

# doctor Q&A

## toddlers sticking stuff in their noses

**Q** Our toddler sometimes sticks cotton or pieces of tissue into his nose. Why does he do this, and can it cause problems?

Toddlers are extraordinarily curious creatures. Their curiosity is most intense about their own bodies. This naturally leads to basic questions about what body parts do and where different openings go. Toddlers are especially fond of sticking things up their noses, into their mouths and ears, as well as other places. The activity itself is harmless exploration. It can be harmful, by accident, if the object the child inserts is sharp, toxic or a choking hazard.

While you can't entirely prevent toddlers from putting things in places they don't belong, you can reduce their access to harmful items around the home. Store loose change, batteries, medication and sharp objects out of your toddler's reach. A foreign object in the nose or ears of toddlers leads to symptoms often mistaken for a sinus or ear infection. While a toddler with a foreign object stuck somewhere is a common source of stress for parents, recovering the lodged item is a relatively common duty of a pediatrician.



## young boy's voice changing early

**Q** My son is 10 and his voice is already changing. He's self-conscious, because none of the other boys his age are experiencing this. Is he hitting puberty too soon?

Puberty comes from the Latin word "puberatum," meaning age of maturity. During puberty, boys develop pubic hair and coarser facial and body hair. Voices become deeper, the Adam's apple grows larger, muscle mass thickens and a growth spurt occurs. Body odor and acne also develop.

Your son's voice deepens because his larynx (voice box) is also growing. This causes the vocal cords to thicken and produces a significantly deeper tone in boys. In a healthy 10-year-old, this is probably no cause for alarm. Each child develops at a different pace, but boys usually begin puberty around 11 - 12. The process can last several years until age 16 - 18. Many chapters of textbooks and articles in journals have been devoted to the exactly correct age for the onset of puberty, but there are many disagreements. In general, pubertal changes at age 8 are considered premature and puberty not occurring by 16 is without a doubt delayed. In premature puberty, a growth stunt could occur; delayed puberty also has some health risks. If your 10-year-old is experiencing multiple signs of puberty, visit your child's physician for further evaluation. If he's self-conscious about his deepening voice, gently remind him that everyone goes through the change at some point and it's only temporary.