

Most people think that hygiene means keeping the body clean, but it's so much more than that: it's the things we do that keep it healthy, too. During tween and teen years, changes in the body escalate the need for good hygiene. Adrenarche refers to the series of physical changes that happen thanks to increased levels of hormones like DHEA and DHEAS from the adrenal glands, like hair growing in new places and pores producing oilier sweat, setting the stage for acne and body odor. Adrenarche is a different physiological process from puberty, which involves the body changes that result from sex hormones produced by the ovaries (estrogen and progesterone) or testicles (testosterone). Adrenarche and puberty often (but not always) occur around the same time which is why many of the body changes caused by adrenarche are considered to be part of puberty. All of these changes can impact self-esteem and social dynamics. Kids who establish good hygiene habits and practice self-care early can wind up healthier and even a bit more confident.

Teaching kids how to care for their body is not a one-and-done conversation, but rather an ongoing (sometimes painfully drawn out) process of providing them with good information and habits. Good hygiene often requires increased executive functioning, skills many kids this age have yet to master. Be patient, don't sweat the small stuff (sorry couldn't help it!) and remember to tell them about the science — they love it!