

# WISCONSIN TWIN RESEARCH NEWSLETTER



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## Spotlight on Research Adolescents and Pubertal Development

Are your twins reaching adolescence? Are you uncertain how pubertal timing will affect the twins' relationships with you and with one other? The Wisconsin Twin Project is beginning a new study of adolescence, in addition to continuing our studies of toddler twins, school-age twins, and twins on the autism spectrum. Over the next five years, we expect to talk with over 500 families and their adolescents. Our research continues to concern emotional and social development, and will incorporate measures of physical development such as pubertal status.

How do researchers study puberty? In 1983, a group of researchers assembled a set of questions to tap different areas of puberty, referred to as the Pubertal Development Scale (PDS). This scale measures five significant changes that adolescents experience during puberty: growth spurts; changes in body hair; changes in skin detail; and breast development and age at menarche for girls; and beard growth and voice change for boys. We will administer the PDS as both an adolescent self-report and parent report questionnaire. In addition, we will collect saliva samples to measure DHEA and testosterone, hormone levels related to puberty. By collecting both written and biological measures of pubertal development for each adolescent, we hope to fully and accurately measure each twin's pubertal status.

In general, girls begin puberty sooner than boys, with girls showing first physical signs between ages 8 and 12, and boys showing first physical signs between ages 9 and 14. Puberty averages a length of five years, meaning that boys may not complete the five stages of pubertal growth until age 19 or even later. Timing of pubertal development has a strong

familial component. Therefore, girls often begin menstruating and developing around the same age their mothers did. Similarly, boys may follow their father's developmental pattern. Dizygotic (fraternal) twins have the same variation as typical non-twin siblings. Monozygotic (identical) twins, who share 100% of their genes, usually enter puberty at approximately the same time, with some natural variation.

Similar to other researchers, we are also interested in aspects of puberty other than physical development. For example, adolescence brings emotional changes, changes in relationships, and changes in sleep patterns. For parents, it's likely that you have not noticed such rapid developmental change in your twins since they were toddlers!

According to many experts, teens need 8-10 hours of sleep (NSF, 2007), but are averaging much less. The consequences include difficulty in reasoning and managing one's emotions and decreased motivation. According to medical research corroborated by the National Sleep Foundation, teenagers experience a nocturnal sleep-wake pattern that differs significantly from preadolescents and adults. This can mean that teenagers are biologically nocturnal. On the basis of this medical research, the Minneapolis Public School District shifted school start times from 7:15 to 8:40 in 1997. Follow-up analyses showed "significant benefits such as improved attendance and enrollment rates, less sleeping in class, and less student-reported depression" (Wahistrom, 2002).

We are excited to begin our new study of adolescence. We're especially looking forward to talking with adolescent twins and their parents! We appreciate your unique perspectives and insights.

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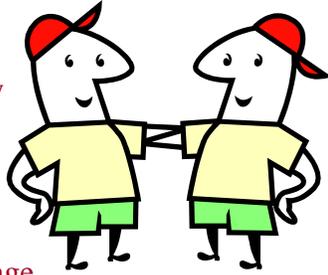
National Sleep Foundation (NSF). (2007). A look at the School Start Times Debate. Retrieved May 14, 2007, from [www.sleepfoundation.org](http://www.sleepfoundation.org) (select Sleep for All Ages; Teens and Sleep).

Wahistrom, K. (2002). Changing Times: Findings from the First Longitudinal Study of Later High School Start Times. *NASSP Bulletin* 86(633): 3-21. Retrieved May 14, 2007.

# Two Peas in a Pod?

## Encouraging Individuality in Young Twins

Many parents of twins report the concern and desire for their twins to grow up as individuals (Vodrack, 2003), while other parents embrace twinship as having a special collective quality. For understanding emerging individuality in young twins, both approaches are successful. To most appropriately fit your unique familial situation, your family has probably found a balanced approach between the two views of individuality and shared nature. To a large degree, the twins may ultimately establish each of their similarities and differences for parents. Here are ten tips on ways parents can encourage individuality (adapted from Vodrack 2003):



**1. Refer to each child by their single name.** Avoid labels like “the boys,” “the girls,” or “the twins.” Also vary the order you say the twins names when you say them together (i.e., “Sara and Emily” and “Emily and Sara”). Encourage your friends and family to do so also.

**2. Avoid labels.** Refrain from referring to one twin as “the scientist” or “the artistic one.” While the labels may be somewhat accurate, they may limit the twins from potential interests.

**3. Use identifiers to help others know who is who.** Even if your twins don’t look alike, people can still mix-up and confuse their names. Use simple identifiers like different color shoelaces or bibs and tell others how to tell them apart. This also will keep people from using their own labels like “He’s the heavier one,” or “He’s the shorter one.”

**4. Dress similarly instead of identically.** Even if they wear similar clothes make sure there is a distinction between whose clothes are whose. Keep their clothes in separate drawers and if one wants to borrow something, make them ask the other twin for permission. It is also important to start giving toddler twins the choice in how similar they want to dress.

**5. Go solo with each twin.** It is important for both twins to occasionally have the undivided attention of each parent. Have compact individual strollers so Mom can take one twin while Dad takes the other, and next time vice versa.

**6. Carefully observe each child’s interests.** Watching your children play is a great way to observe their interests. Let each twin make choices during playtime rather than just doing what the other twin is doing.

**7. Provide praise and individual affection and make sure both receive their fair share.** Foster both verbal and nonverbal communication with each child.

**8. Incorporate each individual into the dual birthday celebration.** To make shared birthdays feel more individualized, do things like having one cake for each twin. Sing “Happy Birthday” twice. Give separate presents and cards for each twin.

**9. Use humor to divert comparisons.** Well-meaning strangers may still inevitably make comparisons. The way in which you respond has a large effect on how your children will respond, so try to be light-hearted and show you don’t take the unwanted comparisons too seriously.

**10. Enjoy your young twins and remember to nurture the natural bond between them as well as to encourage their individualism.** Even though they are individuals, let them feel the bond between each other and recognize their special quality of being twins.

In the end, while these tips specifically pertain to young twins, it is important at any age to make your children feel like individuals. Also, regardless of the quality of advice you receive, you as a parent ultimately know your children the best, and only you can decide what works best for them.

*Adapted from Nancy Vodrak’s (2003) Two Peas in a Pod? Ten Ways to Encourage Individuality in Twin Toddlers. Retrieved 8/20/2003 from Toddlers Today, <http://toddlerstoday.com/resources/articles/twintoddlers.htm>*

## Keeping in Touch

Given that your family’s communication with us is separated by months, and often years, it is likely that your family has moved or your phone number has changed since our last contact. Please inform us of updated contact information so we can continue to include you in our newsletter mailings and calls about different portions of our studies. We can be reached toll-free at (866) 230-2560. Talk to you soon!

## Twins and Research on Autism

We estimate that there are as many as 130 pairs of twins in Wisconsin under the age of 18 in which one or both twins has autism or some other form of pervasive developmental disorder (PDD-NOS or Asperger Syndrome). Our research group has great personal and scientific interest in these disorders, and Dr. Goldsmith and Dr. Gernsbacher have received a large grant from the National Institute of Health to fund a twin research study to help understand the complexities of autism.

In the first phase of our study on autism spectrum disorders, parents are interviewed via telephone about their child(ren)'s developmental and medical history. The interview generally takes 45-60 minutes and can be scheduled whenever is convenient to the family. Families are paid \$25 for participating in this interview. In the next phase, we re-contact some families and ask them to participate in a follow up interview, which is also compensated monetarily.

We would like to know about the existence of all twin pairs in which one or both of the twins might have some form of autism, even if they might not choose to participate in the study. Thus far, we have located about 100 twin pairs in which one or both has autism or a related challenge; however, this is an insufficient number to do our research. We would appreciate a phone call or email from the parents of any twin with autism (identical or fraternal, boy or girl, regardless of whether the co-twin has any behavioral issues or not) living anywhere in Wisconsin.

Any interested person should email the staff project coordinator, Shaun Schweigert, at [saschweigert@wisc.edu](mailto:saschweigert@wisc.edu) or call him toll-free at (866) 230-2560 or locally at (608) 262-5574.

### Playdough: Fun for All Ages!

- 1 cup flour
- ½ cup salt
- 2 tablespoons cream of tartar
- one package of unsweetened Kool-Aid
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 cup water

Sift dry ingredients together in a saucepan. Add liquid ingredients and cook over medium heat until the mixture pulls away from the sides of the pan, approximately 3-4 minutes. Knead dough. Store in an airtight container.

## Twins and Cultural Diversity



We are encouraged by your enthusiastic response to the last newsletter's call for families with twins who have ethnic-minority heritage. More families can still become involved! We are still working to expand the diversity within our project. We are committed

to having a culturally representative group of families participating in all of our research. We are hoping to increase participation among families of ethnic-minority descent including African American, American Indian, Asian, Hispanic and other families of twins with diverse backgrounds. Families may be paid for their participation, depending on the project. Spanish speaking staff is available if needed. If you or a family you know may be interested in learning more about this research opportunity please call us toll free at (866) 230-2560.

## College Scholarships for Twins

As a parent of twins, is the thought of two college tuition bills making you a little nervous? Several colleges and universities offer discounts or scholarships for families with multiples. Here is a list of some institutions that offer discounts every year:

**Georgia**, Morris Brown College (Atlanta)

**Indiana**, Kelley School of Business at Indiana University (Bloomington; Scholarship for Accounting majors)

**Kansas**, Sterling College (Sterling)

**Ohio**, Lake Erie College (Painesville) & Notre Dame College (South Euclid)

**Oklahoma**, Carl Albert State College (Poteau) & Northeastern Oklahoma A & M College (Miami)

**Pennsylvania**, West Chester University of Pennsylvania (West Chester) & Wilson College (Chambersburg)

**Virginia**, Randolph-Macon Women's College (Lynchburg)

**Washington, DC**, George Washington University

Please let us know if your address or phone number changes.

Email: [wisconsintwins@waisman.wisc.edu](mailto:wisconsintwins@waisman.wisc.edu)

Phone: (866) 230-2560 or (608) 265-2674



Visit our website!  
<http://psych.wisc.edu/wtp>



As an expert on your own twins, you possess important knowledge. We appreciate the time you take to talk on the phone, fill out questionnaires, and visit with us. Each piece of information furthers research in child development. Thank you.

We value your input!

## DO YOU HAVE COMMENTS, QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS OR WANT TO KNOW IF YOU ARE ELIGIBLE FOR PARTICIPATION?

Please call us toll-free at (866) 230-2560 or (608) 265-2674 or email at [wisconsintwins@waisman.wisc.edu](mailto:wisconsintwins@waisman.wisc.edu).

- If your twins are under the age of 3, contact Sarah Grider
- If your twins are over the age of 3, contact Nicole Schmidt

If you want to relay information to us about one or both of your twins possibly being on the autism spectrum, please contact Shaun Schweigert toll-free at (866) 230-2560 or locally in Madison at (608) 262-5574. Dr. Goldsmith is also available via email at [hhgoldsm@wisc.edu](mailto:hhgoldsm@wisc.edu).