And Drs. Greenspan and Deardorff explain the link between increased estrogen secretion as a result of increased body fat, which then leads to earlier breast development. However, they also claim that [sugary beverages are the main culprit](#) ^[4], at least for the obesity problem, pointing to the study we debunked last week.

Then, of course, endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDC) are raised as a concern because of their alleged ability to mimic estrogen. However, as we've pointed out before, the term endocrine disruptor has no real scientific or medical meaning. And, an [objective study](#) ^[5] by several academics with no ties to industry revealed their assessment of EDC risk thusly: Overall, despite of 20 years of research, a human health risk from exposure to low concentrations of exogenous chemical substances with weak hormone-like activities remains an unproven and unlikely hypothesis.

Lastly, they explore the link between early puberty and family stress. Things such as an

unpredictable household, the absence of a father in the home and high levels of conflict are associated with a lower age of reaching puberty. They say: To buffer against toxic stress, parents should prioritize setting aside time to engage with their daughters and bond emotionally, but puberty is a complex biological phenomenon that is unlikely to be triggered by a single factor.

ACSH's Ariel Savransky adds, It's clear that there is a link between family relationships and eating habits. Numerous studies have concluded that eating meals as a family can [not only improve children's](#) [6] eating habits but also foster a [sense of belonging and value for the teen](#) [7]. And eating together is a tangible goal that families can work on. This could be a good place to start, and working on eating habits could then affect weight which can then affect age at which a child enters puberty.

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Links

[1] <http://acsh.org/2015/01/soda-cause-earlier-menstruation-girls-period/>

[2] [http://mobile.nytimes.com/2015/02/05/opinion/what-causes-girls-to-enter-puberty-](http://mobile.nytimes.com/2015/02/05/opinion/what-causes-girls-to-enter-puberty-early.html?emc=edit_th_20150205&nl=todaysheadlines&nid=12253159&_r=1&referrer=)

[early.html?emc=edit_th_20150205&nl=todaysheadlines&nlid=12253159&_r=1&referrer=](http://mobile.nytimes.com/2015/02/05/opinion/what-causes-girls-to-enter-puberty-early.html?emc=edit_th_20150205&nl=todaysheadlines&nid=12253159&_r=1&referrer=)

[3] <http://acsh.org/2014/08/obesity-linked-hormonal-changes-girls-may-influence-age-puberty/>

[4] <http://acsh.org/2014/11/brooklyn-lawmaker-proposes-putting-warning-labels-sugary-drinks/>

[5] <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0378427413013659>

[6] <http://acsh.org/2012/12/tis-the-season-to-eat-meals-as-a-family/>

[7] <http://acsh.org/2013/03/teens-eating-with-family-have-better-emotional-health/>