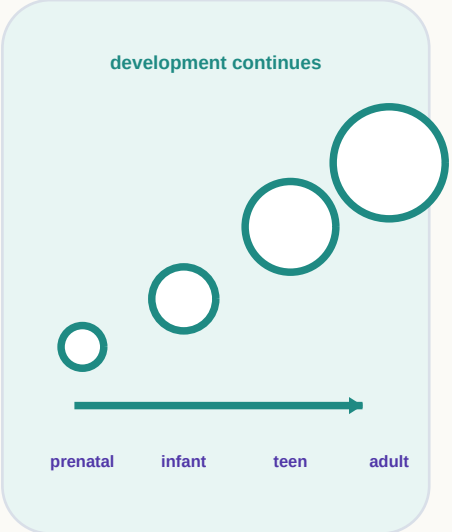
AP PSYCHOLOGY | UNIT 3

TOPIC 3.2

Physical Development Across the Lifespan

Physical development begins before birth and continues through infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.



A LIFESPAN, NOT A FINISH LINE

PRENATAL — conditions matter → **EARLY YEARS** — motor + perception → **ADOLESCENCE** — puberty → **ADULTHOOD** — change varies

BY THE END, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO...

1. Explain how prenatal factors may affect later development.
2. Connect motor skills, reflexes, depth perception, and sensitive periods.
3. Describe physical development in adolescence and adulthood.

BIG IDEA

Development follows broad patterns, but exact timing and the effects of physical change differ across people and contexts.

1 Before birth through childhood

Biological conditions and experience can influence physical milestones, movement, and early perception.

PRENATAL INFLUENCES

TERATOGENS | ILLNESS | GENES | HORMONES | ENVIRONMENT

These factors may influence later physical or psychological outcomes; exposure does not guarantee one result.

MOVEMENT: SAME GENERAL ORDER, DIFFERENT TIMING

FINE MOTOR

Small, precise movements such as grasping, drawing, or buttoning.

GROSS MOTOR

Large-body movements such as sitting, crawling, walking, or jumping.

REFLEXES AND EARLY PERCEPTION

ROOTING REFLEX

Touch near the mouth prompts an infant to turn toward the stimulus.

VISUAL CLIFF

An apparent drop tests whether an infant responds to depth.

SENSITIVE PERIODS

Some experiences have especially strong effects during particular times. In some non-human animals, imprinting is rapid early learning.

2 Adolescence through adulthood

Physical transitions can shape behavior and daily functioning, but they do not unfold identically for everyone.

ADOLESCENCE: PUBERTY AND REPRODUCTIVE MATURATION

PUBERTY

A period of rapid physical growth and development of reproductive ability.

PRIMARY SEX CHARACTERISTICS

Structures directly involved in reproduction.

SECONDARY SEX CHARACTERISTICS

Puberty changes not directly involved in reproduction.

MENARCHE

first menstrual period

SPERMARCHE

first ejaculation

ADULTHOOD: CHANGE ACROSS MANY SYSTEMS

MOBILITY

movement

FLEXIBILITY

range of motion

REACTION TIME

response speed

SENSORY ACUITY

vision + hearing

MENOPAUSE A reproductive transition involving the end of menstrual cycles; it is one part of adult physical development.

DO NOT TURN AVERAGES INTO DESTINY

Age-related patterns describe tendencies. Health, experience, environment, and individual differences affect timing and impact.