

'Adolescent awkwardness'



Motor development and adolescence

As we continue to age and mature in to our teenage years, major changes occur within our body. These changes can have an impact on our ability to move and coordinate our limbs, causing what is known as 'adolescent awkwardness'.

Height

The height growth spurt that occurs in adolescence typically lasts for 2 to 3 years and peaks at around 12 years for females and 14 years for males. This growth involves a lengthening of the limbs and trunk which can result in a change in overall height by about 7.5cm per year for females and 10cm per year for males.

Weight

The peak in height growth leads to many other changes within our bodies, including the onset of peak weight increase. Peak weight increase typically occurs around 3 months for males and 7 months for females after peak height growth. This is important to understand as it allows us to understand the common phrase 'growing up and then filling out'.

Effect on motor skill performance

Understanding how height and weight can impact the movement ability of a learner is important to be able to modify and adjust curriculum design for that individual. By doing this we can reduce the potential for injury, empathise with a potential loss in skill and therefore frustration within the learner and be aware of the future changes in the physical stature of the learner.

The term 'adolescent awkwardness' is related to the time when an individual is increasing in height at the maximum rate. Studies have shown that during this period motor performance can be disrupted for up to 6 months in various movement skills. This temporary disruption is likely to be the result of the change in physical structure of the individual, such as their increased limb length and weight. For example, a sudden increase in weight may affect the ability to jump as the muscles have not increased in strength at the same rate. Another example would be after a large height growth increase the learner's centre of gravity has been altered, making balancing activities more difficult. One study found that the individuals who decreased in performance during peak height growth were more likely to have been the better performers before the growth spurt.

More likely in males

While this change in motor performance may occur in any individual, it has been shown to occur primarily in males. It is also important to mention that not all males will experience this.

Individual focus

While these characteristics are important to understand, it is always best to observe and analyse each individual independently. Changes in motor performance during adolescence are not universal and may be related to other factors such as developmental factors occurring in the cognitive and affective domains.