



# Teen Talk

A quarterly newsletter from the Children's Hospital League's Resource Center

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## Facial Differences

An interview with Elysha Ertas by Asharee and Caitlin

Elysha is a 22-year-old college student, who was born with a complete bilateral cleft lip. This January she wrote a health guide about Facial Difference for our web site. Thanks Elysha for your great work!

### How did your facial difference affect you when you were in your teens? How did you cope?

By the time I was a teen, I was actually pretty confident about my appearance. I went to a small school from 1st-12th grade where everybody knew me and were very accepting of my facial difference. The only thing that was frustrating was when strangers stared or asked questions. I always calmly explained that I was born with a cleft lip. Young children were the easiest to respond to, but they were also the most direct in their reactions.

### How did your peers react to your facial difference when you were younger?



When I came to visit the school before 1st grade I distinctly remember two girls who kept staring and giggling at me. After I started attending the school they actually became two of my best friends. I think it serves as a great example that when you get to know another person beyond their physical appearance, that person can actually be someone you share a lot in common with and enjoy being around. Starting in first grade I became close with all the kids in my class, so they never reacted negatively to my facial difference while growing up.

### Did you face adversity and/or discrimination due to your facial difference?

There is nothing specific that comes to mind. As a young teen my friends sometimes talked about the subject of modeling. I remember thinking that having a facial difference would prevent me from being able to model if I ever wanted to.

### How many surgeries have you been through and were there any support systems in place for you?

I've had five operations (as well as several involved dental procedures). My family (as well as peers and teachers) always provided support and knew that it was important to encourage me to try new things and foster my interests. They made sure that I knew having a facial difference was not a limitation. Starting on the day I was born my dad always used to recite to me: "You are bright, you are strong, and you are beautiful." And I think it

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# 10 Ways to Love Your Body!

- 1 Remember, your body is YOU, not just a fashion statement.
- 2 Focus on what you like about your body.
- 3 When you go to bed, thank your body for everything it did that day.
- 4 Count your blessings, not your zits!
- 5 Keep a list of 10 things you like about yourself—without mentioning your looks. Add new ones when you find them!
- 6 Write “I’m beautiful inside and out” on sticky notes and put them on all the mirrors in your room.
- 7 Remember how cool your body is – your skin replaces itself once a month, your stomach lining every 5 days, your liver every 6 weeks, and your skeleton every 4 months – respect and appreciate it!
- 8 Think of the energy you spend worrying about your looks. Pick one fun thing you’ve been wanting to do, and spend your energy on that instead.
- 9 Hang out with friends that make you feel upbeat and positive about yourself.
- 10 Be your body’s friend, support it and treat it well.

Adapted by Caitlin with permission from Eating Disorders and Awareness Prevention. [www.edap.org](http://www.edap.org)

## Put a little Spring in your step with a delicious Strawberry Banana Smoothie!



Ingredients:  
 1 cup of low-fat buttermilk  
 1/2 of a ripe banana  
 1/3 cup of fresh strawberries  
 2 tbsp of orange juice concentrate

Preparation:  
 Wash strawberries and cut off tops. Mix all ingredients in a blender. If you use an electric mixer, slice the strawberries and cut up the banana before adding to the liquid. Makes 1 serving.

### Internet Chats

#### MRKH

May 9th, 7-8 pm

#### Endometriosis

May 9th, 8:30-9:30 pm

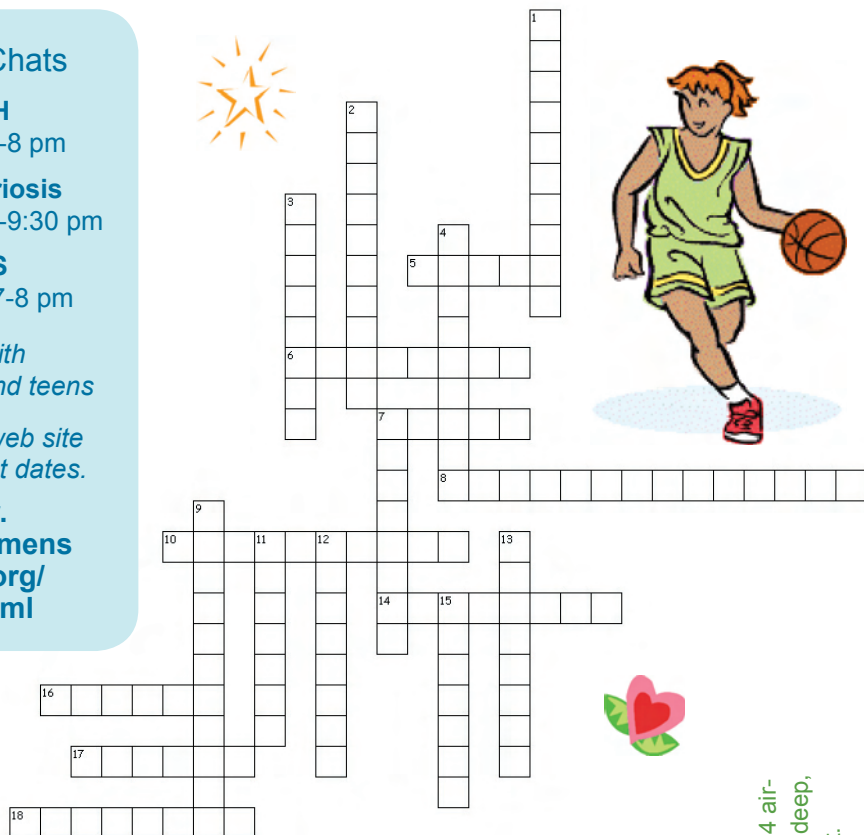
#### PCOS

May 17th, 7-8 pm

Chat with specialists and teens

Check our web site for June chat dates.

[www.youngwomenshealth.org/chat.html](http://www.youngwomenshealth.org/chat.html)



### Across

5. This influences your body image by being unrealistic
6. Makes you feel better about yourself and makes you more healthy and strong
7. These \_\_\_\_ diets often fail and are bad for your health and development
8. Having a bad body image can lead to this
10. You will never be able to attain this
14. What they do to many of the photos in the media
16. \_\_\_\_ is in they eye of the beholder
17. This doesn't always show a true reflection
18. Having a positive one is good for your body image

### Down

1. One of these can certainly throw off your body image!!
2. Having good \_\_\_\_ means you respect your feelings and experiences
3. Beauty is only \_\_\_\_\_
4. How you see yourself
7. When you are too nit-picky about yourself
9. This contributes to good nutrition
11. These people can help you to have good body image
12. Can make you feel self-conscious
13. When you exercise you build your \_\_\_\_\_
15. You show \_\_\_\_ for your body

Continued from page 1 played a major role in helping me have confidence and build good self-esteem.

### How do you hope this guide will help those who have facial differences, and do you think it will help those that don't have facial difference to understand better?

I hope the guide will serve as a helpful resource for teens trying to cope with a facial difference, who experience difficulty building a healthy body image and good self-esteem. I also hope the guide will raise awareness so that people without facial differences can learn more about this issue and its emotional effects. In turn they can learn to react positively to teens with facial differences.

### Through writing this, did you learn anything about yourself or find anything interesting and new?

I realized how fortunate I was to grow up with a good support system that gave me confidence in academics, to participate in sports, theater and arts, and also to get involved in school committees or social events. Unfortunately, many teens with facial differences experience a lot of difficulty doing these things, and I learned how important it is to build a good self-esteem at an earlier age. While doing this project I learned that hardly any research studies have been done on teens with facial differences and its emotional and psychological affects. Perhaps this guide will be the start of future investigations! ♥

Answers - Across: 5 media, 6 exercise, 7 crash, 8 eating disorder, 10 perfection, 14 air-brush, 16 beauty, 17 mirror, 18 attitude. Down: 1 bad hair day, 2 self esteem, 3 skin deep, 4 self image, 7 critical, 9 healthy food, 11 friends, 12 clothing, 13 strength, 15 respect.