

1. Earlier puberty in boys and rising prostate cancer incidence

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Herman–Giddens et al report that the observed mean age of puberty in boys today is 6 months to almost 2 years earlier than in older studies dating back to 1970. At that time, 11.5 to 11.75 was the mean age of puberty in whites. Herman–Giddens et al found a current mean age of 10.1 in whites. The study of Herman–Giddens et al corroborates research on girls, whose breasts develop earlier than in the past. Herman–Giddens et al note that the public health implications need further exploration. (1)

One public health implication may be increased prostate cancer incidence, since early menarche is a risk factor for breast cancer.(2) The prostate cancer incidence has risen from 95 per 100,000 in 1975 to 250 per 100,000 in 1991. Although long–term incidence data indicate a decrease in prostate cancer since 2000, delay–adjusted rates in the most recent time period have increased from 155 (per 100,000) in 2005 to 171 in 2007. (3) Moreover, the long term trend is definitely upward.

Herman–Giddens et al did not analyze weight extensively, but the heaviest boys were entering puberty earlier. It is unclear if weight gain precipitated puberty or was a consequence. In girls adiposity is a risk factor for early menarche and breast cancer.(4) In any event, increasing childhood obesity is detrimental to health, and continued efforts are needed to combat it. (5)

Reference List

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Conflict of Interest:

None declared

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