

The skin you're in

While many women bloom during pregnancy, quite literally glowing with vitality and good health, others are not as fortunate. Acne, stretch marks, pigmentation and hair in places it shouldn't be; you'd be forgiven for thinking you're going through puberty again!



As with puberty, hormonal changes to the skin are a normal part of pregnancy and you're likely to experience at least some of these. Take a look at what skin changes you can expect during pregnancy.

» SKIN PIGMENTATION

WHAT CAN I EXPECT? One of the first signs of pregnancy that you'll notice is a darkening of your skin. Along with your nipples and areolas (the skin around your nipples), any moles and freckles you have may darken or become bigger. The area around your tummy button, armpits, and inner thighs may also appear noticeably darker, and while these areas of your skin may lighten over time, your nipples are likely to remain darker than they were before pregnancy.

WHAT CAN I DO? Being in the sun can cause these areas of your skin to darken, so ensure you cover up, wear a hat, and apply a decent sunscreen whenever you go outdoors. If you are feeling self-conscious about your skin, apply tinted moisturiser, foundation or concealer to help cover up any uneven skin tone. The good news is this pigmentation should fade within a few months of your baby's birth.

» PREGNANCY MASK

WHAT CAN I EXPECT? Called chloasma or the mask of pregnancy, brown patches of pigmentation on your forehead, neck, and cheeks are caused by your body producing extra melanin. Melanin is responsible for determining your skin colour, and during pregnancy the hormones oestrogen and progesterone stimulate this over-production. About two out of three mums experience chloasma during pregnancy, and it's more noticeable in brunettes and darker-skinned women.

WHAT CAN I DO? As with skin darkening in other parts of your body, exposure to sunlight can cause the brown patches of chloasma to darken on your face. Use sunscreen and wear a hat, and avoid being outside in the hottest part of the day.



» LINEA NIGRA

WHAT CAN I EXPECT? You're probably not even aware of the faint white line that runs from your tummy button to your pubic bone. Called Linea Alba, it's barely visible before pregnancy, but sometime in the second trimester of your pregnancy, thanks to those pregnancy hormones again, the Linea Alba becomes a Linea Nigra; a much darker and more noticeable line. It should gradually fade after baby is born, but to help slow down the darkening, cover up your tummy and use sunscreen when outdoors. There is some evidence linked to a darkening in skin tone and a deficiency in folic acid, so make sure you're eating a healthy diet including plenty of folate-rich green leafy vegetables, oranges, and whole-wheat breads and cereals.

ACNE

WHAT CAN I EXPECT?

Acne during pregnancy is rarely as severe as that of adolescence, and your spots will subside after baby is born.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Because your skin is more sensitive than usual, avoid using abrasive scrubs and exfoliants. Milder, oatmeal-based facial scrubs help unblock oily pores. Cleanse no more than twice a day and if your skin is dry, use an oil-free moisturiser. Use make-up sparingly and remove it completely. Avoid using anti-acne prescription medicine while pregnant.

» SPIDER VEINS

WHAT CAN I EXPECT? Increased blood volume and pregnancy hormones can cause tiny, squiggly red or purple capillaries just below the surface of your skin to branch out and become more visible during pregnancy. Spider veins, resembling a small spider's web, may form on the face below the eyes or cheekbones, but can appear on the neck, hands, arms and ears.

WHAT CAN I DO? Spider veins usually fade about six or seven months after baby is born. In the meantime, try using foundation or concealer to cover them up.

» ITCHY SKIN

WHAT CAN I EXPECT? Most noticeable over your tummy and breasts, as your skin stretches during pregnancy, you may experience itchy skin. Itchiness can also be caused by eczema, which you may develop for the first time while pregnant. Typically itching occurs in the folds of your skin, like the insides of knees or elbows.

WHAT CAN I DO? Cut back on warm baths or showers, and avoid using cleansing products that contain strong detergents or perfumes as these can irritate or dry your skin, making it more prone to itchiness. Instead, use mild, moisturising soaps or pH-balanced body washes and moisturise your skin with unperfumed products. Try soothing calamine lotion on your itchy skin, or add oatmeal to your bath. Avoid getting overheated, as heat rash can make itching worse. The combination of an already overheated pregnant body, dampness from perspiration, and the friction of skin rubbing against clothing can cause your skin to rash. Wear loose, cotton clothing and stay indoors, or stick to the shade if outside.

STRETCH MARKS

WHAT CAN I EXPECT? As pregnancy progresses, your skin stretches more and faster than usual. Pregnancy hormones can also disrupt your skin's protein balance, leaving it thinner. These changes can cause stretch marks to appear around your breasts, tummy, and thighs; pinkish or reddish streaks that run down your skin, fading to thin silvery or brown lines about six months after baby is born.

WHAT CAN I DO? Try to gain weight slowly and steadily during your pregnancy by eating a healthy diet and exercising regularly. Stretch marks are also more likely to occur when the skin is not very elastic, so applying moisturising creams and vitamin E oils can lessen their effect.

As seen in Pregnancy, BUMP & Baby Issue 2 (bumpandbaby.co.nz)

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