

Body Talk

A comprehensive guide to helping your growing child take care of body hygiene.

BY PRITI SALIAN

A clean body will help your child's confidence soar. Talk to your kids about these simple, doable practices.

1 Body Talk Your child will need a head-to-toe bath once a day, and a body wash once more, especially after any outdoor physical activity. At this point body odour may be a problem. This could be because of one or a combination of factors. There may be a lack of hygiene as you stop supervising washing and bathing, and with the appearance of underarm and pubic hair. The onset of early puberty triggers the apocrine glands (sweat glands located in the armpits and genital area) to produce an oily secretion. This may be decomposed by bacteria to form odours. Any soap that the family is using is fine. You can get your child to scrub dirty knees and elbows with half a lemon. "Twice or three times a week, your child can exfoliate with a loofah, to open up pores," says Dr. Rohit Bhargava, *Child Advisor*.

2 Hair Tangles She can wash her hair as often as every day with any shampoo that suits her (check that it does not cause lustreless or brittle hair). Preferably buy one that has a conditioner, so your child does not have the hassle of applying it separately. "Specialized treatment shampoos like hair fall control, damage control or dandruff control should not be used more than once a week," says

Dr. Shehla Agarwal, Delhi-based dermatologist and mother to Mehak, 12 years. Kids' shampoos won't clean your tween's hair effectively any more. An oil massage to increase blood circulation in the scalp is fine too, but do have her wash off the oil in half an hour. "Leaving it on overnight can cause acne on the forehead," says Dr. Agarwal.

3 Face Off If your tween wants to use your face wash, it's fine as long as it has no granules. Tween facial skin, if rubbed with granular preparations, can cause acne. "In case of break-outs on the face, get your kid any over-the-counter acne cream like Clearasil or Proactiv," says Dr. Agarwal. If that doesn't help even after two weeks of usage, see a dermatologist. Your child does not need sunscreen. "However, if there is prolonged exposure, like on the beach, she can use a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 to 20," says Dr. Agarwal.

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around the lips, so consult a doctor if your child's lips are dry throughout the year.



4 Under the Arms "Hair in the underarms can be clipped short, for reasons of hygiene," says Dr. Bhargava. Waxing and hair removal creams for girls cause skin darkening. Also, with waxing, the pulling action may cause inflammation and infection. Keep that for the teen years. Skip anti-perspirants, as they prevent sweat formation. Use deodorants sparingly. There are 100 per cent alcohol-free ones available, especially for kids. However these do contain chemicals such as triclosan. Triclosan kills bacteria and fungus, but is increasingly considered bad for the endocrine system (that secretes hormones). Washing as often as possible is the best bet. Your child can keep non-fragrance wet wipes in her bag too. Using talc is fine, as long as it is dusted onto dry skin. "However, if it simply forms a paste in no time, or it irritates the skin, you can avoid using it," says Dr. Bhargava.

5 Foot Care Pre-teens are in shoes half the day so they're likely to develop foot odour. Make sure your child dries her feet well, applying talc even between the toes before putting on shoes. A fresh pair of cotton socks daily is a good bet. But, in case odour becomes strong, replacing ordinary talc with an anti-fungal powder like Abzorb or Flucos helps. Put out shoes in the sun two or three times a week. Have your child go shoe-free when she's in the house.

6 Lip Balm The habit of licking and biting may give your tween chapped lips. Ghee works well when she is at home. Give your child a petroleum jelly lip balm, sans the perfume, which she can apply as often as needed. However, deficiencies of folic acid, vitamin B-complex, zinc and iron can cause persistent dryness around the lips, so consult a doctor if you find they are dry throughout the year.

7 Nail Pretty Teach her to cut nails straight (not too deep) and then round them off at the edges with a nail file or emery board. This should be done in one direction only, or it may break the nails. Help her moisturize after a bath with a moisturizer. Tell her to ensure that the moisturising agent reaches the underside of the nails as well. If skin around the nails peels, clip it, to avoid infection caused by biting.

8 Pubic Region Hair in the pubic region should be cut short. Kids can use the loofah in this area too. "Girls can wash the area two or three times a day with cold or warm water," says Dr. Manjulika Rohatgi, a Delhi-based ob-gyn. If your daughter already gets her periods, she will also get some white discharge. "As long as it does not give off an offensive smell or cause itching, white discharge which appears like mucous is normal," says Dr. Meera Kashyap, a Ranchi-based ob-gyn. Your daughter should change her underwear twice a day. "Underwear should not be wet at any point of time," says Dr. Kashyap. "Sanitary napkins should

also be changed twice a day, however scanty the bleeding," adds Dr. Rohatgi. "Boys need to pull back the foreskin on their penis and clean the area with water while bathing," says Dr. Arun Wadhwa, *Child advisor*. Soaps or antiseptics like Dettol or Savlon are a strict no-no in the genital area.

9 Teeth Talk "Encourage brushing twice a day, after every meal if possible, with a fluoridated toothpaste," says Dr. Meenakshi Kher, a Mumbai-based paediatric dentist. When kids have junk food, brushing is a must. They should also floss once a day, preferably before bedtime. "Six-monthly check-ups can detect a cavity early, much before your child complains of pain," says Dr. Kher. If she needs additional fluoride, sealants or dietary changes for good dental health, her doctor will let you know. If your child's teeth are not aligned properly, this is the time for intervention and orthodontic treatment. Check with your paediatric dentist. ■

Grooming and Preening

Your daughter can start to wear a bra when she is a size 30 (measure under the bust). "Once she needs a 32 A cup size, she must start wearing a bra for support regularly," says Dr. Urvashi Sehgal, Delhi-based obstetrician and gynaecologist.

■ Get a sports bra for providing extra comfort to your child while she plays. Ideally your child should use a cotton brassiere.

■ Avoid sharing make-up, hairbrushes and combs to prevent transferring infections like fungus.

■ When your daughter does use nail paint, get her an acetone-free remover.

■ If your child wishes to wear artificial earrings, Dr. Agarwal suggests that you watch for an allergic reaction. Help her put them on, so they are not so tight that they press her ear lobes. And do remove them at night.

■ "In case of any oozing from the pierced area, Soframycin cream can be applied twice a day for two days," says Dr. Agarwal.

■ Boys love to style their hair and create spikes. "Gels are water-based so are safe to use if washed off by the end of the day," says Dr. Agarwal.

■ Restrict the use of mousse and hair spray to school annual day functions and wash off with shampoo within a few hours.