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## Newborn and elderly skin: two fragile skins at higher risk of pressure injury

Anne-france Bengy, Jérôme Lamartine, Dominique Sigaucho-roussel, Bérengère Fromy

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Anne-france Bengy, Jérôme Lamartine, Dominique Sigaucho-roussel, Bérengère Fromy. Newborn and elderly skin: two fragile skins at higher risk of pressure injury. *Biological Reviews*, In press, 10.1111/brv.12827 . hal-03621154

**HAL Id: hal-03621154**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03621154v1>**

Submitted on 31 Mar 2022

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3 **1 Newborn and elderly skin: two fragile skins at higher risk of**  
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6 **2 pressure injury**  
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21 **4 Anne-France de Bengy<sup>1,\*</sup>, Jérôme Lamartine<sup>2</sup>, Dominique Sigaudou-Roussel<sup>2</sup> and**  
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24 **5 Bérengère Fromy<sup>2,\*</sup>**  
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15 **ABSTRACT**

16 Skin is a key organ maintaining internal homeostasis by performing many functions such as  
17 water loss prevention, body temperature regulation and protection from noxious substance  
18 absorption, microorganism intrusion and physical trauma. Skin ageing has been well studied  
19 and it is well known that physiological changes in the elderly result in higher skin fragility  
20 favouring the onset of skin diseases. For example, prolonged and/or high-intensity pressure  
21 may suppress local blood flow more easily, disturbing cell metabolism and inducing pressure  
22 injury (PI) formation. Pressure injuries (PIs) represent a significant problem worldwide and  
23 their prevalence remains too high. A higher PI prevalence is correlated with an elderly  
24 population. Newborn skin evolution has been less studied, but some data also report a higher

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3 25 PI prevalence in this population compared to older children, and several authors also consider  
4  
5 26 this skin as physiologically fragile. In this review, we compare the characteristics of newborn  
6  
7 27 and elderly skin in order to determine common features that may explain their fragility,  
8  
9 28 especially regarding PI risk. We show that, despite differences in appearance, they share  
10  
11 29 many common features leading to higher fragility to shear and pressure forces, not only at the  
12  
13 30 structural level but also at the cellular and molecular level and in terms of physiology. Both  
14  
15 31 newborn and elderly skin have: (1) a thinner epidermis; (2) a thinner dermis containing a less-  
16  
17 32 resistant collagen network, a higher collagen III:collagen I ratio and less elastin; (3) a flatter  
18  
19 33 dermal–epidermal junction (DEJ) with lower anchoring systems; and (4) a thinner  
20  
21 34 hypodermis, resulting in lower mechanical resistance to skin damage when pressure or shear  
22  
23 35 forces are applied. At the molecular level, reduced expression of transforming growth factor  $\beta$   
24  
25 36 (TGF $\beta$ ) and its receptor TGF $\beta$  receptor II (T $\beta$ RII) is involved in the decreased production  
26  
27 37 and/or increased degradation of various dermal extracellular matrix (ECM) components.  
28  
29 38 Epidermal fragility also involves a higher skin pH which decreases the activity of key  
30  
31 39 enzymes inducing ceramide deficiency and reduced barrier protection. This seems to be  
32  
33 40 correlated with higher PI prevalence in some situations. Some data also suggest that stratum  
34  
35 41 corneum (SC) dryness, which may disturb cell metabolism, also increases the risk of PI  
36  
37 42 formation. Besides this structural fragility, several skin functions are also less efficient. Low  
38  
39 43 applied pressures induce skin vessel vasodilation *via* a mechanism called pressure-induced  
40  
41 44 vasodilation (PIV). Individuals lacking a normal PIV response show an early decrease in  
42  
43 45 cutaneous blood flow in response to the application of very low pressures, reflecting vascular  
44  
45 46 fragility of the skin that increases the risk of ulceration. Due to changes in endothelial  
46  
47 47 function, skin PIV ability decreases during skin ageing, putting it at higher risk of PI  
48  
49 48 formation. In newborns, some data lead us to hypothesize that the nitric oxide (NO) pathway  
50  
51 49 is not fully functional at birth, which may partly explain the higher risk of PI formation in  
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3 50 newborns. In the elderly, a lower PIV ability results from impaired functionality of skin  
4  
5 51 innervation, in particular that of C-fibres which are involved in both touch and pain sensation  
6  
7 52 and the PIV mechanism. In newborns, skin sensitivity differs from adults due to nerve system  
8  
9 53 immaturity, but the role of this in PIV remains to be determined.  
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12 54

13  
14 55 *Key words:* pressure injury, pressure ulcer, newborn skin, elderly skin, skin ageing, fragile  
15  
16 56 skin, skin integrity.  
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19 57

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6

7 77 (2) Skin hydration and external humidity  
8

9 78 (3) Lower endothelial functionality might explain a lower resistance to pressure in  
10  
11 newborn and elderly skin  
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15

16 81 (b) Higher expression of thrombospondin-1 (TSP1)  
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20

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27

28 86 V. References  
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33 88 **I. INTRODUCTION**  
34

35 89 Skin is a dynamic and complex organ forming the interface between the body and the external  
36  
37 environment. Its main function is to maintain internal homeostasis by preventing water loss or  
38  
39 regulating body temperature and to provide protection from noxious substance absorption,  
40  
41 microorganism intrusion and physical trauma. It also mediates the sense of touch and plays a  
42  
43 role in hormone production and social communication (Rittié & Fisher, 2015).  
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45

46 94 Many extrinsic factors can disrupt skin homeostasis, including the application of prolonged  
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48 and/or high-intensity pressure which may induce pressure ulcers (PUs), recently redefined and  
49  
50 renamed pressure injuries (PIs) by the National Pressure Injury Advisory Panel (NPIAP)  
51  
52 (Edsberg *et al.*, 2016; Gefen *et al.*, 2020).  
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56 98 Despite increased attention and a focus on prevention, PI prevalence remains very high, in  
57  
58 particular in intensive care units (ICUs), representing a significant problem worldwide. A  
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3 100 recent study involving 13,254 adult patients in 1,117 ICUs from 90 countries revealed a total  
4  
5 101 prevalence of 26.6%, ranging from 13.8 to 28.9% depending on the continent, with an ICU-  
6  
7 102 acquired prevalence of 16.2%, ranging from 9.1% to 22.8% (Labeau *et al.*, 2021). To our  
8  
9 103 knowledge, no such comprehensive study has been conducted in the paediatric population and  
10  
11 104 data for this age group remain scarce. However, a systematic review, including 21 studies  
12  
13 105 concerning subjects aged <21 years old, recently reported a hospital-acquired prevalence  
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15 106 ranging from 0.47% to 31.2% with a pooled prevalence and cumulative incidence respectively  
16  
17 107 estimated at 7% and 14.9% (Triantafyllou *et al.*, 2021). Although these data cannot be  
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19 108 compared because ICU patients are at greater risk of developing PIs than other hospital  
20  
21 109 patients, they show that PIs can affect people of all ages.

22  
23  
24  
25  
26 110 PIs are often correlated with advanced age and many studies concerning adult populations  
27  
28 111 identified age as a factor increasing PI prevalence (Amlung, Miller & Bosley, 2001; Manzano  
29  
30 112 *et al.*, 2010; Cox, 2011; O'Brien *et al.*, 2014; Nassaji, Askari & Ghorbani, 2014; Tayyib,  
31  
32 113 Coler & Lewis, 2016; Labeau *et al.*, 2021). Fewer data are available for the paediatric  
33  
34 114 population (Bernabe, 2012; Luton *et al.*, 2017; Triantafyllou *et al.*, 2021) and they show  
35  
36 115 highly variable results depending on the study (Jackson *et al.*, 2019; Triantafyllou *et al.*,  
37  
38 116 2021), although some data suggest that PI prevalence is age dependent with the observed  
39  
40 117 prevalence higher for the youngest children. For example, Fujii *et al.* (2010) reported a  
41  
42 118 prevalence of 16% for children under 1 month old, also called newborns or neonates  
43  
44 119 according to the National Library of Medicine, *versus* 2.5% for all ages in Japanese hospitals.  
45  
46 120 Schlüter, Halfens & Schols (2012) found in paediatric ICUs (PICUs) a prevalence of 43% for  
47  
48 121 children under 1 year old, also called infants, *versus* 31% for children of more than 12 years  
49  
50 122 and Triantafyllou *et al.* (2021) reported an estimated pooled prevalence of 27% among  
51  
52 123 neonates, 19.2% among infants and 12.3% for children older than 1 year. In neonatal ICUs  
53  
54 124 (NICUs), incidence and severity are inversely proportional to birth weight and gestational age  
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3 125 (Fischer *et al.*, 2010). However, many factors (lack of mobility, nutritional status, length of  
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5 126 hospitalization, care practices, medical devices used, etc.) may vary among populations or  
6  
7 127 among hospitals that could modulate PI incidence (August *et al.*, 2014; NPUAP, EPUAP &  
8  
9 128 PPIAP, 2014; Edsberg *et al.*, 2016; EPUAP, NPIAP & PPIAP, 2019; Gefen *et al.*, 2020),  
10  
11 129 meaning that comparisons must be made with caution. Overall, the data do suggest that  
12  
13 130 elderly people among the adult population and newborns among the paediatric population are  
14  
15 131 more at risk of PI formation.

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19 132 PIs are thought to be formed when blood and lymphatic vessels collapse under external  
20  
21 133 pressure (Graff, Bryant & Beinlich, 2000; Grey, Harding & Enoch, 2006; Coleman *et al.*,  
22  
23 134 2014). This reduces cell nutrition, oxygenation and waste elimination, leading to a gradual  
24  
25 135 progression of damage. Moreover, during the unloading reperfusion phase, the release of  
26  
27 136 harmful oxygen free radicals may exacerbate such damage (Coleman *et al.*, 2014; EPUAP,  
28  
29 137 NPIAP & PPIAP, 2019). More recent studies have revealed that high and sudden pressure  
30  
31 138 leading to sudden cell and tissue deformation can also contribute directly to rapid  
32  
33 139 deterioration, both in skin (or mucosa) and underlying tissues (Coleman *et al.*, 2014; Oomens  
34  
35 140 *et al.*, 2015; EPUAP, NPIAP & PPIAP, 2019). These different injury mechanisms can interact  
36  
37 141 to induce various impacts. Cell deformation, inflammation and/or ischemia and reperfusion  
38  
39 142 damage can form a vicious circle as described by Gefen (2018) and Gefen & Soppi (2020).  
40  
41 143 This leads to PI formation beginning either at the skin or mucosa level or in deeper tissues  
42  
43 144 (Loerakker *et al.*, 2011; Oomens *et al.*, 2015; EPUAP, NPIAP & PPIAP, 2019).  
44  
45 145 From the most recent EPUAP/NPIAP/PPPIAP guideline (EPUAP, NPIAP & PPIAP, 2019),  
46  
47 146 PI is defined as “a localized damage to the skin and/or underlying tissue” that appears “as a  
48  
49 147 result of intense and/or prolonged pressure or pressure in combination with shear” and that  
50  
51 148 PIs “usually occur over a bony prominence but may also be related to a medical device or  
52  
53 149 other object.” (EPUAP, NPIAP & PPPIAP, 2019, p. 16; Kottner *et al.*, 2019). Thus, PI  
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3 150 formation and severity depend both on the mechanical load characteristics (pressure or  
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5 151 pressure and shear duration, intensity, etc.) and the tolerance/resistance of the soft tissue  
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7  
8 152 (Coleman *et al.*, 2014).

9  
10 153 A lack of mobility and activity, often observed in preterm neonates or very old people and  
11  
12 154 correlated with poor sensory perception in some cases, increases pressure duration and hence  
13  
14 155 the risk of PI formation. The use of some medical devices, often used in ICUs and exerting  
15  
16 156 locally high and/or prolonged pressures, is also well known to increase the risk of PI  
17  
18 157 formation (NPUAP, EPUAP & PPIAP, 2014; Edsberg *et al.*, 2016; EPUAP, NPIAP &  
19  
20 158 PPIAP, 2019; Gefen *et al.*, 2020).

21  
22  
23 159 PI formation also depends on tissue tolerance modulated by many extrinsic and intrinsic  
24  
25 160 factors such as skin moisture, nutrition, perfusion and cell oxygenation (Braden & Bergstrom  
26  
27 161 1987; Coleman *et al.*, 2014; Schlüter, Schols & Halfens, 2014; EPUAP, NPIAP & PPIAP,  
28  
29 162 2019), microclimate, temperature, or comorbidities (Coleman *et al.*, 2014; EPUAP, NPIAP &  
30  
31 163 PPIAP, 2019). These factors exert an effect on the structure and/or the properties of the skin  
32  
33 164 and underlying tissues, thus modulating their ability to resist pressure and repair damage  
34  
35 165 (Braden & Bergstrom, 1987; Coleman *et al.*, 2014). Obviously, intrinsic factors such as age or  
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37 166 genetic background also define tissue mechanical properties and physiology, influencing the  
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39 167 risk of PI formation (Coleman *et al.*, 2014; EPUAP, NPIAP & PPIAP, 2019). Given the  
40  
41 168 higher prevalence of PIs in both elderly and newborn skin, we can speculate whether there are  
42  
43 169 common skin characteristics that could explain a lower resistance to pressure in these two  
44  
45 170 skin types. This review compares the structure of the different parts of newborn and elderly  
46  
47 171 skin, taking into account their evolution over time, and some biological mechanisms directly  
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49 172 or indirectly involved in skin resistance to pressure and shear. As PIs are mainly formed in  
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51 173 areas not exposed to the sun (Labeau *et al.*, 2021), we only considered intrinsic ageing. We  
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3 174 also focused on the skin and PIs that begin at the skin level, not on deep tissue injuries  
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5 175 initiated below skin level.  
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## 10 177 **II. COMMON STRUCTURAL FEATURES OF NEWBORN AND ELDERLY SKIN**

11  
12 178 The protective function of the skin is based on the existence of three layers: epidermis, dermis  
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14 179 and hypodermis. Table 1 provides a comparison of skin structure and barrier functionality in  
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16  
17 180 the skin of newborns, young adults and the elderly.  
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### 21 182 **(1) Infant and elderly skin: thickness and fragility**

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24 183 The exterior of the epidermis mainly consists of keratinocytes which proliferate in the deepest  
25  
26 184 layer (basal layer) and differentiate progressively while migrating upwards through the  
27  
28 185 stratum spinosum, the stratum granulosum and the stratum corneum (SC) (Fig. 1). The SC  
29  
30 186 consists of metabolically inactive and protein-enriched keratinocytes, called corneocytes,  
31  
32  
33 187 tightly linked by corneodesmosomes and embedded in a lipid-rich extracellular matrix (Elias,  
34  
35 188 Goerke & Friend, 1977; Proksch, Brandner & Jensen, 2008). Despite its thinness (7–35  $\mu\text{m}$ )  
36  
37 189 (Telofski *et al.*, 2012), the SC constitutes the main physical barrier of the skin, preventing  
38  
39  
40 190 water loss and noxious substance or microorganism entry (Proksch *et al.*, 2008; Elias *et al.*,  
41  
42 191 2010; Blume-Peytavi *et al.*, 2016). Melanocytes, which produce melanin which protects skin  
43  
44 192 against ultraviolet (UV) radiation, and dendritic cells, which participate actively in the  
45  
46  
47 193 immune response, are also present. The epidermis does not contain blood vessels and  
48  
49 194 therefore depends on the dermis for its nutrition.

50  
51 195 The skin barrier appears *in utero*. From weeks 22–24, a stratified and keratinized epithelium  
52  
53 196 is formed (Coolen *et al.*, 2010) and a thick and well-developed epidermis emerges at 34  
54  
55  
56 197 weeks of gestation with a functional SC and dermal–epidermal junction (DEJ) undulations  
57  
58 198 (Evans & Rutter, 1986; Telofski *et al.*, 2012; Visscher *et al.*, 2015). SC development seems to  
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2  
3 199 reach complete maturity between 30 and 37 weeks of pregnancy (Fluhr *et al.*, 2010; Telofski  
4  
5 200 *et al.*, 2012). It allows little or no drug percutaneous absorption in full-term infants (Harpin &  
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7 201 Rutter, 1983) and prevents full-term neonate dehydration at birth as demonstrated by trans-  
8  
9 202 epidermal water loss (TEWL) analysis. Indeed, increased or decreased TEWL is respectively  
10  
11 203 associated with skin barrier dysfunction or an intact skin barrier. Although many factors can  
12  
13 204 modulate TEWL, a systematic review concluded that full-term newborn TEWL is either  
14  
15 205 similar to or lower than in adults, depending on skin area (Ludriksone *et al.*, 2014). For this  
16  
17 206 reason, some authors consider infant skin as fully mature at birth.  
18  
19 207 Nevertheless, several studies revealed a continuous maturation of the skin after birth. Pulsed  
20  
21 208 ultrasound was used to show a linear increase in skin thickness up to the age of 20 years (Tan  
22  
23 209 *et al.*, 1982) and a progressive increase of epidermis thickness after birth (Evans & Rutter,  
24  
25 210 1986). A comparison of infant skin (3–24 months of age) with that of their mother (25–43  
26  
27 211 years of age) found the thickness of the infant epidermis and SC to be 20% and 30% thinner,  
28  
29 212 respectively, than in adults (Stamatas *et al.*, 2010). This finding is consistent with the slight  
30  
31 213 increase in the number of SC layers reported for back and cheek skin between birth and  
32  
33 214 adulthood (Ya Xian, Suetaki & Tagami, 1999). A recent *in vivo* study used high-frequency  
34  
35 215 ultrasound imaging to identify a lower epidermal thickness (mean of 0.081 mm for extended  
36  
37 216 forearm; 0.083 mm for thigh) in <24 h-old newborns (Przybysz *et al.*, 2021) than in adults  
38  
39 217 (0.132 mm for inner forearm; 0.147 mm for outer forearm; 0.125 mm for cheek; 0.143 mm  
40  
41 218 for chin) (Mlosek *et al.*, 2011, 2013). These values were obtained by the same researchers  
42  
43 219 with the same methods and for similar Caucasian populations, while another study recorded a  
44  
45 220 thickness of 0.108 mm or 0.090 mm for an adult forearm depending on the arm position (90°  
46  
47 221 flexion or 180° extension, respectively) using optical coherence tomography (Maiti *et al.*,  
48  
49 222 2016). Such data indeed suggest that newborn epidermis is thinner than adult epidermis.  
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3 223 At the cellular level and considering the cell surface area, infant corneocytes were found to be  
4  
5 224 20% and granular cells 10% smaller than those of adults indicating a more rapid cell turnover  
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7 225 (Stamatas *et al.*, 2010) which is highlighted *in vivo* by greater desquamation (Hoeger &  
8  
9 226 Enzman, 2002). According to Michel *et al.* (1996, 1997) this may be correlated with a higher  
10  
11 227 stem cell number. Taking into account current knowledge concerning stem cell evolution  
12  
13 228 during skin ageing (Giangreco *et al.*, 2008, 2010; Charruyer *et al.*, 2009; Keyes *et al.*, 2013),  
14  
15 229 we can also hypothesize a higher proliferative ability of those stem cells which may explain  
16  
17 230 the well-known more rapid amplification of human newborn primary keratinocytes observed  
18  
19 231 in 2D cultures. Infant corneocytes have also been shown to be thicker (in height) than those of  
20  
21 232 adults and detailed three-dimensional morphometry using atomic force microscopy  
22  
23 233 highlighted that although adult corneocytes are flatter than in infants, the total volume  
24  
25 234 remains statistically similar between the two groups (Kashibuchi *et al.*, 2002). Another study  
26  
27 235 performed in Japan using confocal laser scanning microscopy reported a decrease in SC  
28  
29 236 thickness over the 3 months after birth and an increase of epidermis thickness during the first  
30  
31 237 month after birth. This study identified no difference between adult skin and infants older  
32  
33 238 than 3 months (Miyachi *et al.*, 2016).  
34  
35 239 Despite newborn epidermis being thinner than in young adults, a recent systematic study  
36  
37 240 using histological data highlighted the paucity of data, significant differences between  
38  
39 241 sampling sites, and technical problems that limit data reliability (de Souza *et al.*, 2019). As  
40  
41 242 contradictions among results may be linked to inaccurate measurements, skin anatomical  
42  
43 243 region or ethnic origin, further investigations using precise measurement tools, large sample  
44  
45 244 sizes and including various skin anatomical regions and subjects of recorded ethnic origins  
46  
47 245 are needed. This would allow us to describe and understand skin modifications better, the  
48  
49 246 underlying mechanisms that take place after birth, and would enable a more accurate  
50  
51 247 assessment of newborn skin fragility.  
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3 248 For preterm babies, skin immaturity is highlighted by a transparent, reddish and gelatinous  
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5 249 appearance (Razmus, Lewis & Wilson, 2008). The epidermis is significantly thinner (Razmus  
6  
7 250 *et al.*, 2008; Przybysz *et al.*, 2021) than in young adults. The SC and the underlying epidermal  
8  
9 251 layers change during pregnancy: there is virtually no SC at 23–24 weeks gestational age  
10  
11 252 (GA), 2–3 layers at 30 weeks (Razmus *et al.*, 2008) and 16 layers in young adults (Fairley &  
12  
13 253 Rasmussen, 1983; Holbrook, 2000). Evans & Rutter (1986) reported a mean  $\pm$  SD of  $2.9 \pm 0.5$   
14  
15 254 cell layers from the epidermal basal layer to the granular layer in preterm neonates compared  
16  
17 255 with  $4.3 \pm 0.7$  cell layers in full-term neonates. It takes 2–8 weeks for preterm neonates to  
18  
19 256 develop a functional epidermis similar to that of full-term infants, depending on their degree  
20  
21 257 of prematurity (Fox, 2011). Recent studies have correlated epidermis thickness to both  
22  
23 258 gestational age and body mass (Przybysz *et al.*, 2021) and have even proposed epidermis  
24  
25 259 thickness as a marker of gestational age to assess prematurity (Vital *et al.*, 2018). This poor  
26  
27 260 epidermal barrier makes preterm infants susceptible to increased water loss, higher  
28  
29 261 permeability to exogenous materials and a higher risk of skin damage and infection during the  
30  
31 262 first weeks following birth (Harpin & Rutter, 1983; Evans & Rutter, 1986; Neidig, Kleier &  
32  
33 263 Oppliger, 1989; Cartlidge, 2000; Lund & Osborne, 2004; Fox, 2011; Blume-Peytavi *et al.*,  
34  
35 264 2012).  
36  
37 265 During human skin ageing, thinning of the skin is observed, with a linear decrease in skin  
38  
39 266 thickness *in vivo* with age (Tan *et al.*, 1982). Clinically, chronologically aged skin appears  
40  
41 267 thin, dry, and finely wrinkled (Rittié & Fisher, 2015). *Ex vivo* studies have confirmed this  
42  
43 268 thinning: Xu *et al.* (2017) reviewed 16 studies of epidermal thickness by mean age and found  
44  
45 269 an average of  $75.03 \mu\text{m}$  for ages 0–60 compared to  $45.56 \mu\text{m}$  for ages 60 and older. This  
46  
47 270 thinning is due to a decrease in epidermal turnover which has been correlated by some authors  
48  
49 271 to reduced cell proliferation and stem cell number (Kligman, 1979; Michel *et al.*, 1997;  
50  
51 272 Stamatas *et al.*, 2006). However, this remains controversial as other studies have reported a  
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3 273 decreased proliferative capacity but a constant stem cell number in mouse skin until the end  
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5 274 of life (Giangreco *et al.*, 2008; Charruyer *et al.*, 2009; Keyes *et al.*, 2013). According to  
6  
7 275 Giangreco *et al.* (2010), the cell density in the epidermal basal layer also decreases during  
8  
9 276 human skin ageing. Moreover, expression levels of two stem cell markers of human  
10  
11 277 interfollicular epidermis –  $\beta 1$  integrin and melanoma chondroitin sulfate proteoglycan  
12  
13 278 (MCSP) – are lower in people >60 years old (Giangreco *et al.*, 2010). This implies either a  
14  
15 279 decrease in stem cell number or a reduction in the activation or proliferation potential of stem  
16  
17 280 cells, but further studies are needed. The SC remains functional (Kligman, 1979; Lavker,  
18  
19 281 Zheng & Dong, 1989; Lavker, 1995; Newton *et al.*, 2017), allowing maintenance of a TEWL  
20  
21 282 similar to or lower than that of young adults (Akdeniz *et al.*, 2018a). Its thickness has been  
22  
23 283 reported to be similar or slightly higher than in young adults, depending on body area and  
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25 284 study (Waller & Maibach, 2005; Rawlings, 2017) (Fig. 1, Table 1).  
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## 33 286 **(2) Infant and elderly skin: a respectively immature and altered dermal–epidermal** 34 35 287 **junction (DEJ)**

36  
37 288 The DEJ is a specific zone forming more or less marked undulations and where the epidermis  
38  
39 289 is tightly associated to the dermis due to the hemidesmosomes of basal keratinocytes, the  
40  
41 290 anchoring filaments linking the hemidesmosomes to the basement membrane, and the  
42  
43 291 anchoring fibrils connecting the basement membrane to the underlying dermis (Ellison &  
44  
45 292 Garrod, 1984; Villone *et al.*, 2008). This structure plays an important part in skin cohesion,  
46  
47 293 resistance and homeostasis. The DEJ also prevents direct contact between the dermis and  
48  
49 294 epidermis or epidermal migration into the dermis and therefore controls the numerous  
50  
51 295 exchanges between the dermis and epidermis (including nutrients and signalling molecules)  
52  
53 296 (Amano, 2016). Moreover, the DEJ maintains the proliferative state of the basal layer and  
54  
55 297 determines the polarity of the epidermis (Amano, 2016).  
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*(a) Features of the DEJ in infant and elderly skin*

A weakly undulating DEJ with flat rete ridges and few fibrils in the epidermal basal layer characterizes the skin of the newborn (Evans & Rutter, 1986; Razmus *et al.*, 2008). It was also reported that dermal papillae were not present in neonatal skin but appeared gradually over the first 3 months following birth (Miyachi *et al.*, 2016). DEJ undulations, cell attachments and epidermal cellularity increase gradually in neonates and young infants during skin maturation (Evans & Rutter, 1986; Cartlidge, 2000; Miyachi *et al.*, 2016). Consequently, newborn skin is more susceptible to traction and shear forces. The DEJ is flat before 34 weeks GA in preterm neonates (Cartlidge, 2000) and there are fewer anchoring structures with wide spaces between connecting points (Holbrook, 1982), leading to increased fragility of the skin (Fig. 1, Table 1).

DEJ flattening with shorter rete ridges and dermal papillae rarefaction and reduction is also a well-known characteristic of intrinsic skin ageing (Lavker *et al.*, 1987, 1989; Moragas, Castells & Sans, 1993; Desai, 1997; Giangreco *et al.*, 2010; Farage *et al.*, 2013; Newton *et al.*, 2017). It is associated with a reduction of anchoring molecules such as  $\beta 1$  integrins, transmembrane proteins of basal keratinocytes involved in their anchoring to the DEJ, and a decrease in basal cell proliferation ability (Giangreco *et al.*, 2010). These modifications are thought to reduce skin resistance to shearing forces (Lavker *et al.*, 1987, 1989; Desai, 1997; Farage *et al.*, 2013; Hatje *et al.*, 2015), the area of the exchange surface for epidermis nutrition (Farage *et al.*, 2013) and the proliferative capacity of epidermal cells (Lavker *et al.*, 1987; Giangreco *et al.*, 2010). This results in higher skin fragility with an increased risk of skin rupture (Farage *et al.*, 2013). There is also likely to be a decrease in waste elimination which might alter the epidermal cellular environment, but this remains to be investigated (Fig. 1, Table 1).

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2  
3 323 The flatter DEJ observed in both newborn and elderly skin is significantly associated with  
4  
5 324 higher susceptibility to traction and shear forces. In addition, it may limit cell nutrition and  
6  
7 325 waste elimination, favouring cell alterations under pressure or shear force conditions.  
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10 326 Consequently, a higher risk of PI formation may be hypothesized although the underlying  
11  
12 327 mechanisms require investigation.  
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14 328

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17 329 *(b) A specific molecular network in the DEJ of infant and elderly skin*

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19 330 At the molecular level, the DEJ contains a well-organized network of various proteins  
20  
21 331 including laminin 332 (also called laminin V), types IV and VII collagens, heparan sulfate  
22  
23 332 proteoglycan (perlecan) and nidogens. Laminin 332, a ligand of basal keratinocyte integrins,  
24  
25 333 is essential for epidermal attachment in mice and humans (Rousselle *et al.*, 1991, 1997;  
26  
27 334 Nakano *et al.*, 2002; Rousselle & Beck, 2013; Tayem *et al.*, 2021). It has been reported to  
28  
29 335 enhance hemidesmosome formation and reinforce the DEJ in skin-equivalent models  
30  
31 336 (Amano, Nishiyama & Burgeson, 1999), but also to regulate the differentiation of mouse and  
32  
33 337 human interfollicular epidermal stem cells which themselves produce laminin 332 (Yamada *et*  
34  
35 338 *al.*, 2018; Tayem *et al.*, 2021), to inhibit sensory mechanotransduction and thereby decrease  
36  
37 339 pain sensitivity in mice, and to control sensory axon branching behaviour (Chiang *et al.*,  
38  
39 340 2011)  
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44 341 During human skin ageing, the expression level of a laminin 332 subunit (Lamb3) has been  
45  
46 342 shown to decrease (Yamada *et al.*, 2018), as well as the number of interfollicular epidermal  
47  
48 343 stem cells and/or their activation potential which is thought to be one of the main causes of  
49  
50 344 epidermal dysfunction such as delayed cell turnover (Giangreco *et al.*, 2010; Akamatsu *et al.*,  
51  
52 345 2016; Yamada *et al.*, 2018). As laminin 332 has been shown to regulate the proper  
53  
54 346 differentiation of human interfollicular epidermis stem cells (Yamada *et al.*, 2018), this  
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3 347 decrease in laminin 332 expression probably leads to slower epidermal renewal, contributing  
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5 348 to the thinner and more fragile skin observed in the elderly.

7 349 Perlecan is well known to have many functions such as regulating the molecular assembly of  
8  
9  
10 350 the extracellular matrix (ECM), stabilizing the ECM molecular network and binding and  
11  
12 351 transporting growth factors to cells (Lord *et al.*, 2018). Perlecan has also been reported to  
13  
14 352 promote epidermal renewal *in vitro* (Dos Santos *et al.*, 2016). As levels of perlecan decrease  
15  
16 353 in the elderly, a role in epidermal thinning during skin ageing has been suggested.

19 354 Very few data focusing on the DEJ of infant skin DEJ at the molecular level are available. To  
20  
21 355 our knowledge, there are no data concerning perlecan. One study reported similar expression  
22  
23 356 of laminin 332 and decreased expression of laminins 511 (= laminin 10) and 521 (= laminin  
24  
25 357 11) in adult skin compared to infant skin (Pouliot, Saunders & Kaur, 2002). As laminins 511  
26  
27 358 and 521 seem to facilitate keratinocyte adhesion and to stimulate their proliferation, this might  
28  
29 359 explain the high proliferative ability of infant skin. We hypothesize that skin maturation  
30  
31 360 during infancy involves deep modifications of the DEJ molecular network, but further studies  
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33 361 will be needed to understand the underlying mechanisms better.  
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### 40 363 **(3) Dermal cells and extracellular matrix (ECM)**

41  
42 364 Thicker than the epidermis, the dermis mainly contains fibroblasts embedded in ECM  
43  
44 365 composed of collagen, elastin and glycosaminoglycans respectively involved in resistance,  
45  
46 366 elasticity and hydration of the skin. The dermal layer also includes skin appendages (hair  
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48 367 follicles, sebaceous glands, sweat glands and nails), capillary beds that feed the skin, and  
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50 368 various nerve endings responsible for skin sensitivity.  
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#### 56 370 *(a) Dermis thickness*

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3 371 In humans, dermis thickness depends greatly on body area, genetic factors (Vital et al., 2018)  
4  
5 372 and age. After a slight decrease during the first 7 days following birth (Reed, Johnson & Nie,  
6  
7 373 2021) it has been found to increase over time (Tan et al., 1982). The thickness of outer  
8  
9 374 forearm dermis was found to be close to 0.722 mm for a newborn (<24 h old), regardless of  
10  
11 375 sex (Przybysz et al., 2021) versus 1.187 mm in adults (Mlosek et al., 2011). For adults, higher  
12  
13 376 values were reported for males than in females (Van Mülder et al., 2017). Intrinsic ageing  
14  
15 377 also induces a thinner dermis in contrast to photoageing (Shuster, Black & McVitie, 1975;  
16  
17 378 Giangreco et al., 2010) (Fig. 1, Table 1).  
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#### 24 380 (b) Fibroblast and ECM evolution

25  
26 381 As fibroblasts produce various ECM components including collagen and elastin, but also  
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28 382 enzymes able to degrade those components, ECM composition is highly dependent on  
29  
30 383 fibroblast state and metabolism.  
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#### 35 385 (i) Fibroblast evolution over time

36  
37 386 Fibroblasts are the most characteristic cells of the dermis. Less mature than adult fibroblasts,  
38  
39 387 human newborn fibroblasts (<16 days) can maintain keratinocyte immaturity and avoid scar  
40  
41 388 formation (Živicová et al., 2017). In newborn mice, as for keratinocytes, a higher proliferation  
42  
43 389 level of fibroblasts has been observed compared to adult skin (Pablos et al., 1997). In elderly  
44  
45 390 humans, fibroblast motility decreases *in vitro* (Pienta & Coffey, 1990), as well as fibroblast  
46  
47 391 number *in vivo* (Sgonc & Gruber, 2013) and a correlation with increased cellular senescence  
48  
49 392 is observed *in vitro* and *in vivo* (Dimri et al., 1995).  
50  
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54 393 Overall, fibroblast immaturity in newborns and fibroblast senescence in the elderly leads to  
55  
56 394 reduced ECM production at both ages, resulting in higher skin fragility (Table 1).  
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3 396 (ii) *A more fragile collagen network*  
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5 397 The dermal collagen network allows skin resistance to rupture. ECM contains various  
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7 398 collagen types of which the main ones are collagen I (85–90% in human adult skin) and  
8  
9 399 collagen III (8–11% in human adult skin) (Smith, Holbrook & Madri, 1986).  
10  
11 400 Collagen fibre volume has been shown to increase progressively from less than 1 year to 30  
12  
13 401 years in human papillary dermis as well as in reticular dermis of the trunk and limbs  
14  
15 402 (Vitellaro-Zuccarello *et al.*, 1994). Collagen fibrils were even smaller in preterm neonates  
16  
17 403 (Holbrook, 1982). Moreover, the collagen bundles of the upper reticular dermis, normally  
18  
19 404 thicker than in papillary dermis, are less thick in newborns and infants. This leads to a more  
20  
21 405 gradual transition between the papillary and reticular dermis (Vitellaro-Zuccarello *et al.*,  
22  
23 406 1994; Holbrook, 1982; Stamatias *et al.*, 2010; Przybysz *et al.*, 2021). Collagen 1 synthesis was  
24  
25 407 found to increase in a gender-specific manner despite no observable differences between  
26  
27 408 males and females at birth. Women aged 15–93 years were reported to have a thinner dermis  
28  
29 409 with a lower collagen density compared to men of the same age (Shuster *et al.*, 1975). A study  
30  
31 410 on mice found an increase in collagen 1 synthesis until 30 days of age with higher values in  
32  
33 411 males older than 16 days correlated with testosterone production (Arai *et al.*, 2017).  
34  
35 412 In young adult skin, collagen is abundant, tightly packed and well organized, whereas it  
36  
37 413 progressively becomes less dense, fragmented and coarsely distributed in aged skin (Shuster  
38  
39 414 *et al.*, 1975; Shin *et al.*, 2019). With skin ageing, collagen I is progressively degraded and  
40  
41 415 over time accumulates around fibroblasts. The surface area of fibroblasts, and their contact  
42  
43 416 points with the surrounding matrix decrease with age in humans (Varani *et al.*, 2001).  
44  
45 417 Consequently, the strength of the matrix and the mechanical forces within resident fibroblasts  
46  
47 418 both decrease. This stimulates reactive oxygen species (ROS) production, synthesis of  
48  
49 419 metalloproteinases (MMPs) and decreased collagen levels (Rittié & Fisher, 2015; Fisher *et*  
50  
51 420 *al.*, 2016), which might explain the higher sensitivity of elderly skin to shear forces (Table 1).  
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3 421 The changes in collagen synthesis and degradation with age lead to an evolution of the ratio  
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5 422 between collagen I and collagen III over time. This ratio is much lower in foetal skin than in  
6  
7 423 adult humans (Epstein, 1974; Cheng *et al.*, 2011), as well as in guinea pigs (Shuttleworth &  
8  
9 424 Forest, 1975), and decreases from age 65 years onwards (Lovell *et al.*, 1987). A lower ratio in  
10  
11 425 skin has been correlated with a lower ratio in the abdominal wall fascia of hernia patients  
12  
13 426 (Peeters *et al.*, 2014), leading us to hypothesize that this ratio may also be involved in  
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15 427 newborn and elderly skin fragility, but further investigations are required to confirm this  
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17 428 (Table 1).  
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### 24 430 *(iii) Lower skin elasticity*

25  
26 431 Skin elasticity arises from elastin. Elastin is composed of fibrillin microfibrils (Sakai, Keene  
27  
28 432 & Engvall, 1986) together with an amorphous component (Rosenbloom, Abrams &  
29  
30 433 Mechams, 1993) synthesized by fibroblasts and vascular smooth muscle cells. Skin elastin  
31  
32 434 synthesis occurs at high rates during late gestation and in early life before decreasing  
33  
34 435 progressively with age. In newborns, elastin mainly appears as thin bundles of microfibrils,  
35  
36 436 which gradually enlarge and evolve, to appear mostly as amorphous elastin surrounded by a  
37  
38 437 few fibrils in adolescents. Thus, the volume density of the elastin network increases from  
39  
40 438 birth, reaching approximately 2–4% of the tissue volume at sexual maturity, with variations  
41  
42 439 depending on dermis area and subject (Swee, Parks & Pierce, 1995; Pasquali-Ronchetti &  
43  
44 440 Baccarani-Contrì, 1997). Thereafter, elastin synthesis is drastically reduced (Swee *et al.*,  
45  
46 441 1995; Shin *et al.*, 2019). This has been correlated with decreased levels of lysyl oxidase  
47  
48 442 (LOX) and lysyl oxidase-like (LOXL), which are both responsible for elastin crosslinking  
49  
50 443 (Cenizo *et al.*, 2006). As elastin has a very high physiological stability with an estimated half-  
51  
52 444 life of 74 years in humans (Shapiro *et al.*, 1991), modifications are mainly due to elastin  
53  
54 445 degradation which mostly occurs in the elderly and are correlated with a higher level of  
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3 446 elastase activity (Shin *et al.*, 2019). This leads to a decrease in elastin level during intrinsic  
4  
5 447 ageing (Braverman & Fonferko, 1982; Lavker *et al.*, 1989; Shin *et al.*, 2019) which has also  
6  
7 448 been correlated with a decrease in fibulin-5 deposition (Kadoya *et al.*, 2005).  
8  
9  
10 449 Given its synthesis mainly at the beginning of life and increased degradation at the end of life,  
11  
12 450 skin elasticity is lower in both newborn and aged skin. As a result, the ability of the skin to  
13  
14 451 return to its original shape after a deformation is lower in both cases and we hypothesize that  
15  
16 452 this makes it more difficult or slower for skin cells and tissues to return to a normal  
17  
18 453 physiological state with appropriate nutrition after a traumatic deformation. Further  
19  
20 454 investigations would therefore be of great interest to evaluate better the involvement of lower  
21  
22 455 elasticity in newborn and elderly skin fragility (Table 1).  
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28 457 *(c) A key role of transforming growth factor beta (TGF $\beta$ ) signalling*

29  
30 458 Transforming growth factor  $\beta$  (TGF $\beta$ )/ Suppressor of mothers against decapentaplegic (Smad)  
31  
32 459 signalling plays a key role in ECM formation. Long known to stimulate collagen synthesis  
33  
34 460 (Gessin *et al.*, 1993), it also enhances the expression of multiple collagens, fibronectin,  
35  
36 461 decorin and versican and controls the expression of matrix metalloproteinases (MMPs) and  
37  
38 462 their inhibitors (TIMPs) which are respectively down-regulated and up-regulated by TGF-  
39  
40 463  $\beta$ /Smad signalling (Quan & Fisher, 2015) (Fig. 2).  
41  
42  
43

44 464 During skin ageing, ROS generation decreases TGF $\beta$  receptor II (T $\beta$ RII) production and  
45  
46 465 impairs TGF $\beta$  signalling thus increasing MMP activity and leading to collagen fragmentation,  
47  
48 466 a coarser distribution and decreased production (Quan & Fisher, 2015; Shin *et al.*, 2019).  
49

50  
51 467 These alterations to TGF $\beta$  signalling lead to modifications of proteoglycans such as decorin  
52  
53 468 and versican and to decreases in their levels. Decorin interacts with collagen and is involved  
54  
55 469 in collagen fibrogenesis, wound repair, angiogenesis while versican is a component of the  
56  
57 470 elastic fibres and is involved in elastogenesis, ECM remodelling, cell phenotype,  
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1  
2  
3 471 proliferation, adhesion and migration (Ruiz Martinez *et al.*, 2020). Changes to these  
4  
5 472 proteoglycan functions could lead to higher skin fragility during ageing (Fig. 2).  
6  
7 473 Activation of the TGF $\beta$  pathway is higher in human adults compared to newborns (Zhang *et*  
8  
9 474 *al.*, 2019), as is the expression of T $\beta$ RII (Živicová *et al.*, 2017) and collagen I production  
10  
11 475 (Zhang *et al.*, 2019). Thus, we hypothesize that TGF $\beta$  is involved in the progressive  
12  
13 476 maturation of the dermis after birth *via* increasing the levels and progressive maturation of  
14  
15 477 collagen but also probably of ECM proteins such as decorin or versican. This probably  
16  
17 478 contributes to the higher fragility of newborn skin, although further investigations will be  
18  
19 479 needed to determine the precise evolution of the dermal matrix after birth, the underlying  
20  
21 480 mechanisms and the role of TGF $\beta$  (Fig. 2).  
22  
23  
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25  
26 481 TGF $\beta$  is also involved in various processes including epidermis differentiation (Barbollat-  
27  
28 482 Boutran *et al.*, 2017; Kahata, Dadras & Moustakas, 2018), wound healing (Liarte, Bernabé-  
29  
30 483 Garcíá & Nicolás, 2020), skin-resident immune cell maintenance and cell fate determination  
31  
32 484 (Kel *et al.*, 2010; Mohammed *et al.*, 2016; Mani *et al.*, 2019). Thus, the lower levels of TGF $\beta$   
33  
34 485 in newborn and elderly skin may be involved in many ways in the increased fragility of the  
35  
36 486 skin at these ages.  
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#### 42 488 **(4) Infant and elderly skin vasculature**

43  
44 489 Preserving skin homeostasis requires the maintenance of the cutaneous blood circulation  
45  
46 490 allowing cell nourishment. Human skin circulation is organized into two plexuses located in  
47  
48 491 the upper dermis just below the DEJ and at the dermal–subdermal junction. Most vessels are  
49  
50 492 in the upper plexus which is composed of terminal arterioles, papillary loops and postcapillary  
51  
52 493 venules. The deeper plexus gives rise to ascending arterioles connecting to the upper plexus  
53  
54 494 and lateral vessels feeding pilosebaceous units and sweat glands. Mainly in glabrous skin,  
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3 495 richly innervated arteriovenous anastomoses (AVAs) allow blood to bypass the high  
4  
5 496 resistance of the papillary loops (Johnson, Minson & Kellogg, 2014).  
6  
7 497 The microvasculature in the skin of newborns presents a horizontal plexus with a capillary  
8  
9 498 network that is not yet organized (Fig. 1, Table 1). At birth, capillary loops are observable  
10  
11 499 only on the nail beds, palms and soles. They become evident in all anatomical sites at 14–17  
12  
13 500 weeks of age (Perera, Kurban & Ryan, 1970). A recent study confirmed these observations *in*  
14  
15 501 *vivo*, also associating capillary loop establishment with that of dermal papillae (Miyachi *et*  
16  
17 502 *al.*, 2016). Preterm newborns have a lower capillary density which remains lower during  
18  
19 503 childhood (Bonamy *et al.*, 2007). Interestingly, one study reported an increase in capillary  
20  
21 504 density after blood transfusion in preterm newborns (Genzel-Boroviczény, Christ & Glas,  
22  
23 505 2004).

24  
25  
26 506 Human skin ageing is also associated with a reduced number and size of blood vessels,  
27  
28 507 especially in the upper dermis, and a reduced number of pericyte-covered blood vessels  
29  
30 508 (Kligman, 1979; Kelly *et al.*, 1995; Chung *et al.*, 2002; Betsholtz *et al.*, 2005; Helmbold *et*  
31  
32 509 *al.*, 2006).

33  
34  
35 510 We hypothesize that a lower organization and blood vessel number can lead to a less-efficient  
36  
37 511 or less finely regulated response following pressure application and therefore to reduced skin  
38  
39 512 resistance to pressure and shear forces, but further investigations are needed.  
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#### 46 514 **(5) Infant and elderly skin hypodermis**

47  
48 515 Under the dermis, the hypodermis, also called subcutaneous adipose tissue (SAT), is mainly  
49  
50 516 composed of adipocytes which may allow attenuation of shocks applied to the skin surface. In  
51  
52 517 mice, SAT has been shown to contribute to thermal insulation, energy storage, thermogenesis  
53  
54 518 (Kasza *et al.*, 2014), hair follicle regeneration (Festa *et al.*, 2011), wound healing (Plikus *et*  
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3 519 *al.*, 2017; Schmidt & Horsley, 2013), skin fibrosis (Marangoni *et al.*, 2015) and protection  
4  
5 520 against infection (Zhang *et al.*, 2015).  
6

7 521 In humans, SAT appears progressively during foetal development. Fat lobules are visible  
8  
9 522 from 28 weeks GA (Orsso *et al.*, 2020), with an important increase in lipid accumulation  
10  
11 523 reported from 28 to 40 weeks GA (Berger-Kulemann *et al.*, 2012; Orsso *et al.*, 2020) before a  
12  
13 524 rapid decrease at birth, followed by a dramatic increase until 3 months of age, with a  
14  
15 525 subsequent decrease after 6 months (Breij *et al.*, 2017; Orsso *et al.*, 2020). Nevertheless, the  
16  
17 526 hypodermis thickness of newborns, children and adolescents, is significantly lower than that  
18  
19 527 of adults: mean abdominal SAT thickness was reported to be 2 and 2.2 mm respectively for  
20  
21 528 boys and girls 7–28 days old (Ferreira *et al.*, 2014), 4.3 mm and 4.4 mm for babies 3–6  
22  
23 529 months old (Breij *et al.*, 2017), 2.6 and 2.7 mm for boys and girls 15–18 years old (Rahmani  
24  
25 530 *et al.*, 2018), 15.2 mm for healthy men 25–26 years old (Grunnet *et al.*, 2019) and 17.8 mm  
26  
27 531 for healthy women 18–39 years old (Perin *et al.*, 2000). Data for the body locations most at  
28  
29 532 risk of PI formation are missing, but we hypothesize that similar age-dependent values apply,  
30  
31 533 with newborns more likely to have the thinnest hypodermis, although further investigations  
32  
33 534 are needed to confirm this.  
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40 535 During skin ageing, a redistribution of fat resulting in SAT atrophy has been reported (Palmer  
41  
42 536 & Kirkland, 2016; Wollina *et al.*, 2017), in particular for men (Levakov *et al.*, 2012), and this  
43  
44 537 has been associated with a reduced subcutaneous/visceral fat ratio (Rittié & Fisher 2015).  
45  
46 538 Consequently, SAT function allowing attenuation of shocks is likely to be lowest both in  
47  
48 539 newborns and in the elderly.  
49

50  
51 540 SAT is known to undergo significant changes with ageing, including a decrease in functional  
52  
53 541 adipocyte cell number, an alteration of endocrine signalling with higher insulin resistance,  
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55 542 metabolic dysfunction, inflammation and impaired regenerative capacity (Rittié & Fisher,  
56  
57 543 2015; Palmer & Kirkland, 2016). Interestingly, despite a thicker SAT, similar changes are  
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3 544 observed in obese people (Palmer & Kirkland, 2016) while epidemiological studies suggest  
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5 545 either a protective effect of obesity against PI formation or, on the contrary, a higher risk  
6  
7 546 despite thicker SAT (Compher *et al.*, 2007; EPUAP, NPIAP & PPPIAP, 2019). As no clear  
8  
9  
10 547 relationship between obesity and PI formation has been established (EPUAP, NPIAP &  
11  
12 548 PPPIAP, 2019), the involvement of SAT modifications in PI prevalence remains to be  
13  
14 549 defined. We cannot exclude that SAT characteristics other than thickness are involved in a  
15  
16  
17 550 higher risk of PI formation.

18  
19 551 While additional data are needed to clarify the evolution of SAT thickness, organization and  
20  
21 552 functionality over the lifetime and in various body areas, the available data do suggest that the  
22  
23 553 ability of the hypodermis to attenuate shocks and reduce the likelihood of skin damage is  
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25  
26 554 lower in newborns and the elderly compared to young adults, putting the skin at higher risk of  
27  
28 555 PI formation (Table 1). Moreover, the risk may be particularly high for preterm infants as  
29  
30 556 subcutaneous fat is very thin or even absent until 32 weeks GA (Fox, 2011; Orsso *et al.*,  
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32  
33 557 2020). In addition, a recent study reported that a subcutaneous oedema was present in all  
34  
35 558 healthy newborns studied (Przybysz *et al.*, 2021), which presumably impacts responses to  
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38 559 pressure application or shear forces, either by providing a protective cushioning effect or by  
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40 560 favouring skin detachment from subcutaneous tissues and associated damage. These effects  
41  
42 561 remain to be investigated.

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### 46 563 **III. FUNCTIONAL FEATURES OF NEWBORN AND ELDERLY SKIN FAVOURING**

#### 47 564 **PI FORMATION**

##### 48 49 565 **(1) A higher pH impairing SC barrier function**

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52 566 The pH of human adult skin ranges from 4.1 to 5.8 depending on body location and results  
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55 567 from many factors, including filaggrin degradation, lamellar body exocytosis, fatty acid  
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58 568 content and ionization, Na<sup>+</sup>/H<sup>+</sup> exchanger activation and melanosome release (Ali &  
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3 569 Yosipovitch, 2013; Proksch, 2018). An acidic skin pH is necessary for effective functioning  
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5 570 of enzymes involved in SC formation, SC cell cohesion, healthy skin microbiota homeostasis  
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7 571 and protection against pathogens (Yosipovitch *et al.*, 2000; Fluhr *et al.*, 2001).  
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10 572 At birth, skin pH is high, with a mean of 6.34 or 7.08 (Lund *et al.*, 1999; Yosipovitch *et al.*,  
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12 573 2000) and ranging from 6.11 to 7.5 across different body regions (Yosipovitch *et al.*, 2000;  
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14 574 Ludriksone *et al.*, 2014). Skin pH decreases rapidly during the first week and more gradually  
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16 575 during the next 3 weeks, for both premature and full-term newborns (Fox, Nelson &  
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18 576 Wareham 1998; Ludriksone *et al.*, 2014). This higher pH of newborn skin allows increased  
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20 577 activity of serine protease (kallikrein 5 and 7) leading to higher corneodesmosome and lipid-  
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22 578 processing enzyme degradation (Hachem *et al.*, 2005). Moreover, a higher pH reduces the  
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24 579 activity of key enzymes such as  $\beta$ -glucocerebrosidase and acidic sphingomyelinase involved  
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26 580 in the synthesis of ceramides (Ali & Yosipovitch, 2013). This potentially puts newborn skin at  
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28 581 higher risk of chemical or mechanical trauma, invasion of microorganisms and infections  
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30 582 (Fig. 3).  
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35 583 In the diapered area where skin is subject to strong alkalinizing agents (urine, faeces), skin  
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37 584 fragility is increased. In preterm babies less than 28 weeks GA, the vernix caseosa which  
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39 585 normally decreases skin pH is absent, potentially leading to higher skin fragility (Visscher *et*  
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41 586 *al.*, 2011*a,b*). Interestingly, maintaining the vernix caseosa instead of removing it  
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43 587 immediately after birth in full-term deliveries has been shown to be beneficial for acid skin  
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45 588 surface development (Visscher *et al.*, 2005).  
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49 589 During human skin ageing, an increase in ceramidase activity and a decrease in eccrine sweat  
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51 590 gland (ESG) function result in ceramide deficiency. This is correlated to an increased pH, for  
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53 591 example on the forehead, forearm or temple (Man *et al.*, 2009; Schreml *et al.*, 2012; Ali &  
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55 592 Yosipovitch, 2013; Rittié & Fisher, 2015). This higher pH leads to a higher fragility and  
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3 593 susceptibility to diseases which could be treated by using acidic treatments and appropriate  
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5 594 buffers (Hachem *et al.*, 2010; Proksch, 2018; Kilic *et al.*, 2019).  
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7 595 As for babies, skin fragility in the aged is increased in diapered areas containing urine and  
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9 596 faeces. Well known to increase incontinence-associated dermatitis, a high pH has also been  
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11 597 suggested to increase PI prevalence, as a treatment including pH-balanced cleansers decreased  
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13 598 PI incidence (Park & Kim, 2014; Avşar & Karadağ, 2018). In skin care, it is of great  
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15 599 importance to consider skin pH and to take into account all factors that might modulate it. A  
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17 600 significant effect of the skin pH alone on PI formation remains to be demonstrated.  
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## 24 602 **(2) Skin hydration and external humidity**

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26 603 Skin hydration influences barrier function, percutaneous absorption, reactivity to irritants and  
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28 604 the skin's mechanical properties (Giusti *et al.*, 2001). It may be modulated by external  
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30 605 humidity and temperature as well as body site, diaper occlusion (Giusti *et al.*, 2001) and fluid  
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32 606 intake (Akdeniz *et al.*, 2018b). The term 'skin hydration' can cover different concepts  
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34 607 depending on the author. *In vivo*, this parameter is often assessed either by considering the  
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36 608 clinical symptoms of dryness on the skin surface or at the SC level using non-invasive  
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38 609 methods. But skin hydration may also correspond to the hydration level in the underlying  
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40 610 living skin layers.  
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45 611 Several studies have reported lower SC hydration in 0–5-day-old newborns compared to  
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47 612 young adults on the forehead, back, abdomen (Yosipovitch *et al.*, 2000), forearm and dorsa of  
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49 613 the hand and foot (Saijo & Tagami, 1991) or forearm and thigh (Chittock *et al.*, 2016). SC  
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51 614 hydration increases during the first weeks after birth in or close to the diapered area (Visscher  
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53 615 *et al.*, 2000) as well as on the forearm (Saijo & Tagami, 1991; Hoeger & Enzmann, 2002),  
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55 616 forehead, cheek or gluteal surface (Hoeger & Enzmann, 2002). Infant SC hydration becomes  
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57 617 higher than that of adults at least on the forearm of 1–6 or 3–24-months-old children (Saijo &  
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3 618 Tagami, 1991; Giusti *et al.*, 2001), the buttocks of 3–24-months-old children (Giusti *et al.*,  
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5 619 2001), and the upper ventral and lower dorsal arm of 3–12-months-old infants (Nikolovski *et*  
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7 620 *al.*, 2008). No significant differences were observed between male and female newborns  
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9 621 (Hoeger & Enzmann, 2002), infants less than 3 months old (Hoeger & Enzmann, 2002) or 8–  
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11 622 24-months-old children (Giusti *et al.*, 2001). Overall, SC hydration of young newborns seems  
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13 623 to be lower than that of adults before increasing during the neonatal period. This has been  
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15 624 correlated to the dry and rough skin surface of young newborns and the progressive  
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17 625 smoothing of the skin surface observed during the first 4 weeks (Hoeger & Enzmann, 2002).  
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19 626 The skin of elderly people tends to become progressively dry and rough, especially in winter  
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21 627 with a low relative humidity (Kligman, 1979; Tagami, 2008). During skin ageing, a decrease  
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23 628 in SC hydration has often been reported, but is not always the case. A decrease on the  
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25 629 forehead and forearm, to a greater extent in women than in men, was reported in a Chinese  
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27 630 population aged >70 years (Man *et al.*, 2009), while a significant decrease was also observed  
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29 631 in German men aged 60–70 years on the forehead, cheek and neck, but not on the forearm or  
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31 632 hand compared with a 20–29-years-old group (Luebberding, Krueger & Kerscher, 2014).  
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33 633 Thus, elderly skin dryness observed on the surface is not necessarily correlated with low SC  
34  
35 634 hydration. Moreover, there is no correlation with dermis water content as elderly skin dermis  
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37 635 contains more water than young adult skin (Kligman, 1979; Nakagawa, Matsumoto & Sakai,  
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39 636 2010, Téllez-Soto *et al.*, 2021).  
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41 637 Skin hydration depends on lipid production (Kligman, 1979; Picardo *et al.*, 2009), ESG  
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43 638 activity (Emery *et al.*, 1991; Saijo & Tagami, 1991; Shiohara *et al.*, 2018) and the  
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45 639 concentrations of a mix of amino acids, ions, organic acids and sugar that together form  
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47 640 natural moisturizing factor (NMF) (Verdier-Sévrain & Bonté, 2007).  
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49 641 On its surface, skin is covered by a mix of lipids secreted by keratinocytes and sebaceous  
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51 642 glands. Dysfunction of the sebaceous glands may lead to skin dryness (Picardo *et al.*, 2009).  
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3 643 In the elderly a decrease in sebum production has been associated with progressive skin  
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5 644 dryness (at least for women) (Pochi, Strauss & Downing, 1979; Luebberding, Krueger &  
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7 645 Kerscher, 2013; Farage *et al.*, 2013). For newborns, few data are available. Some studies  
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9 646 suggest that sebum production is slightly lower in young newborns, compared to young adults  
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11 647 and progressively decreases during infancy, remaining at a low level until puberty (Agache *et*  
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13 648 *al.*, 1980; Henderson, Taylor & Cunliffe, 2000). Consequently, the likely correlation between  
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15 649 decreased sebum production and skin dryness in the elderly is unlikely to apply to the skin of  
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17 650 young newborns.

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21 651 ESGs are known to be involved in body temperature regulation. But they also produce water  
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23 652 and natural moisturizers (lactate and urea) which help to prevent skin dryness (Shiohara *et al.*,  
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25 653 2018). As they are not fully mature at birth, a correlation between gradual ESG maturation  
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27 654 allowing improved activity and progressive hydration of the newborn skin surface has been  
28  
29 655 suggested, at least for the first weeks after birth for full-term newborns (Foster, Hey & Katz,  
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31 656 1969; Saijo & Tagami, 1991; Emery *et al.*, 1991). For preterm births of less than 36 weeks  
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33 657 GA, no sweating has been detected at birth highlighting ESG immaturity (Harpin & Rutter,  
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35 658 1982; Fluhr *et al.*, 2010; Kutlubay *et al.*, 2017). During skin ageing, a progressive decrease in  
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37 659 ESG function has also been observed, suggesting possible involvement of ESGs in elderly  
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39 660 skin dryness (Rittié & Fisher, 2015).

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44 661 NMF mainly results from filaggrin proteolysis occurring during the corneocyte maturation  
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46 662 process (Caspers *et al.*, 2001; Bouwstra *et al.*, 2008). For newborns, NMF also depends on the  
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48 663 amount of vernix caseosa present at birth which increases NMF level and maintains skin  
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50 664 surface hydration for a few hours (Visscher *et al.*, 2005). NMF level seems to be correlated  
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52 665 with SC hydration. Chittock *et al.* (2016) measured low NMF levels in <72 h newborns, a  
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54 666 significantly higher level at 4 weeks, and a significant decrease in healthy adults on the  
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56 667 forearm and the thigh. A recent study also reported an increase in NMF levels between young  
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3 668 (<48 h) and older newborns (>48 h) on the cheek, nose tip and elbow flexure (McAleer *et al.*,  
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5 669 2018). A lower level of NMF was reported in 3–12-months-old infants compared to young  
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7 670 adults in the top 28  $\mu\text{m}$  of the arm skin (Nikolovski *et al.*, 2008), highlighting that additional  
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9 671 data are needed to understand the link between NMF level and SC hydration. For post-term  
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11 672 newborns more than 41 weeks GA, the amount of vernix progressively decreases *in utero*  
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13 673 after term: the NMF increase due to the presence of vernix is therefore lower and the NMF  
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15 674 produced by keratinocytes is partly removed by the amniotic fluid. These effects may explain  
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17 675 the dryer post-term newborn skin (Visscher *et al.*, 2005, 2015). During skin ageing, data  
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19 676 concerning changes in NMF levels remain controversial (Rawlings, 2017) and its involvement  
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21 677 in elderly skin dryness requires additional studies.

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24 678 Overall, some data suggest that both young newborn and elderly skin can be considered as  
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26 679 ‘dry skin’ given their SC hydration. This influences skin barrier function as SC hydration  
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28 680 level regulates the activity of hydrolytic enzymes involved in SC maturation and corneocyte  
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30 681 desquamation (Telofski *et al.*, 2012). Nevertheless, this relative dryness depends on body  
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32 682 location and is not true for older newborns and infants. Moreover, SC hydration depends on  
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34 683 many factors such as NMF level, lipid production and ESG activity which do not evolve in  
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36 684 the same way over time. The relationships between all these factors are complex and remain  
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38 685 unclear. A better understanding of this phenomenon and a possible correlation with skin  
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40 686 fragility will need further investigations (Table 1).

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42 687 Maintaining a higher humidity in the external environment, for example in diapered areas or  
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44 688 with inappropriate dressings, cannot help to maintain skin hydration. On the contrary, it leads  
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46 689 to a decrease in skin barrier competence highlighted by an increased TEWL (Fluhr *et al.*,  
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48 690 2010; Giusti *et al.*, 2001). Excess moisture and maceration is well known to enhance skin  
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50 691 rupture during PI formation (Mervis & Phillips, 2019) and special care to avoid this situation  
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52 692 is needed.  
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5 694 **(3) Lower endothelial functionality might explain a lower resistance to pressure in**  
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8 695 **newborn and elderly skin**

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10 696 Blood flow through the loops of the skin plexus is controlled in humans by highly innervated  
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12 697 arterioles which comprise an internal layer of longitudinally arranged endothelial cells  
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14 698 surrounded by vascular smooth cells in a helicoidal arrangement (Johnson *et al.*, 2014).  
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16 699 Endothelial cells produce various signalling molecules such as nitric oxide (NO) and  
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19 700 prostaglandin PGE2 which induce smooth muscle cell relaxation and blood vessel  
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21 701 vasodilation thus reducing vessel resistance and increasing blood flow (Warren, 1994;  
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23 702 Coffman, 1994; Medow, Glover & Stewart, 2008). This phenomenon occurs for example after  
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25 703 local thermal stimulation or UVB exposure (Warren, 1994; Sokolnicki *et al.*, 2009; Jan *et al.*,  
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27 704 2009; Fromy *et al.*, 2010). It can increase nutritional exchanges with surrounding cells,  
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29 705 immune cell arrival and assists body temperature regulation.

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33 706 When healthy human skin is locally subjected to low pressure (<20 kPa), a specific  
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35 707 mechanism called pressure-induced vasodilation (PIV) allows the skin to maintain an  
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37 708 appropriate blood flow and tissue oxygenation (Fromy, Abraham & Saumet, 1998). PIV  
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39 709 results from the interaction of primary afferent nerves with the vascular endothelium of skin  
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41 710 vessels (reviewed in Fouchard *et al.*, 2019). In some disorders in which there is impairment of  
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43 711 skin vasodilation ability due to endothelial dysfunction or peripheral nerve alteration, PIV is  
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45 712 altered leading to a reduced blood flow in response to local low pressure and consequently an  
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47 713 increased incidence of PI (Fromy *et al.*, 2010, 2012; Vouillarmet *et al.*, 2019).

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53 715 *(a) Functionality of the NO pathway*

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56 716 Besides vessel network modifications, a reduction in skin vasomotor capacity,  
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58 717 especially with regard to skin vasodilation, has been observed in ageing skin and is strongly  
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3 718 correlated with endothelial dysfunction highlighted by a decrease in NO and prostaglandin  
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5 719 levels and an increase in endothelium-derived hyperpolarizing factor (EDHF) involvement in  
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7 720 humans (Algotsson, Nordberg & Winblad, 1995; Rossi *et al.*, 2002 ; Tao *et al.*, 2004 ;  
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9 721 Holowatz *et al.*, 2005; James *et al.*, 2006; Jan *et al.*, 2009; Fromy *et al.*, 2010), rats (Muller-  
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11 722 Delp *et al.*, 2002) and mice (Gaubert *et al.*, 2007) (Fig. 4).

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14 723 The early postnatal period is associated with remarkable changes in the morphology  
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16 724 and functioning of arterial and capillary endothelium correlated with a progressive increase in  
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18 725 microvascular pressure and network blood flow (Boegehold, 2010) in sheep (Abman *et al.*,  
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20 726 1991), piglets (Zellers & Vanhoutte, 1991), rats (Kobayashi & Sakai, 1994) and mice  
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22 727 (Flavahan *et al.*, 2013; Flavahan & Flavahan, 2014). During this period, various molecules  
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24 728 [e.g. cyclooxygenase products, hydrogen peroxide, carbon monoxide, NO, endothelin 1 (ET-  
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26 729 1)] were shown to regulate vasomotricity, depending on the species and the organ, but also on  
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28 730 neonate age. Shifts from one pathway to another were also found. For example, in mice  
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30 731 immediately after birth, endothelial cells lining central arteries express high levels of ET-1  
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32 732 peptides and rapidly release ET-1 and initiate ET-1-mediated endothelium-dependent  
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34 733 constriction in response to stimulation by endothelial secretagogues. Endothelial cells also  
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36 734 show a markedly reduced ability to initiate endothelial NO-mediated dilation. During the  
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38 735 following days, the ET-1 pathway is progressively inhibited, probably due to increased  
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40 736 responsiveness to the NO pathway which inhibits both ET-1 production and secretion. Owing  
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42 737 to this change, the same endothelial secretagogues which induce vasoconstriction  
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44 738 immediately after birth become able to induce vasodilatation a few days later (Chang,  
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46 739 Flavahan & Flavahan, 2016). The contribution of NO to endothelium-dependent dilation has  
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48 740 been reported to increase in the lung, cerebral cortex and skeletal muscle, but to decrease in  
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50 741 the intestine (Abman *et al.*, 1991; Zellers & Vanhoutte, 1991; Kobayashi & Sakai, 1994;  
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52 742 Boegehold, 2010; Flavahan *et al.*, 2013; Flavahan & Flavahan, 2014).

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3 743           There are few data available concerning human skin, especially for newborns.  
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5 744   Nevertheless, the size of the newborn head (length and circumference) and birth weight have  
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7 745   been shown to be positively associated with skin vessel vasodilation induced by acetylcholine  
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9 746   which is also inversely proportional to maternal hypertension during pregnancy; no  
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11 747   significant correlation was observed for sodium nitroprusside (SNP)-induced vasodilatation,  
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13 748   except with gestational age (Touwslager *et al.*, 2012; Martin, Gazelius & Norman, 2000).  
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15 749   Low birth weight has been correlated to cardiometabolic disease in adult life (Gluckman *et*  
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17 750   *al.*, 2008) as well as a lower capillary density both in newborn and adult skin (Lewandowski  
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19 751   *et al.*, 2015). For human adults, endothelial dysfunction measured in the skin vasculature was  
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21 752   also found to correlate with cardiovascular disease risk (Ijzerman *et al.*, 2003). Altogether,  
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23 753   these data suggest an important role of the NO signalling pathway in the skin vasodilation  
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25 754   control of newborns and therefore the local resistance of skin to pressure, but also in baby  
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27 755   growth, blood pressure and cardiovascular health.

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33 756           Many studies on various mammals have reported a succession of pathways regulating  
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35 757   vasodilation in the early postnatal period. This may explain a lower induced vasodilation and  
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37 758   we suggest that the NO pathway is not fully functional at birth in human skin (Fig. 4). This  
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39 759   might result in a greater sensitivity of skin to pressure and a higher risk of PI, especially in  
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41 760   preterm neonates. Further studies would be of great interest, especially in terms of PI  
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43 761   prevention and treatment.

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46 762           Further studies should investigate (1) the exact pathways involved in newborn skin  
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48 763   vasodilation, (2) endothelial cell maturation of newborn skin, (3) interindividual variability  
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50 764   and associated factors, (4) the impact of GA as we can expect lower maturity in premature  
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52 765   neonates, and (5) how to prevent and/or treat newborn PIs.

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58 767   **(b) Higher expression of thrombospondin-1 (TSP1)**  
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3 768 The matricellular protein thrombospondin-1 (TSP1) and its receptor CD47, which are  
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5 769 expressed in normal skin, limit the ability of NO to relax blood vessels by exerting  
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7 770 vasopressor activity as shown in mice (Isenberg *et al.*, 2009). Consequently, blood vessel  
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9 771 vasodilation depends on the balance between NO and TSP1.  
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11 772 In wild-type murine skin, TSP1 and CD47 were reported to increase with ageing and this was  
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13 773 suggested to decrease cutaneous NO signalling and therefore skin blood flow. Interestingly,  
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15 774 targeting CD47 was shown to enhance skin blood flow (Rogers, Roberts & Isenberg, 2013).  
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17 775 UV exposure was also shown to increase TSP1 expression in human skin dermis and dermal  
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19 776 fibroblasts (Seo *et al.*, 2010).  
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21 777 One study suggests that human endothelial cells produce a matrix, of which a major  
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23 778 component is TSP1, in newborn skin whereas this molecule is almost absent in the matrix  
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25 779 produced by adult endothelial cells (Kramer *et al.*, 1985). This suggests higher TSP1  
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27 780 production in newborn skin.  
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29 781 We hypothesize that a higher proportion of TSP1 and CD47 in human newborn and elderly  
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31 782 skin reduces the effect of NO and vessel vasodilation ability (Fig. 4). If further investigations  
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33 783 confirm this hypothesis, we could consider treating PIs by targeting those molecules, thus  
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35 784 improving wound healing and blood flow.  
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#### 786 (4) Newborn and elderly skin innervation

46 787 The ability of skin to respond to light pressure with the PIV mechanism depends not only on  
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48 788 endothelial function but also on sensory fibre functionality (Tew *et al.*, 2011). This  
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50 789 mechanism begins with the activation of acid-sensing ion channel 3 (ASIC3), a neuronal  
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52 790 mechanoreceptor largely expressed in sensory neurons (Fromy *et al.*, 2012), which induces  
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54 791 the release of various vasodilatory neuropeptides inducing nitric oxide synthase (NOS) and  
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56 792 cyclooxygenase (COX) stimulation (reviewed in Fouchard *et al.*, 2019).  
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3 793 Skin innervation includes (1) sensory nerves allowing detection of temperature, touch and  
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5 794 pain whose axonal ends terminate in the dorsal horn of the spinal cord (DHSC) and (2)  
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7 795 efferent nerves coming from the DHSC and modulating for example AVAs and arteriole  
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9 796 vasodilation or vasoconstriction by releasing various molecules such as norepinephrine,  
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11 797 acetylcholine, neuropeptide Y, atrial natriuretic peptide, calcitonin gene-related peptide  
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13 798 (CGRP), vasoactive intestinal polypeptide (VIP), peptide histidine methionine (PHL) and  
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15 799 pituitary adenyl cyclase activating peptide (PACAP) into the skin (Johnson *et al.*, 2014;  
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18 800 Fouchard *et al.*, 2019). The release of these molecules depends on both stimulation by the  
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21 801 sensory nerves and activity of spinal cord interneurons which are able to inhibit efferent nerve  
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24 802 stimulation.

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26 803 Cutaneous sensory nerves include highly myelinated A $\alpha$  fibres, moderately myelinated A $\beta$   
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28 804 fibres, thinly myelinated A $\Delta$  fibres and unmyelinated C fibres. C fibres represent 45% of the  
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30 805 fibres and are present in both the dermis and epidermis (Johnson *et al.*, 2014). The fibre  
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32 806 endings are either free (for sensing temperature, touch and pain) or are linked to specific  
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34 807 receptors such as the Merkel cell neurite complex and Meissner's, Pacini's or Rufini's  
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36 808 corpuscles (various touch sensations). As cutaneous sensory nerves are linked to the spinal  
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38 809 cord, skin sensitivity not only depends on the sensitive fibre endings, but also on the sensory  
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40 810 neuron's ability to conduct the signal and connectivity to other neurons at the spinal cord  
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43 811 level.

#### 44 45 46 47 812 48 49 813 *(a) Sensory nerve function in elderly skin*

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51 814 Human skin ageing is associated with decreased sensory perception correlated to a reduced  
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53 815 number of Meissner's corpuscles, Merkel cell neurite complexes (Garcia-Piqueras *et al.*,  
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55 816 2019) and nerve fibre endings in the dermis and epidermis, including mechano-sensitive C-  
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57 817 fibres (Panoutsopoulou *et al.*, 2009; Fromy *et al.*, 2010; Namer, 2010; Tew *et al.*, 2011;  
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3 818 Bowden & McNulty, 2013). A recent study also found a correlation between sensory  
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5 819 perception degradation and skin structural changes such as dermis thinning and DEJ flattening  
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7 820 (Jobanputra *et al.*, 2020). Correlated reductions in nerve myelination and nerve conduction  
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9 821 speed were also reported in mice (Canta *et al.*, 2016) (Table 1). As a result, tactile, thermal  
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11 822 and mechanical perception decrease, thermal-induced vasodilation is slowed down (Tew *et*  
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13 823 *al.*, 2011) and PIV is progressively impaired (Fromy *et al.*, 2010) putting elderly skin at  
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15 824 higher risk of skin damage and PIs (Fig. 4).  
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21 826 *(b) Sensory nerve function in newborn skin*

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24 827 At birth, skin sensitivity exists in humans and the newborn nerve apparatus has been reported  
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26 828 to be similar to that of adults with one superficial and one deep plexus containing nerve fibres  
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28 829 parallel to the skin surface, densely interconnected and ending more or less deeply in the  
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30 830 dermis (Feito *et al.*, 2018).

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33 831 Nevertheless, the skin sensory system remains immature at some levels. Human Pacini's and  
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35 832 Meissner's corpuscles undergo structural modifications until 4 and 8 months of life,  
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37 833 respectively (Feito *et al.*, 2018). In mice, the proportion of mechanically and heat-sensitive C  
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39 834 fibres was shown to increase in the first two weeks after birth compared to mechanically  
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41 835 sensitive heat-insensitive C fibres (Jankowski *et al.*, 2014). In rats, a lower withdrawal  
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43 836 threshold to mechanical stimulation was observed in 2-week-old rats compared to older ones  
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45 837 (Ririe & Eisenach, 2006). Nerve conduction and myelination extent were reported in mice  
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47 838 and humans to increase until adulthood, especially during infancy for humans (Canta *et al.*,  
48  
49 839 2016; Jenny, Lütshg & Broser, 2020). Neural growth factor (NGF) is needed for the proper  
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51 840 maturation of A $\Delta$  nociceptors (Ritter *et al.*, 1991; Ritter, Lewin & Mendell, 1993) as well as  
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53 841 C-fibres (Lewin & Mendell, 1994). Postnatal rearrangement and refinement of synaptic  
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55 842 connections occurs in the dorsal horn (Fitzgerald & McKelvey, 2016) and it seems that C-  
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3 843 fibre activity is also needed to stimulate the maturation of some interneurons releasing glycine  
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5 844 which inhibit efferent nerves. In mice, it has been shown that during the first 2 weeks after  
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7 845 birth, this phenomenon explains the striking sensitivity of newborns to tactile and noxious  
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9 846 mechanical stimulation of the skin and their lower sensory thresholds and greater amplitude  
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11 847 and duration reflexes (Koch *et al.*, 2012).

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13  
14 848 Although pain sensitivity exists at birth, nerve injury occurring during infancy or childhood  
15  
16 849 does not induce chronic pain sensitivity unlike in adults. This probably results from a  
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18 850 'default' neuroimmune response skewed in an anti-inflammatory direction, suppressing the  
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20 851 excitation of dorsal horn neurons during childhood, whereas in adolescents and adults it is  
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22 852 biased in a pro-inflammatory direction (Fitzgerald & McKelvey, 2016).

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24  
25 853 Overall, newborn sensitivity is very different from that of adults. As peripheral injury during  
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27 854 this period seems to alter sensory function and prevent the appropriate development of spinal  
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29 855 dorsal horn circuits (Jankowski *et al.*, 2014), special care in newborn pain treatment is  
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31 856 needed. Further investigations are required to understand better (1) how immature fibre  
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33 857 endings react when pressure or shear forces are applied, (2) to what extent they can induce  
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35 858 PIV and protect newborn skin against PI formation, and (3) whether a neuroimmune response  
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37 859 different from that of adults results in variations concerning PI aetiology.  
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#### 45 861 **IV. CONCLUSIONS**

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47 862 (1) Although highly different in appearance, newborn and elderly skin share common features  
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49 863 responsible for their physiological fragility and resulting in a higher risk of skin damage or PI  
50  
51 864 formation.

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53 865 (2) At the structural level, they share: (a) a thinner epidermis; (b) a thinner dermis containing  
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55 866 a less-resistant collagen network, a higher collagen III:collagen I ratio and less elastin; (c) a  
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57 867 flatter DEJ with weaker anchoring systems; and (d) a thinner hypodermis. These  
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3 868 characteristics induce lower mechanical resistance to skin damage under pressure or shear  
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5 869 forces.

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7 870 (3) At the epidermis level, a higher pH increases serine protease activity (kallikrein 5 and 7).  
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9 871 This leads to corneodesmosome and lipid-processing enzyme degradation, and a lower  
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11 872 activity of key enzymes such as  $\beta$ -glucocerebrosidase and acidic sphingomyelinase involved  
12  
13 873 in the synthesis of ceramides. Consequently, the cohesion of corneocytes is decreased and the  
14  
15 874 lipid-rich extracellular matrix is altered, putting the SC barrier at higher risk of disruption  
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17 875 under shear forces, chemical trauma, invasion of microorganisms and infections, all of which  
18  
19 876 may induce PI formation or prevent wound healing.

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21 877 (4) Correlated with immature ESGs and lower ESG activity in young newborn skin and a  
22  
23 878 progressive decrease of ESG function and lipid production in aged skin, some data suggest  
24  
25 879 that SC hydration is lower in both age groups. In the newborn, skin surface dehydration is  
26  
27 880 more significant when vernix caseosa is missing (preterm and post-term newborns).

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29 881 (5) Flattening of the DEJ not only decreases mechanical resistance but also the nutritional  
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31 882 exchanges and signalling between the dermis and epidermis. Moreover, the protein network is  
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33 883 modulated and this may have an effect not only on the mechanical characteristics of the DEJ,  
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35 884 but also on (a) the number of interfollicular epidermal stem cells or their activation potential  
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37 885 and therefore on epidermis turnover, or (b) pain sensitivity and the control of sensory axon  
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39 886 branching behaviour. Further studies are needed to understand these effects in detail.

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41 887 (6) At the dermis level, TGF $\beta$ /Smad signalling plays a key role in ECM formation as it  
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43 888 stimulates the synthesis of several key structural molecules such as collagen, fibronectin,  
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45 889 decorin and versican. It also inhibits matrix-degrading MMPs and stimulates their inhibitors.  
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47 890 As TGF $\beta$  signalling and the production of its receptor T $\beta$ RII is lower in both newborns and  
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49 891 the elderly, we speculate that this may be a key reason why dermal ECM is mechanically  
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51 892 more fragile in both cases. In addition, as structural molecules including decorin and versican  
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3 893 are also involved in various physiological processes such as collagenesis and elastogenesis  
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5 894 but also in wound repair, angiogenesis, and in cell proliferation, adhesion and migration, we  
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8 895 also speculate that PI formation may result from a decrease of the skin's ability to repair  
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10 896 damage induced by pressure or friction.

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12 897 (7) The microvasculature of newborn skin presents a horizontal plexus with a capillary  
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14 898 network that is not yet organized into capillary loops compared to adult skin, whereas ageing  
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17 899 skin is associated with a reduced number and size of blood vessels. We speculate that this  
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19 900 lower-level organization will lead to less-efficient or less finely regulated responses following  
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21 901 pressure or shear force application.

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24 902 (8) Concerning the PIV mechanisms which allow the skin to resist light pressures, a decrease  
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26 903 in responsiveness to NO and prostaglandin signalling pathways and an increase in  
27  
28 904 responsiveness to TSP1, which limits the ability of NO to relax blood vessels, are correlated  
29  
30 905 with skin ageing, explaining the observed decrease in the PIV response in the elderly  
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32 906 correlated to a higher PI prevalence. Although we have few data for newborns, several  
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34 907 observations suggest that the NO pathway is not directly or fully functional at birth in human  
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36 908 skin and that TSP1 is more abundant around the endothelial cells of the newborn. This may  
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38 909 result in a greater sensitivity of skin to pressure and a higher risk of PI, especially in preterm  
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40 910 neonates.

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44 911 (9) Sensory perception and PIV induction are both significantly decreased during skin ageing  
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46 912 with a reduced number of Meissner's corpuscles, Merkel cell neurite complexes and nerve  
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48 913 fibre endings and reduced nerve myelination and conduction. At birth, skin sensitivity is also  
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50 914 different and is less finely controlled compared to that of adults, due to immature sensory  
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52 915 receptors, sensory fibres, connections between neurons and a drastically different  
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54 916 neuroimmune response. The ability of the nervous system to induce PIV remains to be  
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56 917 investigated.  
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3 **1908 Figure legends**  
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5 **1909 Fig. 1.** Comparison of skin structure in newborn, adult and elderly skin. BL, basal layer; CL,  
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8 **1910** capillary loop; DEJ, dermal–epidermal junction; ECM, extracellular matrix; ESG, eccrine  
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10 **1911** sweat gland; GL, granular layer; SC, stratum corneum; SL, spinous layer.  
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12 **1912**  
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14 **1913 Fig. 2.** The key role of transforming growth factor beta (TGF $\beta$ ) signalling in skin. This  
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17 **1914** pathway is not fully functional in newborn skin and is impaired during skin ageing. MMP,  
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19 **1915** metalloproteinase; ROS, reactive oxygen species; Smad, suppressor of mothers against  
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21 **1916** decapentaplegic; T $\beta$ RII, TGF $\beta$  receptor II; TIMP, metalloproteinase inhibitor.  
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24 **1917**  
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26 **1918 Fig. 3.** Effects of a higher pH on skin barrier function.  
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31 **1920 Fig. 4.** Comparison of the pressure-induced vasodilation (PIV) mechanism in young adult and  
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33 **1921** ageing skin. ASIC3, acid-sensing ion channel 3; CGRP, calcitonin gene-related peptide;  
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35 **1922** EDHF, endothelium-derived hyperpolarizing factor; NO, nitric oxide; PACAP, pituitary  
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37 **1923** adenylyl cyclase activating peptide; PGE2, prostaglandin E2; ROS, reactive oxygen species;  
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39 **1924** TSP1, thrombospondin-1; VIP, vasoactive intestinal peptide.  
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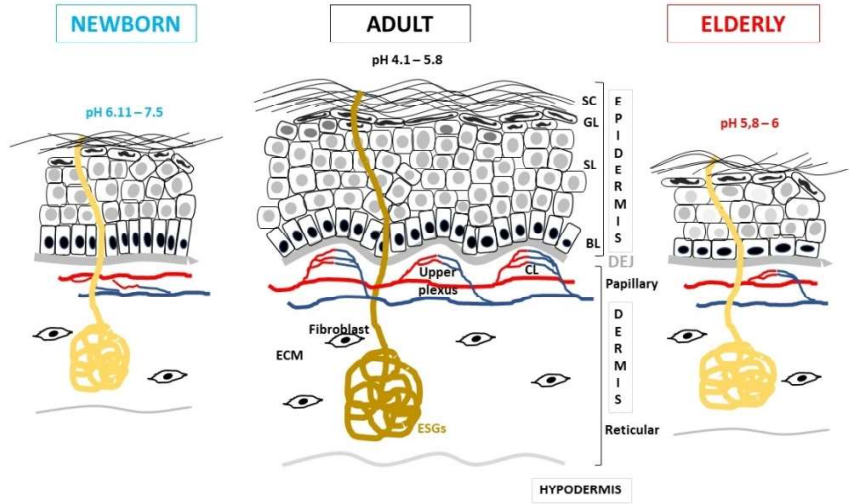


Fig. 1. Comparison of skin structure in newborn, adult and elderly skin. BL, basal layer; CL, capillary loop; DEJ, dermal-epidermal junction; ECM, extracellular matrix; ESG, eccrine sweat gland; GL, granular layer; SC, stratum corneum; SL, spinous layer.

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Table 1. Comparison of skin structure and barrier functionality in newborn, young adult and elderly skin. Text entries for newborn and elderly skin are compared with that of young adults. BMI, body mass index; coll, collagen; DEJ, dermal–epidermal junction; ESG, eccrine sweat gland; NMF, natural moisturizing factor; PIV, pressure-induced vasodilation; SC, stratum corneum.

NEWBORN	YOUNG ADULT	ELDERLY
<p><b>Thin SC (–30%)</b> (Ya Xian <i>et al.</i>, 1999; Stamatas <i>et al.</i>, 2010)</p> <p><b>Very thin SC for preterm</b> (Razmus <i>et al.</i>, 2008)</p>	<p><b>Thick SC</b> (Fairley &amp; Rasmussen, 1983; Holbrook, 2000)</p>	<p><b>SC thickness similar to young adult or thicker depending on anatomical region</b> (Waller &amp; Maibach, 2005; Newton <i>et al.</i>, 2017; Rawlings, 2017)</p>
<p><b>Thin epidermis (–20%)</b> (Evans &amp; Rutter, 1986; Stamatas <i>et al.</i>, 2010; Przybysz <i>et al.</i>, 2021)</p> <p><b>Very thin epidermis for preterm</b> (Razmus <i>et al.</i>, 2008)</p>	<p><b>Thick epidermis</b> (Mlosek <i>et al.</i>, 2011)</p>	<p><b>Thin epidermis (–10 to –50%)</b> (Xu <i>et al.</i>, 2017)</p>
<p><b>Very high cell proliferation and stem cell number and/or activation potential</b> (Michel <i>et al.</i>, 1997; Hoeger &amp; Enzmann, 2002; Stamatas <i>et al.</i>, 2010)</p>	<p><b>High cell proliferation</b></p>	<p><b>Low cell proliferation and stem cell number and/or activation potential</b> (Kligman, 1979; Moragas <i>et al.</i>, 1993; Lavker, 1995; Michel <i>et al.</i>, 1997; Stamatas <i>et al.</i>, 2006; Giangreco <i>et al.</i>, 2008, 2010; Charruyer <i>et al.</i>, 2009; Keyes <i>et al.</i>, 2013)</p>
<p><b>pH 6.11–7.5</b> =&gt; <b>Lower skin barrier function</b> (Yosipovitch <i>et al.</i>, 2000; Ludriksone <i>et al.</i>, 2014)</p>	<p><b>pH 4.1–5.8</b> =&gt; <b>High barrier function</b> (Yosipovitch <i>et al.</i>, 2000; Fluhr <i>et al.</i>, 2001; Ali &amp; Yosipovitch, 2013; Proksch, 2018)</p>	<p><b>Higher pH, increasing with age</b> =&gt; <b>Lower skin barrier function</b> (Man <i>et al.</i>, 2009; Schreml <i>et al.</i>, 2012; Ali &amp; Yosipovitch, 2013; Rittié &amp; Fisher, 2015; Kilic <i>et al.</i>, 2019)</p>
<p><b>Low SC hydration and dry and rough skin surface (0–2 weeks of age)</b> (Saijo &amp; Tagami, 1991; Visscher <i>et al.</i>, 2000; Giusti <i>et al.</i>, 2001; Yosipovitch <i>et al.</i>, 2000; Hoeger &amp; Enzmann, 2002; Nikolovski <i>et al.</i>, 2008; Chittock <i>et al.</i>, 2016)</p> <p><b>Missing vernix caseosa (preterm or post-term) =&gt; higher dehydration and impaired skin barrier function</b> (Visscher <i>et al.</i>, 2005; Telofski <i>et al.</i>, 2012)</p>	<p><b>High SC hydration and smooth surface</b></p>	<p><b>Low SC hydration (at least for some anatomical regions) and dry and rough skin surface</b> (Kligman, 1979; Tagami, 2008; Man <i>et al.</i>, 2009; Luebbberding <i>et al.</i>, 2014)</p>
<p><b>Immature ESGs, low sebum production and less NMF</b> (Foster <i>et al.</i>, 1969; Agache <i>et al.</i>, 1980; Saijo &amp; Tagami, 1991; Emery <i>et al.</i>, 1991; Henderson <i>et al.</i>, 2000; Chittock <i>et al.</i>, 2016; McAleer <i>et al.</i>, 2018)</p> <p><b>No sweating for premature &lt;36GA</b> (Harpin &amp; Rutter, 1982)</p>	<p><b>Functional ESGs and high sebum production</b> =&gt; <b>Well-hydrated skin (surface and SC)</b></p>	<p><b>Decreased activity of ESGs, low sebum production and less NMF</b> (Pochi <i>et al.</i>, 1979; Man <i>et al.</i>, 2009; Luebbberding <i>et al.</i>, 2013; Farage <i>et al.</i>, 2013; Rittié &amp; Fisher, 2015)</p>

<p><b>Less-undulating DEJ with fewer anchoring fibrils</b> =&gt; <b>Reduced nutritional exchanges and higher mechanical fragility</b> (Evans &amp; Rutter, 1986; Cartlidge, 2000; Razmus <i>et al.</i>, 2008; Miyauchi <i>et al.</i>, 2016)</p> <p><b>Flat DEJ for preterm babies</b> (Holbrook, 1982; Cartlidge, 2000)</p>	<p><b>Undulating DEJ</b>  =&gt; <b>Normal nutritional exchanges</b></p>	<p><b>Less-undulating DEJ</b> =&gt; <b>Reduced nutritional exchanges and higher mechanical fragility</b> (Lavker <i>et al.</i>, 1987, 1989; Moragas <i>et al.</i>, 1993; Desai, 1997; Giangreco <i>et al.</i>, 2010; Farage <i>et al.</i>, 2013; Hatje <i>et al.</i>, 2015; Newton <i>et al.</i>, 2017)</p>
<p><b>Thin dermis with gradual transition between papillary and reticular dermis</b> (Holbrook, 1982; Tan <i>et al.</i>, 1982; Vitellaro-Zuccarello <i>et al.</i>, 1994; Stamatias <i>et al.</i>, 2010; Przybysz <i>et al.</i>, 2021; Reed <i>et al.</i>, 2021)</p>	<p><b>Thick dermis with clear separation between papillary and reticular dermis</b> (Mlosek <i>et al.</i>, 2011)</p>	<p><b>Thin dermis (except in sun-exposed area) with clear transition between papillary and reticular dermis</b> (Shuster <i>et al.</i>, 1975; Giangreco <i>et al.</i>, 2010)</p>
<p><b>Low fibroblast density</b> <b>Immature and highly proliferative, they maintain keratinocyte immaturity</b> (Pablos <i>et al.</i>, 1997; Živicová <i>et al.</i>, 2017)</p>	<p><b>High fibroblast density</b> <b>Mature and proliferative fibroblasts</b></p>	<p><b>Low fibroblast density</b> <b>High senescence and low motility</b> (Pienta &amp; Coffey, 1990; Dimri <i>et al.</i>, 1995; Sgonc &amp; Gruber, 2013)</p>
<p><b>Low collagen synthesis</b> (Arai <i>et al.</i>, 2017) <b>Collagen fibrils smaller in preterm neonates than at full-term</b> (Holbrook, 1982)</p>	<p><b>High collagen synthesis</b></p>	<p><b>Fragmented and coarsely distributed collagen I</b> =&gt; <b>Decreased mechanical tension in fibroblasts</b> (Quan &amp; Fisher, 2015; Fisher <i>et al.</i>, 2016; Shin <i>et al.</i>, 2019)</p>
<p><b>High coll III/coll I ratio</b> (Epstein, 1974; Shuttleworth &amp; Forest, 1975; Cheng <i>et al.</i>, 2011)</p>	<p><b>Low coll III/coll I ratio</b></p>	<p><b>High coll III/coll I ratio</b> (Lovell <i>et al.</i>, 1987)</p>
<p><b>Low density of elastin network</b> =&gt; <b>Lower elasticity</b> (Swee <i>et al.</i>, 1995; Pasquali-Ronchetti &amp; Baccarani-Contri, 1997)</p>	<p><b>High density of elastin network</b> =&gt; <b>High elasticity</b></p>	<p><b>Elastic fibre decrease and alteration</b> =&gt; <b>Low elasticity</b> (Braverman &amp; Fonferko, 1982; Lavker <i>et al.</i>, 1989; Swee <i>et al.</i>, 1995; Valle-Orero <i>et al.</i>, 2017; Shin <i>et al.</i>, 2019)</p>
<p><b>Horizontal plexus with a capillary network not well organized</b> (Perera <i>et al.</i>, 1970; Miyauchi <i>et al.</i>, 2016) <b>Lower capillary density for preterm infants</b> (Bonamy <i>et al.</i>, 2007)</p>	<p><b>Well-organized capillary network with papillary loops</b></p>	<p><b>Significant reduction of papillary loops and blood vessel number and size</b> <b>Increased volume fraction in horizontal vessels</b> <b>Sparse and tortuous vessels</b> (Kligman, 1979; Kelly <i>et al.</i>, 1995; Chung <i>et al.</i>, 2002; Betsholtz <i>et al.</i>, 2005; Helmbold <i>et al.</i>, 2006)</p>
<p><b>Immature Meissner's and Pacini's corpuscles, immature AΔ- &amp; C-fibres</b> <b>Lower withdrawal threshold to mechanical stimulation, but lower proportion of heat-sensitive C fibres and immature synaptic connections in the dorsal horn</b> =&gt; <b>Sensitivity, but underlying mechanisms are different from adults</b> (Ritter <i>et al.</i>, 1991, 1993; Ririe &amp; Eisenach, 2006; Koch <i>et al.</i>, 2012; Jankowski <i>et al.</i>, 2014; Fitzgerald &amp; McKelvey, 2016; Feito <i>et al.</i>, 2018)</p>	<p><b>High density of functional sensory fibres</b> =&gt; <b>High and regulated sensitivity</b></p>	<p><b>Decreased number of Meissner's corpuscles, Merkel cell neurite complexes and free nerve fibres, including mechano-sensitive C-fibres</b> =&gt; <b>Lower &amp; impaired sensitivity and decreased PIV</b> (Panoutsopoulou <i>et al.</i>, 2009; Fromy <i>et al.</i>, 2010; Namer, 2010; Tew <i>et al.</i>, 2011; Bowden &amp; McNulty, 2013; Garcia-Piqueras <i>et al.</i>, 2019)</p>

<p><b>Low nerve conduction and myelination degree</b> (Canta <i>et al.</i>, 2016; Jenny <i>et al.</i>, 2020)</p>	<p><b>High nerve conduction and myelination degree</b> (Canta <i>et al.</i>, 2016)</p>	<p><b>Decreased nerve conduction and myelination degree</b> (Canta <i>et al.</i>, 2016)</p>
<p><b>Thin hypodermis</b> =&gt; <b>Lower shock attenuation</b> (Fereira <i>et al.</i>, 2014) <b>Very thin or no hypodermis in preterm infants</b> (Fox, 2011; Orsso <i>et al.</i>, 2020)</p>	<p><b>Thicker hypodermis</b> =&gt; <b>Higher shock attenuation</b> (Perin <i>et al.</i>, 2000; Grunnet <i>et al.</i>, 2019)</p>	<p><b>Thinner hypodermis (normal BMI)</b> =&gt; <b>Lower shock attenuation</b> (Levakov <i>et al.</i>, 2012; Rittié &amp; Fisher, 2015)</p>

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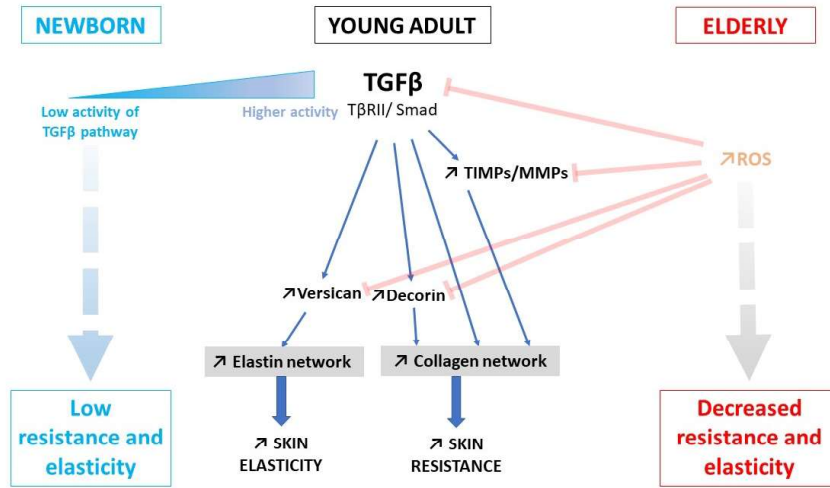


Fig. 2. The key role of transforming growth factor beta (TGFβ) signalling in skin. This pathway is not fully functional in newborn skin and is impaired during skin ageing. MMP, metalloproteinase; ROS, reactive oxygen species; Smad, suppressor of mothers against decapentaplegic; TβRII, TGFβ receptor II; TIMP, metalloproteinase inhibitor.

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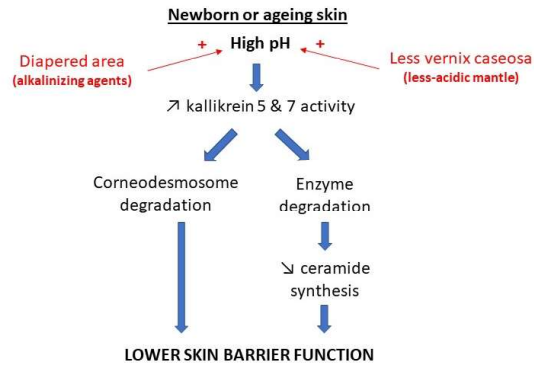


Fig. 3. Effects of a higher pH on skin barrier function.

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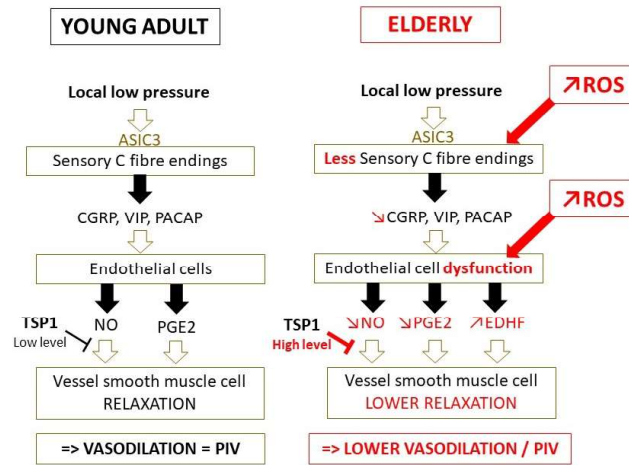


Fig. 4. Comparison of the pressure-induced vasodilation (PIV) mechanism in young adult and ageing skin. ASIC3, acid-sensing ion channel 3; CGRP, calcitonin gene-related peptide; EDHF, endothelium-derived hyperpolarizing factor; NO, nitric oxide; PACAP, pituitary adenylyl cyclase activating peptide; PGE2, prostaglandin E2; ROS, reactive oxygen species; TSP1, thrombospondin-1; VIP, vasoactive intestinal peptide.

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