

# SKIN SAVVY



Uncovering the changes in your skin during pregnancy, and what existing skin conditions can mean to your health.

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**M**any women experience changes during pregnancy while their bodies are adjusting to the influx of hormones. One of the most visible changes may be the altered appearance of their skin, bringing concerns to the forefront.

## FIRST SIGNS

The first transformation that you may notice is usually benign and painless, yet definitely noticeable. Hyperpigmentation (darkening of the skin) around the nipples and genital areas are some first signs that your body is adapting to the new changes. Hyperpigmentation is due to the increased blood flow and the deepness in the hue of the pigment will depend on the fragility of your blood vessels. You may notice a dark vertical line, called a *linea nigra*, developing from your belly button to your pubic bone. This dark line may also be accompanied by hair. *Striae gravidarum*, the fancy word for stretch marks, may begin to show as well. Starting off as pink marks, they may change to a white or shiny appearance after delivery. Depending on your size and the growth of your baby, these stretch marks may be unavoidable but regularly massaging your belly with a vegetable oil-based moisturizing lotion or a balm that is free of chemicals and preservatives will help your skin to adapt to the stretching. With the increase in weight of your growing baby and the accompanying water retention, varicose veins in your legs may develop especially during the last trimester of your pregnancy.

## DEALING WITH THE NOT-SO-NEW

Many pregnant moms often worry about their existing skin conditions. Women with psoriasis are often pleasantly surprised during pregnancy when it greatly

improves or even disappears. There has been a correlation between this improvement and the increased levels of estrogen in the body. Those with eczema may find that their skin either flares up or improves. Unfortunately, it is not known why the eczema may be affected during this time, yet there is a definite correlation between eczema, allergies (environmental and food), chemical irritants and stress, so it is important to consider all of these factors. It's best to focus on treating pre-existing skin conditions before pregnancy as many treatments such as cleanses, herbs, acupuncture and certain supplements should be limited while pregnant. Also, cleanses and detoxification programs are not recommended while pregnant and nursing.

You may also experience more complicated skin conditions. A common symptom is an itchy red rash that can develop, and most often disappears once you have given birth and is harmless to the health of your baby. Most of them are more uncomfortable than a serious threat to you or your baby. Pruritic urticarial papules and plaques of pregnancy (PUPPP) is the most common skin condition during gestation. PUPPP usually presents with an itchy rash or even hives on your abdomen and thighs. It often shows up during the last few months of pregnancy when your belly has reached its maximum size. If you notice a rash of itchy dots on your arms, legs and abdomen, you may be experiencing prurigo gestationis. Again, this rash most often disappears after delivery. Although the pruritis may be more annoying than harmful, it is



