COSMO'S
MUST-VISIT
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Beauty & Style > Beauty

15 Best Stretch Mark Creams for *Results*, According to Dermatologists

The formulas that will actually help get rid of and prevent marks, below.

by BETH GILLETTE, KATHERINE J IGOE and BROOKE SHUNATONA JUL 28, 2022

GETTY IMAGES

Hey, listen: Having stretch marks is completely normal and nothing to hate on or dislike (I've got quite a few of my own, chillin' with my cellulite and butt acne). As a refresher, **stretch marks are caused when your skin stretches suddenly, causing a type of scar**. Though they often appear after weight fluctuations, puberty, and pregnancy, their frequency is actually determined by your genetics, which means they're not really in your control. Still, if you're not a fan of yours and looking to get rid of stretch marks with a few of the supposed "best" stretch mark creams on the market, you're in the right place.

Because here's the truth: There's no such thing as a stretch mark-removing cream. The only way to truly get rid of stretch marks is with a mix of in-office procedures, like laser treatments, microneedling, or microdermabrasion. That being said, **stretch mark creams can keep your skin moisturized, soothed, and more elastic**—three things you'll need for helping stretch marks heal. So to help break down the right formulas, I chatted with dermatologists Loretta Ciraldo, MD; Hadley King, MD; Morgan Rabach, MD; and Shereene Idriss, MD; about the best stretch mark creams, below. But first:

What are stretch marks?

A stretch mark occurs **when the collagen and elastin in your dermis (aka the layer of skin just under the surface) tears from stretching** and creates a type of scar. At first, stretch marks may appear bright red or purple and have a slightly raised, bumpy feel to them, but in three to six months, they'll start to blend into your skin tone (or turn white and silvery, regardless of skin tone) and settle into a slightly sunken texture when examined closely.

1

BEST CREAM FOR BUMPY STRETCH MARKS

Differin Adapalene Gel Acne Treatment

Read More

$15 AT AMAZON

2

BEST LIGHT SELF-TANNER CREAM FOR STRETCH MARKS

Tan-Luxe The Crème Gradual Self-Tanning Face Moisturizer

Read More

$49 AT SEPHORA

3

BEST STRETCH MARK CREAM FOR MASSAGE

Buttah Skin CocoShea Revitalizing Cream

Read More

$19 AT ULTA BEAUTY

4

BEST SELF-TANNER FOR STRETCH MARKS ON DEEP SKIN

Jergens Natural Glow Instant Sun Body Mousse Self-Tanner in Deep Bronze

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$8 AT AMAZON

5

BEST STRETCH MARK CREAM ON AMAZON

Body Merry Stretch Marks & Scars Defense Cream

Read More

$21 AT AMAZON

6

BEST CREAM FOR FADING STRETCH MARKS

Paula's Choice Retinol Skin-Smoothing Body Treatment

Read More

$29 AT AMAZON

7

BEST LIGHTWEIGHT STRETCH MARK CREAM

Mederma Stretch Marks Therapy

Read More

$55 AT AMAZON

8

BEST STRETCH MARK CREAM DURING PREGNANCY

Mustela Maternity Stretch Marks Cream for Pregnancy

Read More

$22 AT AMAZON

9

BEST STRETCH MARK CREAM FOR SMOOTHING

ML Manuela Lubin Delicate Beauty Advanced Stretch Mark Removal Cream

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$32 AT AMAZON

10

BEST NATURAL STRETCH MARK CREAM

Evereden Nourishing Stretch Mark Cream

Read More

$45 AT AMAZON

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What causes stretch marks?

Stretch marks are caused any time your skin stretches too quickly: rapid weight loss/gain, pregnancy, growth spurts in puberty, and intense weight-training regimens. But certain medications, like topical or oral steroids, can also increase your chance of developing stretch marks, because they can temporarily thin the skin and make it more prone to tearing. But **your stretch marks can also just be a matter of genetics**; if everyone in your family got stretch marks during pregnancy or puberty, you might too.

While no stretch mark cream can really get rid of stretch marks, **the right formulas can definitely help soothe and even fade the ones you already have.** So keep scrolling for the best stretch mark creams, along with how to prevent stretch marks, how to permanently remove them, and more.

1

DIFFERIN® GEL
ADAPALENE GEL 0.1%
ACNE TREATMENT
DIFFERIN GEL
ADAPALENE GEL 0.1%
ACNE TREATMENT
NET WT 1.6 OZ (45 g)

COURTESY IMAGE

BEST CREAM FOR BUMPY STRETCH MARKS

Differin Adapalene Gel Acne Treatment

$15 AT AMAZON

$13 AT WALMART

$13 AT ULTA BEAUTY

PROS	CONS
♥ CAN HELP SMOOTH RAISED STRETCH MARKS	✗ TAKES THREE TO SIX MONTHS TO SEE RESULTS

- **Main ingredients:** Adapalene (smoothing retinoid)
- **Fragrance free?** Yes
- **Safe for pregnancy?** No

Dr. King and Dr. Ciraldo agree: The **best at-home product to reduce the appearance and texture of your stretch marks at home is a retinoid.** Why? Because retinoids speed up cellular turnover and trigger collagen and elastin production, which can help smooth skin texture and fade pigmentation within a few months. Your dermatologist can prescribe high-strength tretinoin (which works faster but with more irritation), or you can go with adapalene, a gentler over-the-counter retinoid that's equally effective. Just to start slow: Layer it under moisturizer two nights a week for two weeks, working your way up to every other night.

MY REVIEW: *Differin was the first product that I actually noticed a difference in the stretch marks on my stomach that I developed years ago. It's made my scars flatter, and my skin a lot firmer. Six months later, some of my stretch marks are barely even noticeable anymore.*

2

BEST LIGHT SELF-TANNER CREAM FOR STRETCH MARKS

Tan-Luxe The Crème Gradual Self-Tanning Face Moisturizer

$49 AT SEPHORA

TAN-LUXE
THE CRÈME
ADVANCED HYDRATION SELF-TAN FACIAL CRÈME
GRADUAL

COURTESY IMAGE

PROS	CONS
♥ SELF-TANNING SMELL DOESN'T LINGER	✕ ONLY EFFECTIVE FOR LIGHT-TO-MEDIUM SKIN TONES AND STRETCH MARKS

- **Main ingredients:** DHT (tanning agent), dimethicone (smoothing), glycerin (hydrating)
- **Fragrance free?** No
- **Safe for pregnancy?** Yes

If you're a sunbathing purist, despite the 419,000 cases of indoor tanning-induced skin cancer in the U.S. each year, maybe this other fact will change your habits: Tanning actually makes your stretch marks more noticeable, since their pigmentation will stay the same while your skin gets darker. So if you really want **to blend stretch marks into your skin, layer on self-tanner instead**, like this lightweight gradual-tanning cream. Just massage it over clean, dry skin every day to slowly build up to a medium-toned shade (without the risk of skin cancer).

THE REVIEWS: *"This takes the mess out of mixing tanning drops with your moisturizer," writes one tester. "My skin always looks and feels so plump and glowy after using it."*

3

BEST STRETCH MARK CREAM FOR MASSAGE

Buttah Skin CocoShea Revitalizing Cream

$19 AT ULTA BEAUTY

$31 AT WALMART

$19 AT QVC

buttah.
CocoShea Revitalizing Cream
Lock-moisture, deeply hydrate and restore
BY DORION RENAUD
2 oz [56.5 g]

COURTESY IMAGE

PROS	CONS
♥ LIGHTWEIGHT, SO SUITABLE FOR ALL SKIN TYPES	✕ SOME TESTERS SAY THE TWIST LID BREAKS EASILY

- **Main ingredients:** Shea butter, cocoa butter, sunflower seed oil (moisturizers)
- **Fragrance free?** Yes* (But contains essential oils)
- **Safe for pregnancy?** Yes

Surprisingly, just the act of massaging your skin with an oil or cream could help prevent and soothe stretch marks, according to research. "Studies have shown that **taking the time to massage the product into the skin may make it more effective**," says Dr. King. This cream has a mix of butters and oils that make it easy to massage across your skin. Just rub it in circular motions across your body twice a day for the best results. And don't worry: It's not greasy, so you can slip into clothes when you're done.

THE REVIEWS: *"It's super moisturizing without clogging my pores," writes one tester in a review. "My skin has been at its softest and glowiest since I started using this and other Buttah products."*

JERGENS
NATURAL GLOW
INSTANT SUN
DEEP BRONZE
6 FL OZ (177 mL)

COURTESY IMAGE

4

BEST SELF-TANNER FOR STRETCH MARKS ON DEEP SKIN

Jergens Natural Glow Instant Sun Body Mousse Self-Tanner in Deep Bronze

NOW 48% OFF

$8 AT AMAZON

$12 AT WALMART

$14 AT ULTA BEAUTY

PROS	CONS
♥ TESTERS LOVE THE GOLDEN UNDERTONE	✕ ONLY LASTS ONE TO THREE DAYS

- **Main ingredients:** Glycerin (moisturizing), DHT (tanning agent)
- **Fragrance free?** No
- **Safe for pregnancy?** Yes

If you want to slightly reduce the appearance of your scars without trying to find a laser treatment safe for medium-to-deep-skin tones, try this self tanner that's **gone viral on TikTok for how natural it looks on Black and Brown skin tones**. Its foam-based formula melts easily across your skin and dries down to a soft, even shade, leaving you with glowy, smooth-looking skin every time.

THE REVIEWS: *One reviewer writes, "I'm a dark skin girl and never ever considered self-tanner; however, I have been reborn and renewed. Even if you are a girl with dark skin, get this NOW. It will make you slightly darker, and the evenness and glow of your skin is amazing—10 out of 10 would recommend."*

5

BEST STRETCH MARK CREAM ON AMAZON

Body Merry Stretch Marks & Scars Defense Cream

$21 AT AMAZON

PROS	CONS
♥ REVIEWERS LOVE THE CREAMSICLE FRAGRANCE	✕ SOME TESTERS WITH SENSITIVE SKIN FOUND IT IRRITATING

- **Main ingredients:** Aloe (soothing); safflower seed oil, cocoa butter (moisturizing)
- **Fragrance free?** No
- **Safe for pregnancy?** Yes

Listen, if you just want a stretch mark cream that's affordable, requires zero physical effort to purchase, and has a rabid fan base, try this best-selling cream that's got more than 4,000 positive reviews on Amazon. **Massaging this cream all over your body each day to keep your skin healthy and supple**, thanks to its mix of moisturizing butters and oils (hi, cocoa butter, safflower seed oil, sunflower seed oil).

THE REVIEWS: *"This cream is a good consistency and easy to put on, and most importantly, it doesn't leave me feeling wet or greasy," writes one tester in a review. "If I put it on in the morning, my skin feels soft and hydrated for the majority of the day."*

amazon's choice

COURTESY IMAGE

6

BEST CREAM FOR FADING STRETCH MARKS

Paula's Choice Retinol Skin-Smoothing Body Treatment

$29 AT AMAZON

$29 AT NORDSTROM

$29 AT DERMSTORE

PROS	CONS
♥ DRIES DOWN IMMEDIATELY WITHOUT FEELING STICKY	✕ WILL NEED TO PAIR WITH A BODY CREAM IF YOUR SKIN IS DRY

- **Main ingredients:** Dimethicone (smoothing), retinol (resurfacing), shea butter (moisturizing)
- **Fragrance free?** Yes
- **Safe for pregnancy?** No

Although retinoids (specifically adapalene, like Differin) are the best at-home treatment option for stretch marks, they can be super irritating. If you have sensitive skin, try a retinol-based body cream like this one from Paula's Choice that incorporates 0.1 percent retinol sandwiched with shea butter and graepseed oil to help minimize irritation. Retinoids (even low-dose retinol) stimulate collagen production to help increase skin elasticity and smooth bumpy marks over time.

THE REVIEWS: *According to one reviewer, "I think this skin smoothing treatment is one of the best. I can immediately see results! There is no scent to dislike, and it really does smooth out little bumps, rough spots, etc." Pro: Dries down immediately without feeling stickyCon: Will need to pair with a body cream if your skin is dry*

MEDERMA
stretch marks therapy
DERMATOLOGIST RECOMMENDED
PARABEN FREE

COURTESY IMAGE

7

BEST LIGHTWEIGHT STRETCH MARK CREAM

Mederma Stretch Marks Therapy

$55 AT AMAZON

$42 AT WALMART

PROS	CONS
♥ LEAVES SKIN FEELING SUPER SMOOTH	✕ HAS A STRONG POWDERY SMELL

- **Main ingredients:** Dimethicone (smoothing), hyaluronic acid (hydrating)
- **Fragrance free?** No
- **Safe for pregnancy?** Yes

The main ingredients in this thin cream? Dimethicone (a skin-smoothing silicone) and hyaluronic acid (a humectant that pulls water into your skin for hydration), two lightweight ingredients **recommended by Dr. Rabach for helping to make stretch marks a tiny bit less noticeable.** This lightweight cream will leave your skin feeling silky smooth (literally) without leaving an oily residue on your clothes or sheets.

THE REVIEWS: *"This is my second pregnancy, and my stretch marks are visibly less than my first," writes one reviewer. "I'm less than two weeks to my due date with minimal stretch marks, but it's so much better the second time around, and I really do think it's because of this lotion."*

amazon's choice

Mustela
MATERNITÉ
CRÈME VERGETURES
STRETCH MARKS CREAM
Sans parfum Fragrance-free
97%
150ml - 5.07 US FL.OZ
SÉCURITÉ MAMAN BÉBÉ
EXPANSCIENCE LABORATOIRES

8

BEST STRETCH MARK CREAM DURING PREGNANCY

Mustela Maternity Stretch Marks Cream for Pregnancy

$22 AT AMAZON

$22 AT NORDSTROM

$22 AT BED BATH AND BEYOND

PROS	CONS
♥ HAS NO SCENT, WHICH PREGNANT TESTERS APPRECIATE	✕ NOT MOISTURIZING ENOUGH FOR YOUR WHOLE BODY

- **Main ingredients:** Shea butter and jojoba esters (moisturizers)
- **Fragrance free?** Yes
- **Safe for pregnancy?** Yes

If you want to know what actual dermatologists use for their own pregnancy stretch marks, **Dr. Idriss slathered on this Mustela cream when she was expecting her little girl**. Here's why: It has avocado peptides, which help hydrate skin to minimize tightness, along with something called galactoarabinan, an ingredient extracted from the Larch tree that can help promote elasticity. Mix both with some moisturizing shea butter and beeswax, and you've got a skin-softening stretch-mark cream that's recommended by Dr. King too.

THE REVIEWS: *"I used this during my first pregnancy and had no stretch marks or loose/crepey skin," writes one reviewer. "I know they say that it's all genetic whether or not you get stretch marks and no creams will stop them . . . But even if it didn't prevent the stretch marks, it still eased any itchiness, and it's a really nice lotion that absorbs quickly."*

ML Manuela Lubin
DELICATE BEAUTY
Stretch Mark Cream
Helps Moisturize and Nourish Skin for Increased Elasticity

9

BEST STRETCH MARK CREAM FOR SMOOTHING

ML Manuela Lubin Delicate Beauty Advanced Stretch Mark Removal Cream

$32 AT AMAZON

$34 AT WALMART

4 Fl. Oz. (120mL)

PROS	CONS
♥ HAS A LIGHT, NATURAL SCENT	✕ THICK CONSISTENCY CAN TAKE A WHILE TO FULLY RUB IN, ACCORDING TO TESTERS

- **Main ingredients:** Squalane (moisturizing), dimethicone (smoothing), hyaluronic acid (hydrating)
- **Fragrance free?** Yes
- **Safe for pregnancy?** Yes

This cream contains two of the three ingredients Dr. Rabach recommends for helping to smooth the feeling of stretch marks: hyaluronic acid and silicones. Together, along with the formula’s other humectants and moisturizers (like panthenol, glycerin, and squalane), these ingredients **can help soften the look and feel of stretch marks** and leave your skin plumper and firmer over time.

THE REVIEWS: *“This is thick and rich and has a soft, powdery scent,” a tester writes. “It seems to have a slight tightening effect. I like to use this as an all-over body lotion, and I have noticed some smoothing of rough areas on my upper thighs and stomach.”*

nourishing stretch mark cream
evereden
4 fl. oz. / 120 ml

COURTESY IMAGE

10

BEST NATURAL STRETCH MARK CREAM

Evereden Nourishing Stretch Mark Cream

$45 AT AMAZON

PROS	CONS
♥ PUMP BOTTLE MAKES FOR EASY APPLICATION	✕ MIGHT NOT BE MOISTURIZING ENOUGH FOR DRY SKIN

- **Main ingredients:** Shea butter, mango butter, coconut oil (moisturizers)
- **Fragrance-free?** Yes
- **Safe for pregnancy?** Yes

If you prefer to slather your skin with plant-based ingredients, you’ll love this natural cream that **contains shea butter, coconut oil, mango butter, grapeseed oil, and centella asiatica**. This combo can help soothe itching and inflammation (hi, taut pregnancy skin) while keeping your skin hydrated. Massage it across your entire body, focusing on your stomach, inner thighs, butt, and breasts where stretch marks are most likely to occur.

THE REVIEWS: *According to one reviewer, “The cream goes on easily; has a nice* *consistency; soothes itchy and stretched skin; and has a light, fresh scent."*

best seller

11

BEST OIL FOR STRETCH MARKS

Bio-Oil Skincare Oil

NOW 36% OFF

$17 AT AMAZON

$25 AT WALMART

PROS	CONS
♥ CAN BE USED ON THE FACE AND BODY	✕ TAKES ABOUT 10 MINUTES TO FULLY ABSORB

- **Main ingredients:** Mineral oil, sunflower seed oil (moisturizing); retinyl palmitate (smoothing retinoid)
- **Fragrance free?** No *(But has a fragrance-free version)
- **Safe for pregnancy?** Yes *(Contains a low level of vitamin A that is very unlikely to harm pregnancy)

The ingredients in Bio-Oil haven't been proven to fade or prevent stretch marks, but testers (ahem, Khloe Kardashian) swear by it. In a 2018 study, **more than half of participants who used Bio-Oil said their scars and stretch marks looked less pronounced.** It's likely because the formula has a little bit of retinyl palmitate, the least irritating form of retinol, to smooth texture and fade a bit of discoloration. Plus, it contains vitamin E, which is rich in fatty acids that keep skin hydrated and plump.

THE REVIEWS: *"I am 8 months pregnant and have used this religiously a minimum of twice a day since my first trimester," writes one tester. "I haven't had one stretch mark, nor have I experienced itchiness. My skin is always super supple."*

12

BEST MOISTURIZING STRETCH MARK CREAM

Kreyòl Essence Haitian Coffee & Coconut Body Creme

$32 AT ULTA BEAUTY

PROS	CONS
♥ TESTERS LOVE THE NATURAL COFFEE FRAGRANCE	✕ SOME REVIEWERS WISH THE TUB CAME WITH MORE PRODUCT

- **Main ingredients:** Shea butter, Haitian castor seed oil (moisturizing); aloe vera (soothing)
- **Fragrance free?** Yes
- **Safe for pregnancy?** Yes

This cream isn't specifically targeted to treat stretch marks, but it is ultra-moisturizing and soothing, which you'll want if you're trying to avoid stretch marks before they happen. The hero ingredient in this cream is **Haitian castor seed oil, which you'll often find in stretch mark oils because of its high vitamin E content.** As a refresher, Vitamin E is known for its moisturizing and soothing properties—two things you def want when dealing with stretch marks.

THE REVIEWS: *"I enjoy how the cream absorbs and doesn't leave me feeling greasy," writes one reviewer. "It has an all-day lasting clean and light scent. I've been using the cream for the last year."*

13

BEST BODY BUTTER FOR STRETCH MARKS

Matrescence Stretch Mark Relief Restorative Butter

$84 AT MATRESCENCESKIN.COM

matrescence
Stretch Mark Relief
Restorative Butter
8 oz • 237 ml

COURTESY IMAGE

PROS	CONS
♥ DOESN'T FEEL OILY OR STICKY	✕ THE MOST EXPENSIVE CREAM ON THIS LIST

- **Main ingredients:** Avocado oil, sunflower seed oil, coconut oil (moisturizers)
- **Fragrance free?** Yes
- **Safe for pregnancy?** Yes

If you've been avoiding body butters for your stretch marks because they're typically sticky and heavy, you clearly have not tried this formula from Matrescence. The avocado oil-based cream **melts quickly into the skin and leaves your stretch marks feeling extra soft**, thanks to a mix of shea, sunflower oil, and coconut oil. Smooth it all over your body once a day for immediate and long-term smoothness.

THE REVIEWS: *"I thoroughly enjoyed using this cream after having my son," writes one* *tester. "I love the consistency of the cream, and being that I have very dry skin, this cream kept my skin hydrated throughout the day."*

best seller

14

BEST STRETCH MARK CREAM TO SOOTHE ITCHY SKIN

Burt's Bees Mama Bee Belly Butter

$39 AT AMAZON

burt's bees MAMA
belly butter
with Shea Butter & Vitamin E
99.0% NATURAL ORIGIN
with nutrient rich botanicals

PROS	CONS
♥ DOESN'T LEAVE A STICKY RESIDUE	✕ SOME SENSITIVE TO FRAGRANCE MAY FIND SCENT OVERPOWERING

- **Main ingredients:** Sunflower seed oil, coconut oil, sweet almond oil (moisturizers)
- **Fragrance free?** Yes
- **Safe for pregnancy?** Yes

Stretch marks are inevitable for some people during pregnancy (thanks, genetics), but the mind-numbing itching that can come with stretched skin doesn't need to be a daily issue. This drugstore cream has more than 22,000 positive reviews (!) from testers who rave about its ability to calm irritated marks, so you don't feel the constant urge to itch (which, ahem, can mess with your skin barrier and create more inflammation). The formula also contains almond oil and shea butter to keep your skin moisturized and protected against friction, which is especially key for growing bellies or bodies.

THE REVIEWS: *"Every time my tummy itched during pregnancy—which happened a lot toward the end—I put some of this on," writes a reviewer. "And after my child was born, I continue to use it and haven't had issues with stretch marks."*

amazon's choice

15

BEST STRETCH MARK CREAM FOR YOUR STOMACH

Mama Mio Tummy Rub Butter

$34 AT AMAZON

$25 AT WALMART

mama
mio
OMEGA-RICH STRETCH MARK PROTECTION CREAM
Crème de protection contre les vergetures riche en omégas
Tummy Rub Butter

$34 AT DERMSTORE

PROS	CONS
♥ REVIEWERS SAY IT SOAKS IN FAST	✕ FRAGRANCED VERSION HAS A STRONG SCENT

- **Main ingredients:** Aloe vera (soothing); shea butter, sweet almond oil (moisturizing)
- **Fragrance free?** No *(But comes in a fragrance-free version)
- **Safe for pregnancy?** Yes

This stretch mark cream is specifically created to soothe growing, stretching skin on the stomach, where you're most prone to getting bright red or purple stretch marks. The blend of oils (coconut, almond, sweet almond, and olive oil), along with aloe vera, shea butter, vitamin E, and dimethicone will leave your stretch marks feeling smooth, soft, and super moisturized.

THE REVIEWS: *"This is my go-to stretch mark prevention cream," writes one review. "It helps keep the itchiness away and soaks in fast. Partly my genetics, but I have no stretch marks after two babies!"*

Do stretch mark creams work?

"Stretch mark creams do not have any scientific evidence of working," Dr. Rabach says. But Dr. King points to one small-scale 2017 study that found stretch mark creams containing centella asiatica and hyaluronic acid, as well as daily massages, *might* help make a "mild improvement" in the appearance of stretch marks. However, there have been no clinical studies that prove ingredients like cocoa butter, shea butter, vitamin E, or almond oil can prevent or get rid of stretch marks.

However, the one at-home product that has the best chance at treating stretch marks is retinoids, says Dr. Ciraldo. **Retinoids increase cell turnover and encourage collagen production, which can smooth the texture of bumpy stretch marks** when used three times a week for three to six months. But remember: all retinoids can be drying and irritating (especially higher-strength formulas like prescription tretinoin and drugstore adapalene), so make sure to layer on a thick moisturizer afterward, and start slow with your retinoid usage (two nights a week for two weeks, and then every other night indefinitely).

Can you prevent stretch marks with cream?

Unfortunately, **no, you can't prevent stretch marks with a cream or oil.** Tbh, there is really no way to completely prevent stretch marks, because weight fluctuations are inevitable. But keeping your skin moisturized and supple can help some people get fewer stretch marks over time. The more elastic and strong your skin is, the more likely it will handle the stretching from weight changes. To keep your skin ultra moisturized, smooth a rich body cream or oil all over your skin twice a day.

How do I permanently get rid of stretch marks?

To permanently get rid of stretch marks, your best bet is **an in-office procedure that promotes collagen and elastin production** to help fade the appearance (see below for specifics). "There is no one way to permanently and completely get rid of stretch marks," says Dr. Rabach, "but we have a variety of different treatments that may make them look better."

Your dermatologist might recommend one of these four in-office treatments:

- **Intense Pulsed Light (IPL):** A laser treatment that stimulates collagen and elastin using intense, broad-spectrum flashes of light. IPL is best for reducing the appearance of red or purple stretch marks when they're first forming, but not all IPL devices are safe for those with medium-to-deep skin tones, so check with your provider before scheduling an appointment.
- **Microdermabrasion:** A non-invasive treatment that gently exfoliates the outer layers of skin to stimulate collagen production for more even, clearer skin. This can be a great option if you have sensitive skin, but it's only recommended for new, red/purple/brown stretch marks.
- **Microneedling:** A procedure that uses a needle-covered roller or stamp to create micro "traumas" in the skin to encourage collagen production, which can help fade stretch marks over time, especially when combined with radiofrequency.

Your dermatologist can recommend the best treatment based on your goals, like if you're trying to fade the bright red/purple color of your stretch marks, smooth texture, or firm skin. But as with any in-office procedure, **you'll need "multiple sessions to produce more noticeable results,"** says Dr. King, which can get costly and take time. Your outcome can also vary depending on the depth and tone of your stretch marks, so chat with your doctor before investing in a procedure that might not give you the results you're looking for.

How long do stretch marks take to fade?

Some stretch marks can take anywhere from months to several years to fade on their own, depending on the area of your body, the color they are, and how textured they are, says Dr. Ciraldo. "Be proactive and don't wait to see if yours will resolve quickly or not," she says, meaning if you want to get rid of your brand new stretch marks, see a doctor ASAP.

And if you're wondering, will losing weight reduce stretch marks? Dr. Ciraldo says no, but **losing weight *can* make stretch marks appear more like loose, excess skin**, rather than the classic "tiger stripes" look. In general, rapid weight fluctuations (including weight loss) can cause more stretch marks or exacerbate the ones you already have. So, if you're losing weight after pregnancy or natural weight shifts, bring up any skin concerns with your doctor, who can recommend a treatment for you.

How do you avoid stretch marks during pregnancy?

There's no surefire way to avoid stretch marks during pregnancy, but you can moisturize your skin to strengthen its elasticity, which can help your skin stretch better without tearing and scarring. **Massage a moisturizing cream or oil twice a day to your stomach, breasts, inner thighs, and anywhere you're worried about marks.** Dr. Ciraldo suggests stretch mark creams with cocoa butter, shea butter, and avocado oil, thanks to their moisturizing properties and thick, spreadable consistency.

Regardless of what cream you choose, you should start the massage process early, says Dr. Ciraldo. If this is your first pregnancy, "**It is best to start at three months or, at the latest, the beginning of the second trimester,"** she explains. In fact, Dr. Ciraldo suggests picking up a cream as soon as you find out you're pregnant, if you've been pregnant before or have gotten stretch marks from other weight fluctuations or medications in the past.

How to choose the best stretch mark cream

Pick the right ingredients

When it comes to fading existing stretch marks, Dr. Rabach says to **prioritize the ingredients that have the most data on improving or reducing the appearance of stretch marks**: prescription retinol, which produces collagen to increase elasticity and fade hyperpigmentation; and hyaluronic acid, which can help plump up skin to help make bumpy textures appear smoother (especially when combined with hydrating ingredients like shea butter, cocoa butter, and vitamin E). If you have sensitive skin, beware that added fragrance can be irritating (especially if you have a sensitive nose during pregnancy) and worsen redness.

Prioritize regular use

The more you use a stretch mark cream, the better your skin can remain soft and stretchable, which might prevent some stretch marks from forming. For best results, most creams will require twice-daily application for three to six months (or, if you're pregnant, for the duration of your pregnancy), but retinoid-based creams (which, reminder, are not safe for pregnancy or breastfeeding) should only be used every other night to avoid irritation.

Understand what you want to achieve

One size doesn't fit all when it comes to stretch mark creams. Some formulas are specially created to be safe for people who are pregnant or breastfeeding. Some work best on new stretch marks, and others are better for old scars. Assess your needs before you make your pick, because who wants to spend money on a stretch mark cream that doesn't work for them? Not me.