

Height, Health, and Hashkafa

As pediatricians working in the frum community, we often remind families that in *Yiddishkeit*, we care most about what's inside - not outside. Focusing too much on looks, height, or image is not part of our tradition. Our Torah teaches: "אל תסתכל בקנקן אלא במה" — "Don't look at the container, but at what's inside." We measure a person by their *middos*, *yiras Shamayim*, and how they treat others — not by how tall they are.

The *sefarim* speak about the בני-הא-להים: "Their exaggerated physicality was accompanied with an exaggerated emphasis on life's physical dimensions in consequent disregard of spiritual and moral concerns. Because of their impressive height and physical prowess, they became the natural leaders of a society as it increasingly valued physical over moral excellence."

That being said, there are times when medical treatment is truly necessary. If a child has health issues that are affecting growth — like poor nutrition, lack of sleep or exercise, chronic stress, or conditions like Crohn's or celiac — we absolutely intervene. Also, if a child has a real growth hormone deficiency, it must be treated, not just for height, but for healthy bones, metabolism, and heart development. In these cases, short stature is just one symptom — and it is not the main reason for intervention.

There are also situations where growth hormone is used even without a deficiency. One example is *Idiopathic Short Stature (ISS)* — children whose height is below the 1.2th percentile for their age and gender. That's usually around 5'3" for boys and 4'11" for girls as projected adult height. The FDA has approved growth hormone in these cases, and also for conditions like Turner syndrome, chronic kidney disease, Noonan syndrome, Prader-Willi, SHOX deficiency, and children who were small for gestational age and didn't catch up.

However, in many cases where the child is simply short but otherwise healthy, the push for treatment comes from social pressure — not medical need. These are serious hormonal interventions. We've seen families refuse to give a child a short burst of steroids for severe asthma, yet they are somehow comfortable giving puberty blockers or long-term growth hormone injections — just to make their child a little taller. That approach needs real reflection. Are we fixing a problem — or creating one?

Some parents ask about delaying puberty—either to help their child grow a little taller, or because their child “doesn't seem ready.” While there are rare cases where this is needed, in a healthy child going through puberty at an earlier age, stopping puberty can carry real risks. These include weaker bones, a smaller growth spurt, and unknown effects on future fertility. It also sends a message to the child that something is wrong with how their body is developing—when in fact, everything may be completely normal. These are powerful medications, and we have to be careful about using them unless there's a clear medical reason.

Most importantly, we must give our children the right message. *Hashem* made each and every one of us exactly the way we are supposed to be. Short? Great. You're in good company. Many of the greatest *gedolei Yisrael* were short — the Chazon Ish, the Steipler, Rav Shach, the Vilna Gaon, Rambam, and Rav Moshe Feinstein are some prime examples. They not only led *Klal Yisrael* and wrote *seforim* that changed the world — they also got wonderful shidduchim and built families of greatness. Two inches didn't hold them back at all.

So when your child asks, “Why am I shorter than everyone else?” — remind them: Our pride is in our *Torah*, our *middos*, and our heart. Not our inches.