

# BRUNCH

## Cross the line

Stretch marks aren't confined to just pregnant women. Anyone can get them

by Veenu Singh

**CLAIM:** Only pregnant women or new mothers need to be worried about stretch marks.

**FACT:** No. Even guys can get them.

Huh? It's true, says Dr Munish Paul, consultant dermatologist and laser surgeon, Max Hospital, Delhi. "Stretch marks (fine lines on the body) happen when your skin is stretched by rapid growth."

Skin is fairly elastic, but when it's overstretched, the normal production of collagen (the major protein that makes up the connective tissue in your skin) is disrupted. As a result, scars called stretch marks may form. While 75 to 90 per cent of pregnant women will develop stretch marks, actually everyone is at risk. You can develop stretch marks anywhere that fat accumulates and stretches the skin.

### CAUSES

Children reaching the age of puberty are also prone to stretch marks. "When a person grows or gains weight really quickly, they risk developing stretch marks. The same can happen to the obese, bodybuilders and yo-yo dieters," says Dr

Nina Madnani, senior dermatology con-

sultant, Hinduja Hospital, Mumbai.

"Stretch marks can also be caused by excessive, long-term and unsupervised usage of steroids," adds Dr Paul.

### WHAT'S THE CURE?

Stretch marks usually fade with time. Certain treatments may make them lighter, but dermatologists say nothing can make them entirely disappear. To prevent stretch marks, keep your skin well moisturised, says aromatherapist Blossom Kochhar. "Use either vitamin E-based moisturisers or those with cocoa or shea butter," she says

However, if you do get them, try some of these methods to lighten the marks:

**Tretinoin cream:** Also called Retin-A. Not advisable for breastfeeding women.

**Alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs):** These plant-derived extracts increase cell regeneration. AHAs apparently increase skin flexibility, which helps lighten stretch marks. You can try AHA creams or you can visit a dermatologist for AHA treatment.

**Laser surgery:** Laser surgery is most effective in the early stages, when the colour is darkest, because the laser will only respond to dark colours. For visible results, you need a series of treatments.

**Micro-dermabrasion:** This uses jets of zinc, aluminum oxide crystals or a rough surface to remove dead skin. Chemical peels are also helpful in lightening these marks.

**Glycolic acid:** It most likely works on stretch marks by increasing collagen production.

**Anti-stretch mark cream or lotion:** Lotions like Stretch Nil help improve hydration in the body.

**Concealers:** Blend them well with your skin tone to hide stretch marks.

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