Parents Ponder: Pierced Ears for Preteens?

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Question: My 9-year-old daughter wants her ears pierced. While I know ear piercing is a common procedure, are there any medical issues to consider?

Answer: If you’re mulling over pierced ears for your child, there’s another factor beyond family custom to consider: keloids.

Keloids are overgrowths of scar tissue. They’re a common reaction to ear piercing. While they’re not serious, they can be uncomfortable and disfiguring. And, they have an unfortunate tendency to keep growing back, even if they’re surgically removed.

Keloids run in families, and they’re more common among African-American families. But, a small study found that people are less likely to develop keloids if they get their ears pierced before age 11. This is true even among families with a history of keloids. So, getting the piercing done earlier may be the best choice for some children.

Be aware that piercing can be performed too early. It is generally recommended that parents wait until an infant has received at least one full set of immunizations at 2 months of age to reduce the possibility of tetanus infection.
A “PG” Is Pretty Good for Kids, Right?

If you’re like most parents, you almost always check ratings of movies before letting your kids watch them. But ratings may not be as on the money as you think.

For the record: The “PG” movie rating means “parental guidance suggested.” The stronger “PG-13” rating means the film has some material that may be inappropriate for children younger than age 13. But the labels can be misleading. In one recent study, researchers found that 20 percent of the PG films they studied actually had more violence than the average amount of violence in the PG-13 movies.

If you’re concerned about movie violence, try to find out as much as you can about a film before your child sees it. Read reviews and talk to other parents who are movie buffs.

The Meaning of Playtime

Playtime means unscheduled time in which children can just, well, play. Playing with others—peers or parents—is how children learn to explore the world, experiment with rules, cooperate, and problem solve. Play encourages children to exercise, helps them adjust more easily to school, enhances their ability to learn, and teaches them vital social and emotional skills.

Help Your Child Get Balanced

“But they can’t just play their way into Harvard, can they?” True. That’s why experts say this is the key: a balance of school, structured activities, and unstructured playtime.

“Balance is very important,” says David Bennett, PhD, Clinical Psychologist at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and Psychology at the UMKC School of Medicine. “So many times, things get so out of balance and rushed, that everything is really less fun.”

If you think your children need better balance in their lives, these tips may help:

● Consider the individual child when deciding how many activities she can handle—make sure the activities are ones that your child really enjoys.
● Guard family time as precious. Make family nights a priority over other activities.
● Value—and model—downtime. If your children see you enjoying walks in the park or daydreaming in a swing, they’ll be more likely to do so, too.
Lesser-Known Facts About Sports Injuries in Children

Most children depend on recreational and school sports for exercise and fun. But, too many young athletes suffer from needless injuries. See below for some facts about your child’s sport to keep it fun and safe.

Body Checking and Your Young Hockey Player
Body checking is a hockey maneuver in which players use their hips or full body to knock into opponents and take possession of the puck. Some hockey experts urge young players to body check. But, medical experts disagree. One study found that kids were much likelier to suffer concussions or fractures in leagues that allowed body checking.

The American Academy of Pediatrics advises that kids younger than age 16 not be allowed to body check. To help protect your child, check the league’s rules on body checking.

“Fancy” Shoes Aren’t Necessary for Basketball
Is basketball your child’s sport? If so, save yourself some money on shoes. A study of more than 10,000 recreational players found that those wearing expensive shoes with air cells in the heels suffered 4.3 times as many ankle injuries as did players in less expensive shoes.

The air-cell shoes, experts say, may contribute to ankle injuries by destabilizing the heel. Another ankle saver is stretching before play. Players who failed to do so injured their ankles 2.7 times more often than did pre-game stretchers.

Tell Your Child’s Coach to Forget Headfirst Slides
According to the American Journal of Sports Medicine, in baseball and softball, head-first slides are linked to more serious injuries than feet-first slides. But, some coaches prefer head-first slides because they believe these slides are faster. Not so, says one study. Feet-first slides were just as fast or faster than head-first slides.

Cheerleading Injuries Are on the Rise
Cheerleading injuries are becoming more and more prevalent. The most common injuries are sprains, strains, and bruises. To help keep your child or teen safe, make sure that practice is supervised and that properly trained “spotters” are used during difficult stunts. Plus, coaches should be trained and certified.

“We’re seeing a lot more ACL and meniscal (cartilage) injuries due to the increased acrobatics and stunts,” says Donna Pacicca, MD, Orthopaedic Surgery at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Assistant Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery at the UMKC School of Medicine. “Appropriate train-
Winning Strategies for Raising a Good Sport

If you’re raising an athlete, here’s how you can train your child to be a good sport.

Beyond the Rules of the Game
When your youngster plays or practices, offer praise and encouragement.

“Spend time playing the sport with your child, regardless of your skill level,” says Brian Belden, PhD, Developmental and Child Psychologist at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the UMKC School of Medicine. “This is not only great fun for your child, but also good exercise for you and a model of good parenting for your child.”

Proper behavior is also important. Let her know if she does something inappropriate. For example, if she pushes another child down, make sure she understands that it hurts the other child.

Regardless of your child’s age, it’s wise to explain that winning is not the best way to find success in sports. What matters more is how hard you try in defeat as well as in victory.

Be a Good Role Model
How you act at games also teaches your child about what’s acceptable.

When you and your child see uncivil behavior, you should take some time to talk to your child about it. Explain your feelings about the behavior, and suggest better ways to handle the situation.

One of the most important teachers of sports etiquette is the coach. Good coaches don’t put a premium on winning. But, a bad coach teaches your child that cheating or poor behavior is OK as long as no one gets caught.

If your child’s coach seems to encourage foul play, talk to the coach privately. Emphasize that you want your child to learn about more than winning. If the coach is unresponsive, talk to other parents in an effort to correct this behavior. You can also withdraw your child from that team or enroll your child in another sport.

A Few Words of Caution Regarding Karate
Experts caution that sports played at a high speed or involving forceful contact—such as soccer, football, or karate—can raise the risk of injury. Injuries from karate training can include minor cuts and bruises, sprains, fractures, and concussions. But, safety equipment—such as mouth guards and protective padding—can help your child avoid getting hurt.

Additionally, karate may not be a recommended sport for your child if he or she has epilepsy, an enlarged liver, or only one kidney. It’s best to check with your child’s doctor to see if karate is right for him or her.

The Children’s Mercy Orthopaedic Clinic offers special sports emphasis on Monday afternoons and all day Thursdays at Children’s Mercy Hospital, and Wednesday afternoons at Children’s Mercy South. For information, call (816) 234-3700.

Team sports are not the only way a child can gain fitness, self-esteem, and maturity. If your child prefers to go it alone, consider an individualized sport—such as martial arts.
Everyone knows that smoking can cause lung cancer. But, smoke also poses a major risk for asthma.

Asthma, like allergies, often runs in a family. Jay Portnoy, MD, Section Chief, Allergy/Asthma/Immunology at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Professor of Pediatrics at the UMKC School of Medicine, says that while in the womb, a fetus is not exposed to secondhand smoke but that smoking can cause low birth weight. However, current research suggests that being exposed to secondhand smoke during childhood can trigger asthma in kids who are genetically susceptible.

Asthma is the most common chronic childhood illness, affecting about one in eight American children. Almost 22 million adults—about one in nine—have also been diagnosed with asthma.

Environmental tobacco smoke increases the risk of asthma in adults as well as in kids. In addition to causing asthma, environmental smoke:

- increases the number and frequency of asthma episodes and Emergency Room visits
- worsens symptoms of asthma and makes it more difficult to control
- makes airways more sensitive to other irritants that affect asthma
- slows recovery from an asthma attack.

Unfortunately, almost one in four Americans smoke, and some of these smokers are children. In a recent study, seventh and eighth graders who regularly smoked at least one cigarette per day raised their risk by 5 percent for being diagnosed with asthma within the past year. The risk increased to 24 percent if they smoked 11 or more cigarettes per day.

Protecting yourself and your family from asthma is just one more reason to quit smoking. To maximize your chances for success:

- line up support beforehand

The DVD, featuring Children’s Mercy experts and some of the children and families we serve, will be mailed FREE of charge to all subscribers of the Safe & Sound magazine. In addition, visitors to the Children’s Mercy’s Web site—www.childrensmercy.org—can either download the stories or request a copy of the DVD, which will be mailed to them FREE as well!

The Safe & Sound DVD series is just one more way Children’s Mercy is working to help keep your children healthy and safe. The series is made possible with support from Kohl’s department stores.

Children’s Mercy has established a reputation as a national leader in asthma management. In fact, the American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology selected Children’s Mercy to develop asthma disease management tools for national use. To learn more, call (816) 234-3097.
Portion Sizes:  
What’s Right for Your Child?

In this age of super-sized meals—and a super-sized epidemic of obesity—it’s important to know what portion size is appropriate for young children. Not sure? Research suggests that you may want to let your children choose for themselves.

A study of preschool children showed that when they were served a double portion of macaroni and cheese, the children took larger bites and ate more food. But, when the double-sized portion was placed in a serving bowl and the children were allowed to serve themselves, they chose the right amount of food for their ages. And, how much macaroni and cheese is that? For a 3-year-old, about half a cup; for 4- or 5-year-olds, about ¾ of a cup.

Downsize Those Super Sizes
Here are some ways to avoid eating too much when portions are large:

- When eating out, each person can eat half of his or her meal, then take the rest home in a doggy bag. Or, split one meal with your child.
- Order smaller amounts of food at fast food restaurants. “Value meals are seldom a value because portions are too large for most parents and children,” says Karen Stephens, Registered Dietitian.
- Help your child eat slowly, and encourage stopping eating when he or she begins to feel full. Be a good role model.
- Give children small portions to start. Children can ask for more if they are still hungry.

What’s in a Serving?
A typical order of french fries has tripled in size over the past 20 years. A portion of spaghetti is twice as big. A common size for a soft drink is 32 ounces (4 cups) instead of 8 ounces. During the same period of time, the percentage of obese American children has doubled. It’s certainly no coincidence. Super-sized portions encourage both kids and grown-ups to overeat. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) says that one slice of bread or ½ cup of cooked rice equals one serving from the grains group. However, some bagels are so big that they equal six servings.

Meat portions also tend to be oversized. One serving of meat, chicken, or fish should be 2 to 3 ounces. Some restaurant steaks, however, are five times that size.

Help Your Child Maintain a Healthy Weight

You can help your child avoid gaining excess weight with these healthy strategies:

- Offer your children well-balanced meals that are low in fat and sugar. After age 2, children only need the same amount of fat as adults do—no more than 30 percent of their daily calories.
- Set specific snack times with set amounts. This will help discourage constant munching. And, have plenty of healthy snacks on hand, such as low-fat or nonfat yogurt, low-fat or fat-free cheese, or fruit.
- Monitor those sugar-filled juices and sodas. In one study, each extra can or cup per day boosted a child’s risk of obesity. “We recommend an attitude of ‘replace, don’t remove,’” says Sarah Hampl, MD, General Pediatrics at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at the UMKC School of Medicine. “So instead, offer your child a bottle of water or a sugar-free beverage, and have one yourself, too.”
- Add exercise, such as hiking, to family weekends and vacations. And, help your child find physical activities she enjoys.
- Limit TV watching and video games to one to two hours each day. On average, children who watch at least four hours a day tend to be heavier than children who watch less than two hours.
- Practice what you preach. Research shows that children imitate the behavior of their parents. “We cannot underestimate the power of parents as positive role models in the areas of healthy eating and physical activity for their children. Parents are the gateway to development of their children’s healthy habits,” according to Dr. Hampl.

Do you think your child might be overweight? Ask your child’s doctor, who can assess your child’s age, growth pattern, height, and weight before deciding if he or she needs to lose weight.
Seven Ways to De-Stress Your Next Family Vacation

“Vacation stress” may sound like a contradiction in terms. But, any kind of change—even a fun one—can trigger stress. Add children to the mix, and you have a recipe for more work than relaxation. But, some preplanning can help keep everyone smiling:

1. Involve older children in decisions about where to go and what to do on vacation.
2. Let kids be kids. Plan at least one child-oriented activity a day, such as a visit to the zoo.
3. Don’t feel pressured to spend a lot of money. A recent article in the Journal of Happiness Studies found that family togetherness, not spending money, predicted a happier holiday.
4. Plan fewer activities than you think you have time for. Rushing to reach a destination or catch a plane can add unwelcome stress to your family vacation.
5. Schedule time for stress-busting naps and exercise along the way.
6. Bring a “fun bag” stuffed with favorite snacks, books, games, and other items your kids enjoy.
7. Accept that some arguments are a natural part of family life. To keep anger to a minimum, let your children win on minor issues that aren’t worth fighting over.

We value your input. Please send your comments to:

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