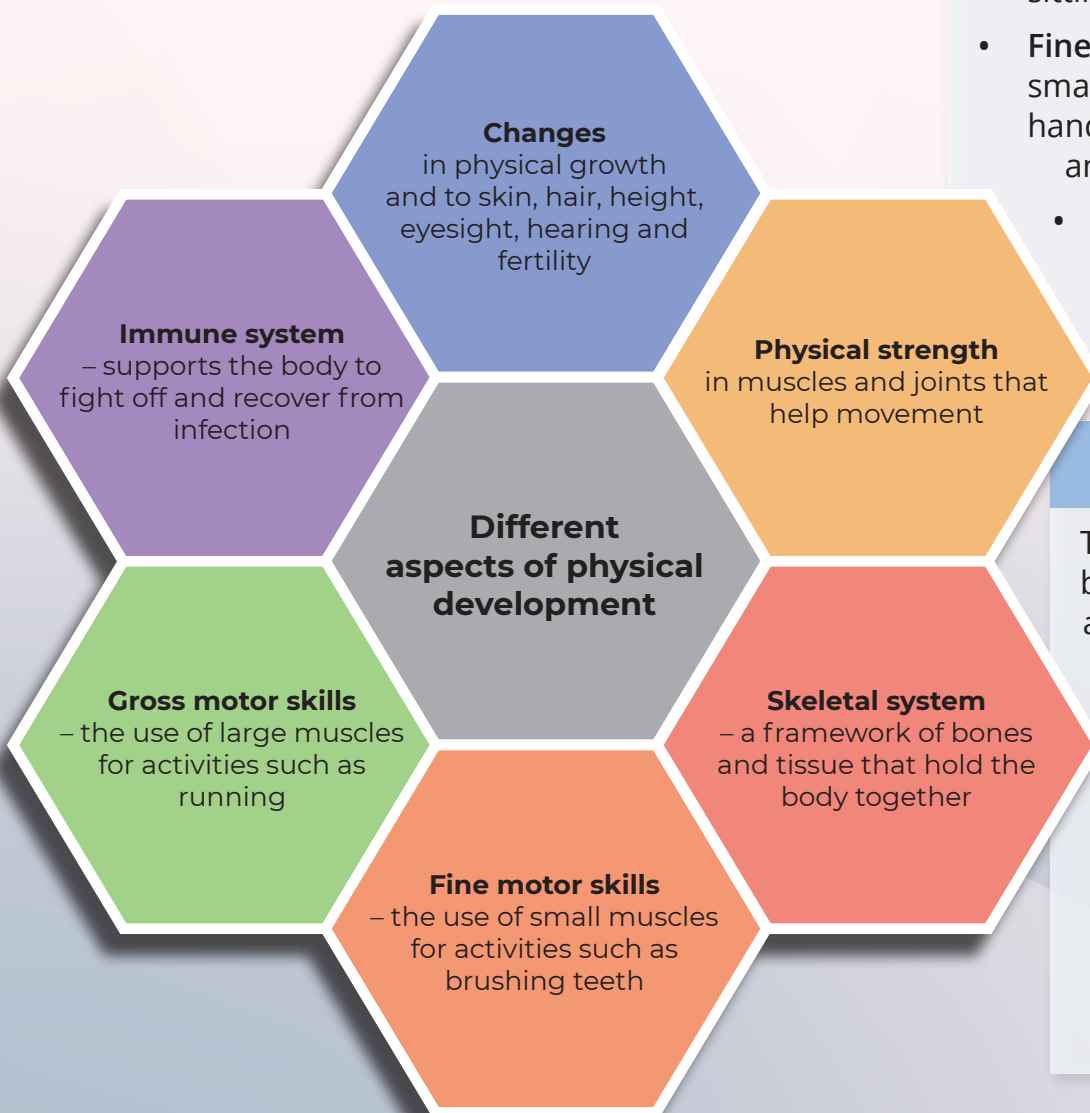


**What is physical development?**

Physical development refers to the growth and development of an individual's body across their lifespan, from birth to later adulthood. It includes growth, the development of motor skills and changes that occur during puberty, adulthood and ageing.

Different aspects of physical development**Infancy (0–2 years) and childhood (3–10 years)**

Physical development in the early years is rapid. Key milestones include:

- **Reflexes:** Involuntary movements babies are born with for survival, such as the grasping reflex (gripping a finger).
- **Growth:** Measurable increases in height and weight.
- **Gross motor skills:** The development of large muscle movements for activities like sitting, walking and running.
- **Fine motor skills:** The development of small, precise muscle movements in the hands for activities like drawing, writing and cutting.
- **Self-care skills:** Learning to become independent through skills like dressing, using the toilet, washing and eating.

Adolescence (11–19 years)

During adolescence, individuals experience puberty – the period of physical and emotional changes that marks the transition from childhood to adulthood.

General changes during puberty

- Increased height and weight (growth spurt).
- Growth of body hair, including underarm and pubic hair.
- Skin and hair become greasier, which can lead to acne.
- Sweat glands become more active.
- Changes to the voice.

Specific changes

- **For girls/individuals with a vagina:**
 - › Breasts develop and fill out.
 - › Periods (menstruation) begin.
 - › A white vaginal discharge may occur.
- **For boys/individuals with a penis:**
 - › The penis and testicles grow.
 - › Semen is produced, and erections can occur.
 - › The voice deepens significantly (breaks).
 - › Chest muscles develop.

Later adulthood (65+ years)

The ageing process involves physical changes that happen as the body gets older. The experience of ageing is different for everyone and is influenced by lifestyle, diet and health.

- **Changes to appearance:**
 - › Hair turns grey and may thin.
 - › Skin becomes thinner and develops wrinkles and age spots.
 - › Loss of height can occur.
- **Other physical changes:**
 - › Bones become more fragile.
 - › Loss of muscle mass and strength continues.
 - › Increased risk of tooth decay and gum disease.
 - › Sleep patterns may change.
 - › Weight loss can occur.

Adulthood (20–64 years)

Physical changes continue throughout adulthood.

- **Muscle strength:** Muscles are at their strongest in an individual's twenties and will decline in strength and mass with age, especially without regular use.
- **Weight gain:** Metabolism (the rate the body burns calories) slows down, which can lead to weight gain. This can cause breathlessness, joint pain and difficulty with physical activity.
- **Pregnancy:** A 40-week period with significant physical changes, including weight gain, sickness, swollen limbs and sore breasts.
- **Menopause:** Usually occurs between 45 and 55. A woman's periods stop, and she can no longer become pregnant naturally. Physical symptoms can include hot flushes, night sweats, aches and pains, and vaginal dryness.