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Why is my tween so grouchy?

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The question

Is it possible that my tween daughter is experiencing the hormonal cycle of menstruation, without actually menstruating? Her mood swings have escalated, and it seems, sometimes, the extreme grouchiness can only be attributed to hormones.

Am I on the right track?

The answer

Tween girls do tend to be, as you mention, grouchy. Not all tweens experience these emotional swings but when they do, the family dynamic can be altered.

Exactly how female hormones impact the developing brain of a tween remains a mystery, but hormonal swings may play a role even before the onset of menstruation. I tend to call it the hormonal dawn. This age is like the dawn of a day --- the sky toward the east is getting brighter but it will still be a while before the sun rises.

In older individuals functional MRIs show that monthly hormonal fluctuations are associated with physiological changes in the brain. It is a complex science however and at this stage no objective and valuable data are available in tweens.

A good place to start is to focus on what you can control and to ignore things you cannot control such as when these hormones fluctuate. Make sure she's not staying up too late, eat excessive amounts of junk foods full of preservatives, chemicals and refined sugars.

Consistent exercise has been shown to help with mood regulation. Neuro-transmitters which boost an individual's mood and concentration are produced during aerobic physical activity. A psychiatrist from Harvard, Dr John Ratey, wrote a useful book which goes into more detail about exercise and the brain (The book title is "Spark")

Lastly, control your tween's media habits. In the past, television viewing was all a parent had to monitor. Spending time on social media websites, texting, playing video games - instead of interacting with people and getting daily exercise - can be mood changing.

Send pediatrician Peter Nieman your questions at [pediatrician@globeandmail.com](mailto:peds@theglobeandmail.com). He will answer select questions, which could appear in The Globe and Mail and/or on The Globe and Mail web site. Your name will not be published if your question is chosen.

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