



baby & toddler

Beyond the Pediatrician

Doctors Babies and Toddlers May Also Need to See

By Katherine Bontrager

When your little one arrived, you sought a caring pediatrician to carefully monitor and treat your child's physical, emotional and social health. And barring any complications, the pediatrician was the only doctor your little one needed until he was much, much older, right? Well, not exactly. What most parents don't realize is that there are several specialists who would prefer to see kids when they're little to look out for, and prevent, many a malady.

At what age do these doctors like to start seeing kids, and what do they typically do and look for?

Baby Smooth Skin

Silky soft and unblemished – such are the descriptors typically associated with baby's skin. But many wee ones don't have such magazine-perfect skin. And even if your little one is the happy exception, what wouldn't you do to protect that baby skin from all the harsh elements out there?

Dr. Jason R. Lupton, a dermatologist in practice in Del Mar, Calif., sees many young children for this very reason – heightened concerns regarding moles and early melanoma detection.

So how do you know if a dermatologist needs to be added to your child's medical arsenal? "Children are most commonly seen by dermatologists for eczema, mole exams, birthmarks, warts, psoriasis, etc.," Dr. Lupton says. "Most children don't necessarily need to be seen by a dermatologist if they have no significant skin issues or any significant issues that run in the family. Since most children are regularly seen by pediatricians, they usually catch the most common skin conditions."

But there are some exceptions to this rule. "If a child has a lot of moles (even as a toddler) or has some present at birth, then a baseline exam by a dermatologist is warranted," Dr. Lupton says. "If they have a rash like eczema, for example, and the pediatrician is not able to get it under control within a month or so, then a visit to a dermatologist would also be a good idea."

Since skin can change quickly, parents need to be on the lookout for anything unusual. "It's very common for children to develop moles during early childhood, but you want to make sure these are even-colored, even-bordered and smaller than the size of a pencil eraser," Dr. Lupton says. "Moles that change in color, size or shape or bleed or itch should be looked at by a dermatologist. Moles that are not symmetrical in color or shape should be examined. Fortunately, most moles in children are benign and a normal finding on routine exam; however, any changes or new growths that look out of place or irregular should be checked. Melanoma and atypical moles can develop in children."

Thankfully for all involved, the first appointment to a dermatologist is usually pretty easy. The doctor simply does a thorough exam of your little one's skin. "If any areas of concern are present, than a small skin biopsy may need to be performed," Dr. Lupton says. "This would involve injecting a little bit of lidocaine to numb the area and then a small piece of skin shaved off for diagnostic biopsy. Follow-up exams would be dictated by the condition at hand."

