



Growing older

As people grow older, they change shape. At first they get taller and thinner compared to their height, then later on they get shorter again.

You will notice many changes in your body during your school years. You only have to compare people in a class above you and below you to begin to see some of these changes (Picture 1).

Growing upwards

One of the easiest changes to spot is that people grow taller during their school years. Children grow taller very quickly. By your late-teens you will already have reached your final height. Your head grows taller, too, so that if you look back at photographs of yourself when you were young, you will see that your face is now narrower than it was.

Age 6 years
Height 113cm
Weight 20kg

Age 8 years
Height 129cm
Weight 32kg

Age 11 years
Height 152cm
Weight 54kg



Changes in height occur at different ages in girls and boys. Girls usually have a spurt of growth when they are about 10 or 11 years old. At this time they may become taller than boys of the same age.

Boys usually have their spurt of growth later, when they are between 13 and 15. It is during this time that they become, on average, taller than girls.

Filling out

You grow in two ways: you first grow taller, then you fill out. If you grow tall, but do not fill out at the same rate, you look tall and thin. You are not unhealthy, it's just that filling out will happen later in life for you.

As you fill out, you develop bigger bones and bigger muscles. You can see this in feet shapes and sizes (Picture 2). With bigger muscles you become stronger, so growing up means growing stronger, too.

Girls and boys both weigh about the same when they are 8 years old. Girls then put on more weight than boys, and become heavier, until about age 14, when boys overtake them again.

◀ (Picture 1) As people get older they get taller, they fill out and they put on weight.



◀ (Picture 2) Feet change shape just like the rest of the body. Here you can see casts of the feet of a family. Notice that the feet get longer, compared to their width, as the people get older. You may notice other changes in shape, too.

The later years

You are tallest and strongest by your early twenties. Then you may fill out even more. By your sixties you will start to get shorter again as your bones shrink and your muscles become less powerful (Picture 3). This completes your growth cycle.

Growing hair

Hair is one of the last things to grow. Look at your arms and you will see that they are covered with fine, almost invisible hairs. But if you look at an adult's arm you will see that the hairs are thicker, longer, and in the case of men, darker.

Summary

- Boys and girls grow at different rates during their lives.
- People grow tall first, then fill out.
- As people get older, they get shorter again.

▶▶ (Picture 3)
The human growth cycle.

