

Coming of Age in America (Much Too Soon)

Girls in the U.S. and other industrialized nations are now reaching puberty at drastically earlier ages.¹ However, Hispanic-American girls don't experience this early puberty to the extent that many other Americans do, reported Mary Wolf, MD, at the American Association for Cancer Research's annual meeting in April, 1999 in Philadelphia.²

Two factors proven responsible for precocious puberty are detached parenting³ and consumption of cow's milk. As a whole, Hispanic parents tend to protect their young from both of these debilitating influences. Children who reach puberty and menarche early have adult sexual feelings they don't understand, which then leads to increased teen pregnancy and venereal disease. There is also a greatly increased risk of reproductive cancers, including breast cancer.⁴

When an infant is raised with natural feeding, plenty of body contact and a high level of affectionate response, strong attachment bonds are developed.⁵ According to attachment researchers, the consequences of this parenting style are fewer behavior problems and mental disorders, less social misconduct, a greater ability to form lasting adult relationships, and improved overall health.⁶ In contrast, when nursing is withheld from a baby and there is maternal separation during much of the day and night, high levels of the stress hormone cortisol are produced.⁷ This leads to permanently altered brain function, hormonal imbalance and reduced immune functioning, as well as increased mental and behavior problems and a decreased ability to deal with stress throughout life.^{8,9,10,11}

Cow's milk has a high fat content, high levels of biologically available hormones and growth factors, and other chemical contaminants from highly medicated cows fed environmental trash¹² (chicken feces and diseased carcasses, for instance). These are all linked to early puberty and proliferation of cancer cells in human reproductive organs.^{13,14,15} Moreover, immune reactions to large bovine proteins are associated with gastrointestinal disease¹⁶ and cancer.^{17,18} When consumption of cow's milk starts in infancy (via baby formulas), the consequences seem to be the most dire.¹⁹

Hispanic children are more often breastfed, and for extended periods. This leads not only to good attachment, but prevents exposure to artificial feeds derived from bovine milk. Hispanic youngsters often sleep with their parents or other family members and grow up in warmer family-oriented environments, resulting in deeper attachments between children and parents, thereby preventing high cortisol levels and their effects on early puberty.²⁰ Early maturity is an innate survival response to inadequate resources in childhood²¹ seen in many mammals.

When resources are scarce - namely, when parents and nutrition are less available children become more aggressive (to be able to compete for limited food resources), and they mature more quickly (providing for survival of the species as opposed to quality of life). 20th-century parenting often

signals scarcity responses in an infant, including practices such as leaving children alone to "cry it out," feeding on schedules rather than in response to hunger cries, and providing less nutritious feed (infant formula).

In general, the consumption of dairy products in traditional Hispanic homes beyond infancy is also lower than U.S. averages. Although American Mexican food is often piled high with cheese and sour cream, this is not the case in traditional Hispanic homes.

Being genetically Hispanic is not enough. As a Hispanic family lives in the U.S. for several generations, their level of physical and psychological disease increases.²² Evidently, as standard American baby care and diet are adopted, American levels of decreased health (and presumable early puberty) are produced. Although it is more difficult to measure, it is felt that early maturation is being experienced by boys as well.

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