7 habits that make skin age faster

Home remedies for stretch marks

What’s wrong with the teenage mind?

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As the temperature starts to soar, it signals the start of summertime in our tropical paradise. Summer means beach and beach means looking good! Most people tend to only think of creams and lotions to put on their body when it comes to looking good. But just as important is what you put into your body.

The loudest buzz now is about the power of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients to give skin a more radiant, healthy, and even youthful glow. Health experts say that vitamins and minerals in all forms play an integral role in a healthy complexion, whether the source is food, supplements, or even a jar of cream.

In this special issue of Natural Beauty, we focus on skin health and bring you lots of tips and ideas on how to have and maintain healthy, beautiful, and younger-looking skin. Your skin reflects what is going on inside your body, and all skin conditions, from acne and eczema to wrinkles and eye bags, are the manifestations of your body’s internal needs and deficiencies. So take time to know what food and what habits to have (and discard) to ensure you don’t age before your time.

Also, in this issue, we offer an article for new parents on the controversial subject of whether or not to circumcise your baby boy. There are well-known religious, social, and medical reasons to recommend circumcision; however, most major medical societies have taken an “impartial” view of the procedure, neither recommending nor renouncing the practice. This means new parents are left on their own and will have to depend on their own perspectives and experiences to decide. We hope the article will add some insights to help you come to a decision.

Teens, we have all come through it but somehow as adults, many of us can’t seem to relate to or handle our own teenage children. The teen years are a time of growth that involves experimentation and risk taking. For some teens, the social pressures of trying to fit in can be too much. In a very enlightening article, What’s Wrong with the Teenage Mind? by Alison Gopnik, a professor of psychology at University of California in Berkeley, and author of “The Philosophical Baby: What Children’s Minds Tell Us About Truth, Love and the Meaning of Life,” delves into the minds of today’s teenagers and offers some insights and practical solutions on how to help teenagers and their parents/guardians survive this angst-ridden period… happily.

Have a great summer everyone and don’t forget to chill a bottle (or two) of wine when you go down to the beach! Cheers!

Best of health,

romy@healthyoptions.com.ph
Many of the external causes of aging skin are determined by the health and lifestyle decisions you make every day. Making unhealthy choices can cause prematurely aging skin, and this makes you look older, faster.

An important part of any anti-aging skin care program is to know what you may be doing that is harming your skin and speeding up your skin’s aging process.

Here are 7 habits that contribute to aging skin, making you look older than your years:

1. **Cigarette smoke:** Whether you smoke, or you spend time with a smoker, cigarette smoke is damaging -- and aging -- to your skin. Research has shown that exposure to cigarette smoke significantly increases skin wrinkles and dryness. This is partly due to the behavior of smoking, and also because cigarette smoke depletes your body of Vitamin C, which is a key ingredient for keeping skin plump and moist.

Some researchers believe that exposure to cigarette smoke (whether you smoke or not) is as damaging to aging skin as exposure to the sun’s ultraviolet rays.

2. **Sun exposure:** Sun exposure is very aging to skin. Unprotected skin that is exposed to the sun becomes more mottled in appearance. Freckles can turn into brown sun spots, the skin takes on a dry, leathery appearance, and wrinkles and sagging increase. The risk of skin cancer is significantly increased by sun exposure.

The good news is that sun damage is avoidable, and if you start now, you can improve the condition of sun damaged skin.

See your health care provider to assess the amount of sun damage you may have, and to rule out possible skin cancers. He or she may be able to prescribe medication that can help to reduce existing sun damage.
If you want to avoid aging skin but don’t want to avoid the sun, make sure you use sunscreen that protects against both UVA and UVB rays. Choose sunscreen with SPF of 15 or higher, and use it all year-round, even on cloudy days. Clouds do not protect you from ultraviolet ray exposure.

**3. Lack of exercise:** Living a sedentary life contributes to aging skin, because exercise helps to tone your muscles and gets your blood flowing. Exercise should be an important part of every anti-aging skin care program. Researchers have also discovered that sedentary older adults are at higher risk for dementia.

In addition to the physical benefits of exercise, the benefits of a regular exercise program will show on your face. Having a bright smile and lots of energy will help you look and feel younger, at any age.

**4. Exposure to cold weather:** Cold winds and low temperatures contribute to aging skin by making skin dry, so if you venture out in the cold be sure to use a good moisturizer.

It’s important to use moisturizer indoors too, as heated rooms can be very drying to skin. Consider using a humidifier to help keep your skin more comfortable and reduce the aging skin effects of heated rooms.

**5. Alcohol Abuse:** Alcohol contributes to aging skin by dilating small blood vessels in the skin and increasing blood flow near the skin’s surface. Over time, these blood vessels can become permanently damaged, creating a flushed appearance and broken vessels on the skin’s surface.

**6. Stress:** Maybe you’ve heard this expression: “Don’t frown; your face could stay that way.” Stress and worry cause frowning, and over time the muscles in the face actually conform to that movement.

To help reduce aging skin due to stress, be aware of your stress level and try to vary your facial expressions during the day. A good anti-aging skin care program should include meditation, yoga, gentle exercise or other relaxation techniques. Keeping stress in check -- and frown lines and aging skin wrinkles to a minimum -- will help you look and feel younger.

**7. Lack of sleep:** Too little sleep makes you look and feel tired. One of the first places sleep deprivation manifests itself is on the face, with dark circles and bags under the eyes, and sagging skin. Lack of sleep is also a major factor in memory loss and symptoms of depression that include low interest in daily activities and negative thinking.

Research has shown that most adults function best with 8-9 hours of sleep each night. Reduce caffeine during the day (with none in the evening), avoid eating at least 2 hours before bedtime, and maintain a sleep routine that includes going to bed at the same time each night are sure-fire ways to regulate your sleep pattern.

If you are having trouble sleeping, for any reason, it’s important to see your health care provider.

While some signs of aging skin are inevitable, there’s a lot you can do to look your best at any age. Taking good care of yourself is the most important step in your anti-aging skin care program.

Source: about.com
5 Most Common Skin Disorders

Atopic dermatitis is the most common and is seen most often in children. One to three percent of adults compared to 10 to 20 percent of children have this long-term genetic disease, which causes itchy rashes in the crux of the elbows and behind the knees.

Allergic contact dermatitis begins to show in adulthood and is caused by environmental factors such as cosmetic agents, fragrances and the metals in jewelry.

Nummular dermatitis looks like red and flaky coin-shaped patches of skin and is due to dry skin. This can be very itchy.

In all cases, what you want to do is moisturize the skin, build up the skin barrier and avoid drying out the skin. And then, you may use corticosteroids for these conditions.

3. Seborrheic Dermatitis

Seborrheic dermatitis, which causes oily, waxy patches to develop on the scalp, is distinct from other forms of dermatitis.

It affects 5 percent of people, according to U.S. News and World Report. It can affect babies, typically in the first six months of their lives in the form of “cradle cap” -- a flaky, dandruff-like condition on the scalp. After the symptoms clear up, it rarely appears again until puberty.

4. Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the United States.

Basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma are the most common types of skin cancer. But 75 percent of skin cancer deaths are from melanoma, the third most common form.

Sun damage is on a spectrum with skin cancer because excessive exposure to ultraviolet light is a leading cause and requires physicians to be well-versed in treating it early.

5. Psoriasis

Psoriasis is a chronic and disfiguring genetic disease. It is a buildup of excess skin tissue that looks red and thick and is covered with silvery scales. It first appears on the elbows and knees, but can spread to other parts of the limbs and even the trunk. Certain forms affect particular areas like the hands, scalp or the joints.

Patients with psoriasis have very poor quality of life because it’s very obvious and it makes the patient extraordinarily self-conscious.

If you suspect you have any of these conditions, see a dermatologist immediately to evaluate your treatment options.

Almost everyone has known the horror of waking up to a glaring-red zit. Acne is the most common skin condition, but it’s usually the least severe. Others can be equally embarrassing -- and some can even be life-threatening.

Because skin is the largest body organ, the effects of its disorders are as psychological as they are physical.

Acne, eczema, seborrheic dermatitis, skin cancer and psoriasis are the five most common skin disorders, says Dr. Macrene Alexiades-Armenakas, assistant clinical professor at Yale University School of Medicine.

Although these five appear at the top of most lists, there is a lot of disagreement among dermatologists about what their prevalence rates really are, Dr. Armenakas said.

1. Acne

Acne is a skin disorder that causes pimples when the passageway that connects the skin’s pores to the oil glands becomes clogged.

Acne, which appears most often on the face, neck, shoulders, chest and back, can come in many forms. Whiteheads and blackheads are the most commonly known; nodular and cystic acne are more severe because they form deep in the skin and can cause scars.

Factors like heredity can play a role in developing acne, but hormones are the most important factor.

“In both men and women, the reason it peaks in the teenage years is because growth hormone is released at a very high frequency,” Dr. Armenakas said. “Production really spikes and valleys in the course of a day, and this surging of the growth hormone is why acne is most severe in the teenage years.”

2. Eczema

Eczema is a “grab-bag term,” comes from the Greek word for “boils over.” There are three common forms of eczema:

Source: Fox News
problem skin?... no problem!

Ease common skin conditions with natural solutions.

1. Skin Lighten
   Effectively fade, even and lighten any complexion with this improved natural formula that works without harmful bleaches or chemicals.

2. Scar Gel
   Effectively soften, smooth, and diminish the appearance of scars and stretch marks with this oil-free gel.

3. Psorzema Crème
   Effectively soothe scaly, flaky, itchy, irritated skin with this exceptional blend of vitamins and botanicals.

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Home Remedies for Stretch Marks

It is very common that almost every woman in a specific time of their lives will develop stretch marks. Others simply have a generic predisposition to stretch marks and get them everywhere while others never develop stretch marks at all.

Stretch marks look like reddish lines across the body, and with time they will turn white. In pregnancy it is common to have them, as the skin is stretching very rapidly to accommodate the baby and the milk stored in the breasts.

Once the stretch marks develop they will stay forever; but with time they will be less noticeable. The only way to avoid stretch marks is preventing them. Here are some recommended remedies:

#1: It is very important to exercise in order to get rid of stretch marks; toning your muscles helps make your skin firmer thus preventing stretch marks.

#2: Make sure you are getting plenty of protein and foods rich in Vitamin C and Vitamin E, they promote good tissue growth in your diet.

#3: Massaging your body with olive oil or Vitamin E may help.

#4: You can also try this homemade recipe: Mix one ounce of carrier oil (try avocado, sweet almond, jojoba, they are the best) with seven drops of lavender and five drops of chamomile.

#5: Apply cocoa butter and/or elastin cream throughout the body as directed on label. These are very good for stretch marks.

#6: Another good recipe is mixing half a cup of virgin olive oil, 1/4 cup of aloe vera gel, liquid from 6 capsules of Vitamin E, and liquid from 4 capsules of Vitamin A. Mix all the ingredients together in a blender. Pour the mixture into a jar and store it in the fridge. Apply the oil externally all over the places where the stretch marks commonly appear (abdomen, hips, thighs and breasts).

If you do these remedies consistently every day, you may prevent stretch marks.
Food for Healthy Skin
How much can vitamins and supplements help your skin?

This article shall help you get back to the basics of skin care. And when we say basic, we really mean something that is readily available in your own pantry or in your refrigerator. Yes, you read it right—food can be used to supplement your daily skin care regimen.

AVOCADO
Youthful Skin, Timeless Beauty
Avocado is your skin’s best friend. The high hydrocarbon content of its pulp and oil gives it the ability to relieve and soothe dry skin. Rich in Vitamin A, D, and E, this beauty fruit has powerful anti-aging properties that softens and moisturizes skin. Small wonder, avocado is used in the long-term treatment of dermatitis and arthritis.

PAPAYA
The beauty of rejuvenation and renewal
Papaya gained wide popularity for its whitening properties. Its secret - a natural enzyme called papain, which promotes skin renewal and cell turnover. It also contains natural alpha hydroxy acids that help remove dead skin cells thereby improving skin texture and elasticity. So it’s only natural to find papaya in beauty products that offer skin rejuvenation.

TOMATO
Cleansed Skin, Natural Beauty
Tomatoes should find its place not only in the kitchen but also on your dresser. Why? Because putting a bit of tomato on your face can help treat oily skin as it absorbs excess oil and sebum and prevent pimples. Combine with avocado for a natural cleansing mask that moisturizes skin as it reduces blackheads. Mix it with yogurt for a cool soothing mask for raw or itchy skin.
OATS
The beauty of soothed and exfoliated skin

Oats are not just good for breakfast. Ancient Greeks and Romans used oat baths to heal skin ailments. Its amino acid balance and high silica content help restore skin’s natural moisture. Highly absorptive and hypoallergenic, these grains can be used to cleanse, exfoliate, soften, and soothe skin - which is why oats are still used to ease rashes, abrasions, insect bites, and chicken pox.

MILK
The beauty of royal and regal skin

Milk was an essential part of Cleopatra’s beauty regimen. And for good reason: milk contains beta hydroxy acids that help exfoliate dead skin, making it smooth and radiant. Milk also contains Vitamins A and D that make skin soft but strong. It soothes dry and irritated skin and restores its natural glow.

CARROTS
The beauty of clarity

Carrots don’t have to be eaten in order to nourish skin. As a face mask, carrots are great for cleansing. Extract its juice and apply to uneven skin tones due to blemishes and pigmentation. Simply mix pineapple juice and carrot juice together, apply it on the face then wash off after 15 minutes. Use daily for clear and even toned skin.

CUCUMBER
The beauty of cool and refreshed skin

Cucumbers have become a familiar sight in beauty regimen. When placed under the eyes, its ascorbic acid content decreases water retention and eye puffiness. Its antioxidant and silica ingredients help rejuvenate skin thus reducing the appearance of dark circles. It also tightens pores, treats sunburn and, over time, decreases freckles.

EGGS
Gentle Skin, Soft Beauty

Egg, the perfect food, is also perfect for your skin. Any type of skin! For oily or acne-ridden skin, use egg white as it gently dries out skin, tightens pores while adding needed nutrients. For dry skin, use egg yolks. The fat in the yolk softens and moisturizes skin. For normal skin, use the entire egg to give your skin everything it needs to be healthy.

COCONUT
The beauty of healthy, glowing skin

Coconut oil is an effective moisturizer for all skin types. It prevents dryness and flaking. It also helps treat various skin problems such as psoriasis, dermatitis, eczema, and other skin infections. Its antioxidant properties help prevent ageing and degenerative diseases.
5 Things Your Skin Needs Every Day

By Julia Layton

With about 2 square yards (1.7 meters squared) of exposed skin to care for, it makes sense that many people’s medicine cabinets are crammed with skin-care products. But for most of us, using more than two or three of those products on a daily basis is unnecessary -- and may even be doing more harm than good.

The exposed layer of skin we’re slathering with lotions, creams, toners, scrubs and cleansers is called the epidermis -- it’s the outermost of the three layers of skin. The epidermis is the most vulnerable to environmental damage, typically UV light that can leave it discolored and old-looking; and skin in general undergoes an aging process that can leave it looking dull, wrinkled and dry. Enter the hundreds of “scientific” skin-care products on store shelves -- some costing thousands of money an ounce -- intended to clear, plump, de-wrinkle, brighten and just generally beautify all different skin types.

In reality, it’s not rocket science. Skin only needs a handful of simple, inexpensive “treatments” to get and stay healthy -- and healthy-looking. And many of those treatments are the same ones the rest of your body needs to operate at its optimum level. Adding additional, expert-recommended products into a skin-care routine isn’t necessarily a bad thing, and can in some cases be quite beneficial; but for most people, effective skin care is actually a pretty simple process.
In this article, we'll find out what everybody's skin needs every day, why those elements are so important, where you'll find them, and which supposed "necessities" might really be harming your complexion. The first daily must is the most obvious: Healthy skin has to be clean.

1: Cleansing

Cleansing is the most basic element of any skin-care routine. It not only removes excess dirt, pollutants and pore-clogging oil from the epidermis so it can remain blemish-free, but it also preps the skin for any subsequent products you'll be using, so active ingredients (like vitamins or sunscreen) can penetrate and be most effective.

But not all cleansers are the same. First, a facial cleanser should always be soap-free; the soap products you use on the rest of your body are typically too harsh for the face. And, as with most skin-care products, you need to pick one that suits your skin type. For very dry skin, you might want to go with a creamy cleanser. Dry and/or sensitive skin should always go alcohol-free, whether creamy or not. An oily epidermis can benefit from an acidic cleanser, like an alpha-hydroxy product, which does a better job of breaking up sebum -- the skin's oily secretion that can lead to clogged pores.

Whichever cleanser is right for you, be sure to massage it into your face for at least 20 seconds so it has a chance to do its job.

Cleansing is all about the surface of the skin. Up next, going a bit deeper…

2: Water

The human body is full of water -- it's 55 percent to 75 percent of what we are. Water flushes toxins out of the body, allows our cells to absorb nutrients, and keeps our digestive processes moving smoothly. But water isn't a constant. The most basic bodily processes, like breathing and sweating, remove that water from our cells. So for our cells to function properly, we need to consume lots of water to replace what we lose.

The skin is no different from the rest of the body when it comes to needing hydration. Water helps to remove impurities from the skin that can lead to pimples, and it hydrates to keep the skin looking plump and smooth. To keep the skin hydrated, you should drink at least half a gallon (2 liters) of water each day.

Up next: Water doesn't do much good if your cells can't hold on to it.

3: Essential Fatty Acids

Essential fatty acids, or EFAs, are an important component of any healthy diet. They help to build up the lipid-based cell membranes that hold in water and nutrients. In the case of the skin, those lipids also form an oil barrier that protects the skin from UV damage and pollutants.

Without EFAs, skin-cell membranes and that overall protective barrier can't work effectively. The skin ends up overly exposed, dehydrated and prone to produce a more harmful type of sebum, leaving it dry, inflamed and blemished.

The EFAs you need to keep your skin looking great are primarily Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids. Omega-6 is found in tons of foods, including poultry, grains and cooking oils, so you're probably getting plenty of that. Omega-3s are somewhat harder to come by; you'll find those in cold-water fish, like salmon and sardines, along with flaxseed and safflower oils, kidney beans, walnuts and spinach. Some skin experts also recommend another EFA, gamma linolenic acid (GLA), for its anti-inflammatory effects. GLA is found mostly in plant oils.

You might find it helpful to take an Omega-3 or GLA supplement to improve your skin health. You'll find those in most grocery stores, and definitely in any natural-foods store.

EFAs can improve your complexion from the inside. Up next, something to protect your skin on the outside.

4: Sun Protection

When you use sunscreen, you're not just helping to protect yourself from diseases like skin cancer; you're also helping to prevent the signs of skin aging that come from sun exposure. Skin that's left naked in the sun ends up more discolored and wrinkled and less elastic than skin that has been steadily shielded from UV radiation.

In fact, what most of us think of as "aged skin" is, more specifically, sun-damaged skin.

To protect your skin from the effects of the sun, you can choose either a chemical sunscreen, like avobenzone or oxybenzone, or a physical one, like zinc oxide or titanium dioxide. Either way, look for one with a sun-protection factor (SPF) greater than 15, and apply it at least 20 minutes before you're going to be in the sun. That way, the active ingredients have time to take effect before the UV exposure begins.

If you go swimming or have occasion to sweat a lot, be sure to reapply afterward.

Up next, another element of great skin that doubles as a cancer fighter.

5: Antioxidants

Antioxidants are widely believed to be beneficial for both cardiovascular health and cancer prevention. They're found in all sorts of foods, including fruits, vegetables, seafood and oils. Antioxidants' free-radical-fighting activities destroy molecules that can damage healthy cells, and as it turns out, they're as great for skin cells as they are for every other cell in the body.

While many different antioxidants can be beneficial to the skin, two in particular get lots of attention:

- **Vitamin C** -- Builds collagen for plump, tight skin. Find it in whole grains, apples and citrus fruits. Aim for 75 milligrams a day.
- **Vitamin E** -- Protects cell membranes and "boosts" skin-based nutrients that fight off UV damage. Find it in wheat germ oil, almonds, and peanut butter. Aim for 15 milligrams a day.

Other skin-beautifying antioxidants include selenium, thiamine, beta-carotene and zinc.

Source: health.howstuffworks.com
Solutions for Dark Circles and Puffy Eyes

By Wendy C. Fries
Reviewed By Brunilda Nazario, MD

Do you have puffy eyes or under-eye circles? Whether the cause is a few long days or too many restless nights, you’ve probably dealt with both at one time or another.

If your solution is to splash a little cold water on your face or grab a concealer, stop right there. There’s more that you can do to unpack those under-eye bags and prevent eye puffiness. These simple tips from skin care pros can get you started.

What Causes Dark Under-Eye Circles
Dark circles, or bags under your eyes, have many causes. These include:

- Increased melanin (also called hyperpigmentation)
- Fat loss beneath the eye
- Broken blood vessels
- Hard living -- too much caffeine and tobacco and too little sleep -- is a less common cause of eye puffiness and bags.

6 Solutions for Under-Eye Circles and Bags
Try these tips for brightening your eyes:

- Check out injectable fillers. A dermatologist may administer these if your dark eye circles are due to broken blood vessels, says Badreshia-Bansal. Fillers can also help if fat loss is the cause of bags under the eyes.
- Look into laser treatments and Vitamin K. Laser treatments may reduce the look of dark circles due to broken blood vessels. Skin care products containing Vitamin K can also help.
- Go a shade lighter in your concealer. A concealer one shade lighter than your skin tone can help disguise under-eye circles. A concealer with an SPF of 15 or higher provides double benefits. If your skin tends to be oily or acne-prone, use an oil-free concealer.

6 Strategies to Prevent Eye Puffiness

Lots of things can lead to puffy eyes -- from too much to too little sleep, from eating poorly to getting older. To help reduce the look of eye puffiness, the pros offer these suggestions:

- Sleep. It’s as important to preventing puffy eyes as it is to diminish dark circles. Start by getting at least eight hours of good sleep a night.
- Drink. Staying well-hydrated can help prevent puffy eyes, says Chicago dermatologist Carolyn Jacob, MD. Drinking plenty of healthy liquids, especially water, helps keep overall skin tone firm and full looking.
- Cut back on salt. Retaining body fluid can cause puffy, doughy looking skin. Reducing salt intake helps reduce the tendency to retain excess water. An easy way to cut back on salt? Reduce the processed foods in your diet.
- Use cool compresses. Florida dermatologist Andrea Cambio, MD, advocates the de-puffing power of chilled, moist green tea bags. Elizabeth L. Tanzi, MD, suggests gently placing cool cucumber slices or a bag of frozen peas or carrots on the eyes for 10 to 15 minutes. A gel eye-mask will also do the trick.
- Consider fillers. These can help if collagen and elastin break down -- “causing surrounding skin to pouche out,” in the words of dermatologist Fredric Brandt, MD, in his book 10 Minutes, 10 Years. Fillers can actually make puffiness look smaller.
- Learn to accept the look of your eyes. Some people are just more prone to puffy eyes or dark eye circles, according Brandt. As we grow older, skin naturally weakens and becomes less resilient, so puffy eyes or dark circles naturally become more noticeable.

These tips may help you keep your eyes looking their best. But the most effective eye-brightening tip may also be the easiest one to implement: Smile! ☺

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Source: webmd.com
What’s Wrong With the Teenage Mind?
Children today reach puberty earlier and adulthood later. The result: A lot of teenage weirdness.

By Alison Gopnik

“What was he thinking?” It’s the familiar cry of bewildered parents trying to understand why their teenagers act the way they do.

How does the boy who can thoughtfully explain the reasons never to drink and drive end up in a drunken crash? Why does the girl who knows all about birth control find herself pregnant by a boy she doesn’t even like? What happened to the gifted, imaginative child who excelled through high school but then dropped out of college, drifted from job to job and now lives in his parents’ basement?

If you think of the teenage brain as a car, today’s adolescents acquire an accelerator a long time before they can steer and brake.

Adolescence has always been troubled, but for reasons that are somewhat mysterious, puberty is now kicking in at an earlier and earlier age. A leading theory points to changes in energy balance as children eat more and move less.

At the same time, first with the industrial revolution and then even more dramatically with the information revolution, children have come to take on adult roles later and later. Five hundred years ago, Shakespeare knew that the emotionally intense combination of teenage sexuality and peer-induced risk could be tragic—witness
“Romeo and Juliet.” But, on the other hand, if not for fate, 13-year-old Juliet would have become a wife and mother within a year or two.

Our Juliets (as parents longing for grandchildren will recognize with a sigh) may experience the tumult of love for 20 years before they settle down into motherhood. And our Romeos may be poetic lunatics under the influence of Queen Mab until they are well into graduate school.

What happens when children reach puberty earlier and adulthood later? The answer is: a good deal of teenage weirdness. Fortunately, developmental psychologists and neuroscientists are starting to explain the foundations of that weirdness.

The crucial new idea is that there are two different neural and psychological systems that interact to turn children into adults. Over the past two centuries, and even more over the past generation, the developmental timing of these two systems has changed. That, in turn, has profoundly changed adolescence and produced new kinds of adolescent woe. The big question for anyone who deals with young people today is how we can go about bringing these cogs of the teenage mind into sync once again.

The first of these systems has to do with emotion and motivation. It is very closely linked to the biological and chemical changes of puberty and involves the areas of the brain that respond to rewards. This is the system that turns placid 10-year-olds into restless, exuberant, emotionally intense teenagers, desperate to attain every goal, fulfill every desire and experience every sensation. Later, it turns them back into relatively placid adults.

Recent studies in the neuroscientist B.J. Casey’s lab at Cornell University suggest that adolescents aren’t reckless because they underestimate risks, but because they overestimate rewards—or, rather, find rewards more rewarding than adults do. The reward centers of the adolescent brain are much more active than those of either children or adults. Think about the incomparable intensity of first love, the never-to-be-recaptured glory of the high-school basketball championship.

What teenagers want most of all are social rewards, especially the respect of their peers. In a recent study by the developmental psychologist Laurence Steinberg at Temple University, teenagers did a simulated high-risk driving task while they were lying in an fMRI brain-imaging machine. The reward system of their brains lighted up much more when they thought another teenager was watching what they did—and they took more risks.

From an evolutionary point of view, this all makes perfect sense. One of the most distinctive evolutionary features of human beings is our unusually long, protected childhood. Human children depend on adults for much longer than those of any other primate. That long protected period also allows us to learn much more than any other animal. But eventually, we have to leave the safe bubble of family life, take what we learned as children and apply it to the real adult world.

Becoming an adult means leaving the world of your parents and starting to make your way toward the future that you will share with your peers. Puberty not only turns on the motivational and emotional system with new force, it also turns it away from the family and toward the world of equals.

The second crucial system in our brains has to do with control; it channels and harnesses all that seething energy. In particular, the prefrontal cortex reaches out to guide other parts of the brain, including the parts that govern motivation and emotion. This is the system that inhibits impulses and guides decision-making, that encourages long-term planning and delays gratification.

This control system depends much more on learning. It becomes increasingly effective throughout childhood and continues to develop during adolescence and adulthood, as we gain more experience. You come to make better decisions by making not-so-good decisions and then correcting them. You get to be a good planner by making plans, implementing them and seeing the results again and again. Expertise comes with experience. As the old joke has it, the answer to the tourist’s question “How do you get to Carnegie Hall?” is “Practice, practice, practice.”

In the distant (and even the not-so-distant) historical past, these systems of motivation and control were largely in sync. In gatherer-hunter and farming societies, childhood education involves formal and informal apprenticeship. Children have lots of chances to practice the skills that they need to accomplish their goals as adults, and so to become expert planners and actors. The cultural psychologist Barbara Rogoff studied this kind of informal education in a Guatemalan Indian society, where she found that apprenticeship allowed even young children to become adept at difficult and dangerous tasks like using a machete.

In the past, to become a good gatherer or hunter, cook or caregiver, you would actually practice gathering, hunting, cooking and taking care of children all through middle childhood and early adolescence—tuning up just the prefrontal wiring you’d need as an adult. But you’d continued on page 17....
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with
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do all that under expert adult supervision and in the protected world of childhood, where the impact of your inevitable failures would be blunted. When the motivational juice of puberty arrived, you’d be ready to go after the real rewards, in the world outside, with new intensity and exuberance, but you’d also have the skill and control to do it effectively and reasonably safely.

In contemporary life, the relationship between these two systems has changed dramatically. Puberty arrives earlier, and the motivational system kicks in earlier too.

At the same time, contemporary children have very little experience with the kinds of tasks that they’ll have to perform as grown-ups. Children have increasingly little chance to practice even basic skills like cooking and caregiving. Contemporary adolescents and pre-adolescents often don’t do much of anything except go to school. Even the paper route and the baby-sitting job have largely disappeared.

The experience of trying to achieve a real goal in real time in the real world is increasingly delayed, and the growth of the control system depends on just those experiences. The pediatrician and developmental psychologist Ronald Dahl at the University of California, Berkeley, has a good metaphor for the result: Today’s adolescents develop an accelerator a long time before they can steer and brake.

This doesn’t mean that adolescents are stupider than they used to be. In many ways, they are much smarter. An ever longer protected period of immaturity and dependence—a childhood that extends through college—means that young humans can learn more than ever before. There is strong evidence that IQ has increased dramatically as more children spend more time in school, and there is even some evidence that higher IQ is correlated with delayed frontal lobe development.

All that school means that children know more about more different subjects than they ever did in the days of apprenticeships. Becoming a really expert cook doesn’t tell you about the nature of heat or the chemical composition of salt—the sorts of things you learn in school.

But there are different ways of being smart. Knowing physics and chemistry is no help with a soufflé. Wide-ranging, flexible and broad learning, the kind we encourage in high-school and college, may actually be in tension with the ability to develop finely-honed, controlled, focused expertise in a particular skill, the kind of learning that once routinely took place in human societies. For most of our history, children have started their internships when they were seven, not 27.

The old have always complained about the young, of course. But this new explanation based on developmental timing elegantly accounts for the paradoxes of our particular crop of adolescents.

There do seem to be many young adults who are enormously smart and knowledgeable but directionless, who are enthusiastic and exuberant but unable to commit to a particular kind of work or a particular love until well into their 20s or 30s. And there is the graver case of children who are faced with the uncompromising reality of the drive for sex, power and respect, without the expertise and impulse control it takes to ward off unwanted pregnancy or violence.

This new explanation also illustrates two really important and often overlooked facts about the mind and brain. First, experience shapes the brain. People often think that if some ability is located in a particular part of the brain, that must mean that it’s “hard-wired” and inflexible. But, in fact, the brain is so powerful precisely because it is so sensitive to experience. It’s as true to say that our experience of controlling our impulses make the prefrontal cortex develop as it is to say that prefrontal development makes us better at controlling our impulses. Our social and cultural life shapes our biology.

Second, development plays a crucial role in explaining human nature. The old “evolutionary psychology” picture was that genes were directly responsible for some particular pattern of adult behavior—a “module.” In fact, there is more and more evidence that genes are just the first step in complex developmental sequences, cascades of interactions between organism and environment, and that those developmental processes shape the adult brain. Even small changes in developmental timing can lead to big changes in who we become.

Fortunately, these characteristics of the brain mean that dealing with modern adolescence is not as hopeless as it might sound. Though we aren’t likely to return to an agricultural life or to stop feeding our children well and sending them to school, the very flexibility of the developing brain points to solutions.

Brain research is often taken to mean that adolescents are really just defective adults—grown-ups with a missing part. Public policy debates about teenagers thus often turn on the question of when, exactly, certain areas of the brain develop, and so at what age children should be allowed to drive or marry or vote—or be held fully responsible for crimes. But the new view of the adolescent brain isn’t that the prefrontal lobes just fail to show up; it’s that they aren’t properly instructed and exercised.

Simply increasing the driving age by a year or two doesn’t have much influence on the accident rate, for example. What does make a difference is having a graduated system in which teenagers slowly acquire both more skill and more freedom—a driving apprenticeship.

Instead of simply giving adolescents more and more school experiences—those extra hours of after-school classes and homework—we could try to arrange more opportunities for apprenticeship. AmeriCorps, the federal community-service program for youth, is an excellent example, since it provides both challenging real-life experiences and a degree of protection and supervision.

“Take your child to work” could become a routine practice rather than a single-day annual event, and college students could spend more time watching and helping scientists and scholars at work rather than just listening to their lectures. Summer enrichment activities like camp and travel, now so common for children whose parents have means, might be usefully alternated with summer jobs, with real responsibilities.

The good news, in short, is that we don’t have to just accept the developmental patterns of adolescent brains. We can actually shape and change them.

“The experience of trying to achieve a real goal in real time in the real world is increasingly delayed, and the growth of the control system depends on just those experiences.”

—Ms. Gopnik is a professor of psychology at the University of California, Berkeley, and the author, most recently, of “The Philosophical Baby: What Children's Minds Tell Us About Truth, Love and the Meaning of Life.” Adapted from an essay that she wrote for www.edge.org, in response to the website’s 2012 annual question: “What is your favorite deep, elegant or beautiful explanation?”

Source: online.wsj.com
To circumcise your baby or not?

By Brian Alexander

Recently, two reputable medical journals published articles on male circumcision and came to totally different conclusions, leaving parents of newborn boys with a stark realization they are on their own, without a consensus from the medical profession.

The two groups of authors came to their disparate conclusions after looking at the same set of evidence and making a judgment call — pretty much what new parents have been expected to do since routine male circumcision became a political issue more than 25 years ago.

As a result some parents find themselves wrestling with the decision. Posts on message boards visited by parents-to-be reflect the problem: “So much pressure from family friends to get it done, but my gut told me not to,” wrote Kelly714 on the Café Mom Web site.

Collin Childers, a 25-year-old first-time father had his son Colton circumcised two days ago at Sharp Mary Birch Hospital for Women & Newborns in San Diego. Nobody gave him advice either way, he said, and Childers didn’t really do any research on the issue. He ultimately decided that since most men he knew, including his family members were all circumcised and since he’d heard that “it’s cleaner, it doesn’t allow bacteria to grow,” Colton would join the family tradition.

Family precedent is how many such decisions are made — like father, like son, said Dr. Jean Robertson, a pediatrician in Lancaster, Ohio.

“I would have to say that most infants whose fathers are circumcised end up getting circumcised,” she said. When parents are conflicted, she said, they don’t usually ask about health benefits, they ask about the pain of the surgery and most parents who get their newborn boys circumcised “desire it for the cosmetic effects.”

The lack of consensus leaves a wide opening for anti-circumcision campaigners. Just as actress-turned-autism-activist Jenny McCarthy’s scare mongering over childhood vaccines only makes the job of parents tougher, so-called “intactivists,” are trying to scare parents with wild hyperbole like equating circumcision to female genital mutilation — which is about like equating an appendectomy with an amputation.

Circumcision has been around since before recorded history. Still, most American males were not circumcised routinely until the post-World War II era. Today about 80 percent of American males are circumcised, though rates vary by region.
Anti-circumcision movement

Starting in the late 1980s a no-circumcision movement began questioning the practice.

Anti-circumcision campaigners focus their objections on several issues. First, they accurately point out that the foreskin is rich in nerves and that cutting it away removes erogenous tissue.

Second, they argue that circumcision is usually medically unnecessary surgery and that it carries risks like bleeding or infection. Most men, they say, never have a problem with their foreskins and if parents are willing to hold a brief hygiene seminar — and the penis's owner is willing to perform some simple routine maintenance — there is no reason why they should. Any possible benefits of circumcision are hypothetical at best, they say.

Finally, they argue that the decision doesn’t really belong to the parents — it belongs to the baby boy, and he’s in no position to conduct a risk/benefit analysis.

Those arguments are not necessarily wrong, just woefully incomplete.

Your newborn son's sexual pleasure may not be much on your mind, but eventually it will be on his mind, so parents may fear that cutting away erogenous tissue might be a sin the young man will never forgive.

In an editorial accompanying the Pediatrics essay, Dr. Michael T. Brady of Ohio State University points out that studies on circumcision and sexual pleasure are all over the map, leaving parents once again without clear guidance on that point.

The possible complications cited by intactivists, Brady told me, are “exceedingly rare.” Circumcision does carry very small risks for bleeding and for infection, but he said, these have been minimized. One big change in the last generation is that babies are now given pain medication before and sometimes after surgery. In the past, baby boys had to tough it out.

Medically necessary?

A more nuanced issue is whether circumcising newborns is a “medically necessary” surgery. By the usual definitions, it’s not. Circumcision does not cure anything and a foreskin isn’t a deformity. This is partly the basis for Perera’s objections.

She does, however, acknowledge the validity of new data on preventing sexually transmitted diseases, the same data that led Quinn and colleagues to lean the other way. These studies show that circumcision reduces the risks of HIV infection and other viral STDs like herpes and HPV, the human papilloma virus, some strains of which can cause penile and cervical cancer. There is some evidence that male circumcision reduces the risks of bacterial STDs, too. Male circumcision also has other preventive benefits, too, such as reducing the risk of urinary tract infections, especially in boys younger than a year old.

Confusion arises because these are possible benefits, not a sure thing. As Brady told me, on one hand “your child may be one that is spared getting HIV,” but on the other hand, “he may never even have that risk” in the first place.

There are two other non-medical points that parents often consider, ones most doctors won’t mention because they aren’t politically correct considerations: convenience and looks. Circumcision can be more convenient for parents and for the boy. Second, with four out of five males in the U.S. circumcised, at some point after his first gym class you may have to take that non-circumcised chip off the old block to a museum to show him some Greek urns so he understands that he is perfectly normal.

Deciding to skip a circumcision can be a responsible choice. So can opting for one.

“It is important to give parents information,” Brady explained. “Then they can make the decision they think is in the best interest of the child and (doctors) should be supportive of that.”

So ignore the politics swirling around circumcision; they only obscure the issue. No parent needs what may be the first decision they make on behalf of their child to become a morality play.  

Source: msnbc.com
How to Tighten Loose Skin After Weight Loss

By Ben Greenfield

If you’ve lost a lot of weight recently, then you may have noticed that you have a bit of loose skin hanging around. From extra skin under the arms to a hanging pouch around the stomach, loose skin can pose an embarrassing problem, especially if weight loss has been achieved rapidly.

Why Skin Gets Loose After Weight Loss

Since it has to stretch as we move, grow, and--as in the case of weight loss--shrink, skin is an incredibly elastic living organ. Yes, that’s right, skin is not just one big piece of rubber that covers the entire body, but is instead an organ, and just like all the other organs in your body, it is comprised of cells.

Different layers of your skin have different types of cells, and though the skin cells on the outer part of your skin (the epidermis) are constantly being lost and replaced with new cells, the skin cells under the epidermis are a bit more permanent.

What Happens to Your Skin When You Lose Weight?

When you lose weight, and especially when you lose weight very quickly, these elastic components of your skin not only lose the layers of fat that keep them stretched out over your body, but they also don’t have much time for their elasticity to adapt to your new shape.

In addition to weight loss, age, poor nutrition, dehydration, excessive sun exposure, and smoking can all affect the elasticity of the skin and give you that elephant-like appearance you probably don’t want.

How to Tighten Loose Skin After Weight Loss

As you lose fat and your loose skin begins to appear, the first rule is: don’t panic! Because it is a living organ, your skin will slowly return to a shape that fits your new body. But since that process can take up to two years, here are steps you can take to make your skin tighten more quickly:

**Tip #1: Don’t Lose Weight Too Quickly**

Crash diets and excessive amounts of time spent exercising can rapidly shed both muscle and fat, resulting in a double-whammy on your skin—the supportive underlying muscular structure that holds skin against your body is lost, as is the fat that keeps the skin stretched out.

Aim for 1-2 pounds of fat loss per week, and make sure your weight loss program includes weight lifting so that you do not lose lean muscle.

**Tip #2: Stay Hydrated**

Attend to your hydration needs. Water is a crucial component of maintaining skin elasticity. From both food and drink, you should be taking in at least two liters of water each day.

**Tip #3: Eat Properly**

Two necessary ingredients that keep skin plump and elastic are collagen and elastin. Protein-rich foods such as cottage cheese, milk, legumes, tofu, beans, seeds, nuts, and fish all contain collagen and elastin forming components, as well as oils to help maintain healthy skin.

**Tip #4: Take Care of Your Skin**

Nourish and care for your skin. Daily exfoliation can help to remove dead skin cells and increase skin circulation. A hot bath with sea salts and minerals can improve skin tone. Skin tightening creams with herbal formulas and ingredients such as aloe vera, hyaluronic acid, yeast extract, soy protein, Vitamin C, Vitamin E and Vitamin A can help to hydrate and increase collagen and elastin formation in skin.

Stay away from harsh detergents, such a sulfates in soaps, shampoos and dishwashing liquids. If you swim for fitness, use soap and shampoo that are specially designed to remove chlorine.

When to Consider Surgery for Loose Skin

Skin can only be stretched so far before it looses some of its ability to snap back. If you’ve had a 9-month pregnancy, then you’ll be able to tighten your loose skin. But if you’ve carried a hundred or more extra pounds for many years, you may be a candidate for plastic surgery to tighten and lift loose skin. This fix should only be used in extreme cases, and I should warn you: my clients who have undergone this operation have actually gained more fat afterwards while they were rehabilitating from surgery!

Source: organizedwisdom.com
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