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Expert Insight: A Cosmetic Surgeon Talks Stretch Mark Solutions

Let's talk openly for a moment. Women of all ages, regardless of height, weight, or parental status, are susceptible to stretchmarks. This is a simple fact. Another fact, which will hopefully make you feel a bit better, is that supermodels –yes, the bikini models you see in Sports Illustrated and Victoria's Secret– have stretch marks.

If you're like the 95% of the women out there, you prefer them *gone*. **Dr. Kirk Brandow**, founder and director of the Brandow Clinic for Cosmetic Surgery in Philadelphia who has appeared on national programs such as Good Morning America and 20/20 offering insights on cosmetic surgery, shares the real deal on stretch mark solutions with several facts on popular procedures and topical options to prevent and remove stretch marks. Here's what he has to say.

Option #1: Topical Creams & Preventative Foods

"There are a variety of topical treatments, the ones with cocoa butter are the trend, but they won't do much if anything to improve severe stretch marks. These creams and oils perform better when used as preventive measures because fully developed stretch marks are rarely skin-deep," explains Dr. Brandow.

Gelatin powder has been suggested as a great way to get more collagen into your system. Coconut oil mixed with beeswax is said to prevent stretch marks especially when applied throughout the day. Eating foods rich in vitamin C can help prevent stretch marks from the inside out. Adding things like red peppers, parsley, broccoli, kale, Brussels sprouts are good bets.

Option #2: Lasers

Many women who have post pregnancy stretch marks turn to lasers to eliminate this unwanted scarring. Kim Kardashian recently announced via her Snapchat that she would undergo laser treatments to rid her stretch marks. The Coolbeam laser, which is the one Kim Kardashian is going with, requires up to 5 treatments at around \$5,000 per treatment which adds up to \$25,000. Lasers are known for high level of safety and efficacy and most patients come away very pleased with the result. The treated area heals rather quickly, within a week to three weeks.

“Lasers are far less invasive than a tummy tuck, which has a much longer recovery time. Lasers do have some risk in that they can burn the skin or cause tissue damage. Therefore, it’s very important to choose a doctor who knows what they are doing,” advises Dr. Brandow.

Option #3: Platelet Rich Plasma with Micro-needling

Platelet Rich Plasma (PRP) has been around for the past two decades and used to help athletes like Tiger Woods and Alex Rodriguez recover from injury. A few years ago, the “Vampire Facial” made headlines when Micro-needling was added to the procedure offering a vibrant, smooth, flawless complexion. The results were so great that cosmetic surgeons started to explore other parts of the body such as stretch marks on the buttocks, breast, arms, thighs and abdomen.

This calls for blood to be taken from the patient then put into a machine that separates the platelet rich plasma from the blood. It is then spread over the face after the micro-needling is completed. The micro-needling is a process where a pen-like tool with several tiny needles at the tip is carefully guided over the affected area making microscopic holes on both the outer and inner layers of skin. These holes are so small that they heal within a few hours. The process triggers a healing response in the dermis layer which is what causes the fast fading of stretch marks. Doctors recommend micro-needling with PRP over any other treatment because the results are significant and the cost is about \$1000 per session. “Micro-needling with PRP is a combination that offers a fast, in office option, with excellent results and is less costly than lasers,” explains Dr. Brandow who was recently on TV speaking of the procedure.

Dr. Brandow adds that the advantage of micro-needling with PRP for stretch marks over lasers is a lesser chance of scarring and skin discoloration. “Skin on the body is more susceptible to hyperpigmentation than on the face making Micro-needling is a safer option for ethnicities with varying skin tones. This is a big advantage over cool beam lasers, IPL or chemical peels,” he explains.

Option #4: The Tummy Tuck

This is the gold standard offering the best results however it’s invasive and the recovery time is longer. Known as abdominoplasty, the procedure removes excess skin in the abdominal region and tightens the muscles. The stretch marks below the belly button are discarded along with the excess skin. “The tummy tuck is a surgical procedure that comes with risk so typically candidates must be non-smokers in good physical health as certain they will not want more kids after surgery. It’s is the only option for complete and permanent stretch mark removal. Recovery time can be up to 6 weeks and again it is

critical that one chooses a reputable doctor. A botched tummy tuck can lead to off-centered belly buttons, long thick scars, and dangerous infections,” warns Dr. Brandow.

Ultimately stretch marks are an unfortunate reality that comes with pregnancy, puberty and any other weight or muscle gain where the skin is stretched. There are preventative measures one can take. Be very weary of anything that seems too good to be true and always consult with a credentialed doctor when considering any kind of cosmetic procedure.

About the Doctor:

***Dr. Kirk Brandow**, founder and director of Brandow Clinic for Cosmetic Surgery, is a plastic surgeon that has been nationally recognized as one of America’s “Best Plastic Surgeons” of this decade. He has been featured on local, national and international television programs including 20/20, CNN’s Headline News, and Good Morning America.*