

Ages + Stages

ADVICE AS YOUR CHILD GROWS

PREGNANCY

HOW TO

Manage Stretch Marks

by **ADRIENNE FARR**

● Understand what they are.

Up to 90 percent of pregnant women can develop stretch marks (also called striae). When they first appear, they may be red, purple, pink, reddish-brown, or dark brown, depending on your skin color. They are caused by extreme growth of the skin beyond the limits of its elasticity, and are most likely to develop when the skin is stretched rapidly, as it is during pregnancy. Although anyone can develop them, you may have a higher risk of stretch marks if other people in your family have gotten them. No one method has proven to be 100 percent successful in preventing stretch marks, but there are some things that may help minimize their appearance if you get them.

● Take your vitamins.

Collagen and elastin fibers in the skin are necessary to keep rapidly growing skin taut. The stronger they are, the less likely they are to break—which is what causes stretch marks. To make sure that your skin maintains its natural elasticity, eat plenty of foods that are rich in vitamins E and C, zinc, and silica, all of which help

form collagen. Vitamin C in particular is an important antioxidant that aids in protecting tissue from damage. Vitamins B2 (riboflavin) and B3 (niacin) are also a great defense against stretch marks and can help promote and maintain healthy skin.

● Make sure to hydrate.

Staying hydrated will not only help maintain your skin's elasticity during pregnancy, but it's also essential for supporting skin's natural cell renewal. According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, pregnant women should drink eight to 12 cups of water daily. Using moisturizing serums can also keep your skin hydrated. Check with your doctor before treating stretch marks on your own, though, because some products contain ingredients such as retinol that could harm your baby.

● Consult a dermatologist.

If you do have lasting stretch marks and want to have them removed (to the degree that this is possible), speak to a board-certified dermatologist. The doctor may be able to offer solutions to help minimize stretch marks' appearance, but advanced treatments will generally be done after your pregnancy. Early stretch marks, which can be reddish, are easier to manage because the presence of functioning blood vessels makes them more responsive to

treatment. As stretch marks mature, they turn lighter and are more difficult to deal with, but the options that your dermatologist may discuss include chemical peels, radio frequency, laser therapy, and microdermabrasion.

Sources: Parents advisor Kim Nichols, M.D., founder of Nichols MD of Greenwich, in Connecticut; Mona Sadeghpour, M.D., cofounder of the SkinMed Institute, a board-certified dermatologist, and a fellowship-trained laser and cosmetic surgeon.

0-12 MONTHS

HOW TO

Deal With Diaper Rash

by **MICHELLE CROUCH**

● Don't freak out.

No matter how diligent you are about diaper changes, at some point you'll probably open your baby's diaper and encounter the red splotches and inflamed skin that are telltale signs of a diaper rash. When it happens, take a deep breath; it doesn't mean you did anything wrong. Almost all babies have bouts of diaper rash because their skin is so sensitive and they poop and pee so often.

● Schedule air time.

Going diaper-free lets the skin breathe and heal. Right after a poop or a bath, leave your baby in the buff and try some tummy time on a towel. Even five to ten minutes can make a big difference. In a rush? Give your munchkin a 30-second blast with the blow-dryer on the cool setting.

● Use ointment regularly.

Make sure your baby's bottom is dry, then apply a thin layer of diaper-rash ointment. It creates a physical barrier to prevent the skin from coming into contact with urine and stool. Most contain petroleum, zinc oxide, or both, which help seal out wetness and



Staying hydrated will help maintain your skin's elasticity and support its natural cell removal.



Get More Age-Specific Tips

Hover your phone's camera over the smart code to subscribe to our daily newsletter.

promote healing. Be wary of those that have fragrances or a long list of ingredients, even if they're organic. They can be irritants and make the rash worse.

● **Clean gently.**

The chemicals in some commercial wipes may bother your baby's skin. When they have a rash, try using a soft washcloth with warm water instead. You can also try a baking-soda bath to soothe the raw skin and promote healing. Dump a quarter cup of baking soda into their bath and let them soak for ten minutes. Steer clear of laundry detergent or dryer sheets with color or fragrance for your baby's clothes, especially if you use cloth diapers. Choose breathable clothing like cotton instead of polyester. And even though baby powder used to be a changing-table staple, experts now say parents should avoid it because it can be inhaled and cause breathing problems in babies.

● **Contact your pediatrician.**

If your baby's diaper rash blisters or bleeds, reach out to your pediatrician for help. Some diaper rashes develop into bacterial, fungal, or yeast infections that call for a prescription to clear them up. Fortunately, as kids grow, their skin toughens up and they have fewer bowel movements, so it shouldn't be long before diaper rash is a distant memory.

Sources: Kristen Bruno, M.D., a Washington University pediatrician at St. Louis Children's Hospital; Neal Davis, M.D., a pediatrician and medical director of pediatric community-based care for Intermountain Healthcare, in Salt Lake City.

1-2 YEARS

HOW TO

Plan First Playdates

by REBECCA RAKOWITZ

● **There's no pressure.**

From birth, your child has already been doing a lot of socializing with you and other important people in your

family's life. Those simple, everyday interactions—smiling, talking, and playing with your child—set the stage for later friendships. Babies as young as 6 months may be interested and excited about seeing a peer, but kids ages 1 and 2 years are still very self-focused. They tend to be curious about other kids, but they're easily frustrated when these children don't do what they want. So if your child hasn't been able to spend time with peers in the past year, don't worry that they are missing out; it won't harm their development, and there is no pressure to play catch-up. And many kids don't start playdates until preschool, so there's no rush. But if you want to begin, now can be a time to slowly dip your child's feet into the social waters, if you take the right precautions. They just may be curious about other kids, even if they don't actually want to play with them.

● **Set the scene.**

Supervised environments with room to run and explore, like a playground or a backyard, give kids 1 and 2 years old the chance to interact safely and manage how close or far apart they are from each other. Have toys or activities on hand, but don't expect the kids to play a specific game or even do things together. Put away any item that's very precious to your child. Sharing is a challenge at this age! Also, keep in mind that an hour is long enough for a playdate now. Any longer than that makes conflict more likely (think "stolen" toys and tired, grumpy kids).

● **Manage your expectations.**

At around 18 months, kids show definite preferences for some children over others. Usually, they like kids whom they see often and who like doing the same things they enjoy. While you may picture your child and their friend playing together, it is more typical for kids this age to engage in parallel play. This means they are playing the same way near each other but not with each other. A playdate is an opportunity for your child to get comfortable being around other kids. They may imitate or simply watch one another. Your child is learning

just by being in the same space with other kids, even if they're not interacting directly.

● **Go with the flow.**

If you feel that your child doesn't have what you consider to be appropriate social skills, it's totally fine. Withdrawn or aggressive behaviors are typical when young children don't know how to handle a situation. Pushing can be common at this age because kids are focused on what they want and not so good at using their words or imagining someone else's feelings. Aggressive behavior is often short-lived and more extreme in younger children, so try not to overreact. Instead, do your best to gently and patiently help your child speak up kindly or redirect their attention to a new activity. Getting along with others is complicated, even for bigger people. So creating opportunities for your child to play with other kids and offering caring guidance to get through those unavoidable rough spots are great ways to help your child begin to figure out the social world. If you have concerns regarding your child's social skills, talk with their pediatrician.

Sources: *Parents* advisor Eileen Kennedy-Moore, Ph.D., a psychologist and author of *Growing Friendships*; Tovah P. Klein, Ph.D., director of the Barnard Center for Toddler Development and author of *How Toddlers Thrive*.

3-4 YEARS

HOW TO

Introduce Board Games

by KATE ROCKWOOD

● **Start simple.**

Kids' first forays into board games should be all about the basics—learning to take turns, count spaces, make decisions, and follow directions. That's why classics like Candy Land and Chutes and Ladders are such great starting points for preschoolers. But

if you're looking to branch out a little, try a game such as First Orchard that introduces concepts like color matching and simple decision making (and it can be played solo too). And don't forget about dice-based games. They teach an important skill that really takes off at this age: "subitizing," or being able to look at the dots on dice and know the number without counting.

● **Downplay winning.**

Board games are often a kid's first experience with losing. And yes, there may be tears, but that can actually be kind of a good thing. Games are a chance to teach kids basic sportsmanship and that it's okay to make mistakes. If your child gets upset when they lose, tell them: "I'm proud of you for taking turns and trying your best. I know it can be hard to lose, and I can't wait to play with you again." To keep things encouraging, include games with cooperative play like Busytown, Feed the Woozle, and Race to the Treasure!

● **Stretch their muscles.**

Board games aren't just good for the mind and the emotions—they can boost kids' physical development too. Games like Gumball Grab or The Sneaky, Snacky Squirrel Game! use tools that give the pincer grasp a workout. That's perfect for kids who are almost ready to write. And for a game that gets kids hopping, skipping, jumping, and walking backward, try Marvel's I Can Do That! Hero Training Game.

● **Have fun as a family.**

One of the best gifts you can give your kids is uninterrupted playtime together. It's good for your relationship and their mental health (even if playing Chutes and Ladders for the 100th time might not be so good for yours). When it's game time, clear out the distractions—power down all devices, try to forget about the sink full of dishes that's waiting for you, and just focus on being present with your kiddo.

Source: Chelsey Rosen, Psy.D., an adolescent and adult psychologist at Manhattan Psychology Group.

5-6 YEARS

HOW TO

Give Them Confidence to Speak Up

by **MARYN LILES**

● **Tell them fear is normal.**

Being comfortable speaking to others, whether one-on-one or in front of a group, will make it easier for your child to convey information and make social connections. Although facing an audience of classmates is not the same as facing a ferocious beast, it can feel just as scary to your kid. Their worries about the crowd's reaction, such as being teased by peers or asked a question they can't answer, can give them butterflies, sweaty palms, and a racing heartbeat. But let them know that this fight-or-flight response is natural and that they'll learn to overcome jitters with practice.

● **Help them with technique.**

Encourage your child to practice using confident body language by standing tall, smiling into the mirror while speaking, and making eye contact with the "audience." You might help them learn to project by using puppets to model the difference between speaking



Explain that taking deep breaths before talking, slowing down, and increasing their voice volume can help too.

up and mumbling. Explain that taking deep breaths before talking, slowing down, and increasing their voice volume can help too.

● **Rehearse together.**

Show your child that the same set of words or sentences can carry different meanings, depending on their inflection and presentation. Try using an exercise dubbed "I can't believe this is happening." Have your child say that phrase using various emotions—excitement, shock, or anger, for example—and make up a scenario in which each expression of the phrase could be appropriately used. To make it even more personal, choose a phrase that they often use and do the same exercise.

● **Get experience IRL.**

The next time you go out to eat, urge your child to order their meal themselves. At dinner, ask them to share a story about their day, or help them dial Grandma for a phone update that will get them chatting. Having them pipe up in familiar situations will prepare them for moments in the spotlight, at school or elsewhere.

Sources: Jackson Chow, director of Communication Academy, in Cupertino, California; Stacey A. Marshall, author of *Captain Courage and the World's Most Shocking Secret*.

7-9 YEARS

HOW TO

Handle Clothing Conflicts

by **KATE ROCKWOOD**

● **Tap into their inner designer.**

Your child may be increasingly interested in establishing their own sense of style and have strong feelings about what they like. It's best to establish some basic rules (say, fresh undies and socks daily, nothing with holes in it), and try to let go of your



Together make a “weekend” drawer so they can grab what they want on Saturdays and Sundays.

worry over some of the other combos, like a leopard-print top, pastel bottoms, and mismatched socks. If it irks you when your kid’s clothes clash, it might be more about your own fears of being judged as a parent than about any real damage that stripes and polka dots might cause together. And who knows? You might be raising the next set decorator for feature films.

● Offer options.

Obviously, different seasons and settings require different attire. When you ask open-ended questions like “What do you want to wear to the restaurant tonight?” you could be inviting a battle. Instead, just explain the dress code (“You can’t wear your wrestling T-shirt to dinner this time”), then offer your kid two or three parent-approved choices (“Would you rather wear this dress tonight or your nice blue pants?”). Such a practice helps teach your kid how to tailor their choices while still empowering them with a bit of control. Your kid’s not allowed to wear logos to school? Together make a “weekend” drawer so they can grab what they want on Saturdays and Sundays.

● Let them learn for themselves.

If your second-grader decides to wear flip-flops in a rainstorm, you can fuss with them over it or let their feet get wet. Sometimes the most effective teacher is Mother Nature (as long as your kid isn’t at risk for frostbite, of course). The next time you feel a major meltdown brewing over the need for a jacket, take a deep breath and let them handle the natural consequences of their bad

clothing choices. Stash a spare set of shoes or a sweater in their backpack or in the car just in case. It’ll be a wonderful welcome, even if they don’t tell you so.

Sources: Barbara Greenberg, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist in Fairfield, Connecticut; Maggie Mamen, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist in Ottawa, Ontario.

10–12 YEARS

HOW TO

Respect Their “Alone Time”

by JENNA WIRTH

● Give them space.

Everyone deserves some privacy, and as kids transition from childhood to adolescence, it’s very common for them to crave it. But not because they’re up to no good. At this age, kids are juggling the demands of school, peer pressure, home, and social media, which can all be stressful. They are becoming increasingly aware of the opinions and perspectives of others and are motivated by achievement and social reinforcement. Allowing your child to have some space away from others helps them reflect and process what has gone on in their life—and recharge their battery.

● Promote self-sufficiency.

Your child is becoming more responsible, and one of the hardest challenges they face is gaining independence from you while still living at home. Giving them some room to breathe offers them the opportunity to make decisions as well as to organize and direct their time. Providing excessive supervision can be harmful to your relationship because it can make them believe the world is dangerous or that they’re not capable of doing things on their own.

● Foster creativity and self-esteem.

In general, when kids are around others, they tend to be mindful of certain social

expectations, which can influence their behaviors, actions, and strategies. Because of this, your kid’s authentic creativity can suffer. But when your child has time to be on their own, they’re able to explore new interests and generate their ideas without worrying about what others think. The pride and satisfaction they feel from learning what they can do themselves, and the ability to enjoy their own company, can then boost their sense of self.

● Support their efforts.

The most important thing for you to do is recognize and support your child’s growing sense of independence by limiting your feedback, letting them make mistakes that don’t have major consequences, and not overscheduling them. You should also make sure that you and your partner model this behavior in your own lives to help your child understand that everyone needs downtime. And remember, when they prefer to be behind their closed door, it isn’t a rejection of you and doesn’t mean they’re trying to keep things from you. They’re enjoying getting to know who they are, which can actually make your relationship stronger in the long run.

Sources: *Parents* advisor Lisa Damour, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist in Shaker Heights, Ohio, cohost of the *Ask Lisa* podcast, and senior advisor to the Schubert Center for Child Studies at Case Western Reserve University; *Parents* advisor Wayne Fleisig, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist at Children’s of Alabama Behavioral Health in Birmingham; Caroline Fulton, Psy.D., a child and adolescent psychologist at Northwestern Medicine Central DuPage Hospital, in Winfield, Illinois.

Send Us Your Kid Quotes!

BEST OF GIGGLES PROMOTION, PAGE 180
NO PURCHASE NECESSARY TO PARTICIPATE. Send your funny story to kidquotes@parents.com. Include your full mailing address, phone number, and your eligible child’s name and date of birth. Subject to Terms and Conditions at parents.com/gigglespromotion. Open to legal residents of the 50 United States and the District of Columbia, 21 years or older. One submission per person per email address per day. Void where prohibited. Sponsor: Meredith Corporation, 225 Liberty St., New York, NY 10281.