

Does It Work?

Scar & Stretch Mark Treatments

BY STEPHANIE ANDERSON WITMER

Fun fact: Stretch marks are a type of scar. When skin is stretched or wounded, new collagen fibers form at the stressed spots as part of the healing process, leaving marks behind. There's no surefire way to prevent stretch marks and other scars, and they're difficult to get rid of entirely, says Rebecca Baxt, M.D., a dermatologist in New Jersey. Some remedies, however, promise to reduce their size or appearance or to erase them altogether. We've fleshed out how well these actually work.

TOPICALS

WHAT THEY ARE: Available online and in drugstores, creams, body oils, serums, and silicone gel sheets claim that their active ingredients will shrink scars or prevent and fade stretch marks.

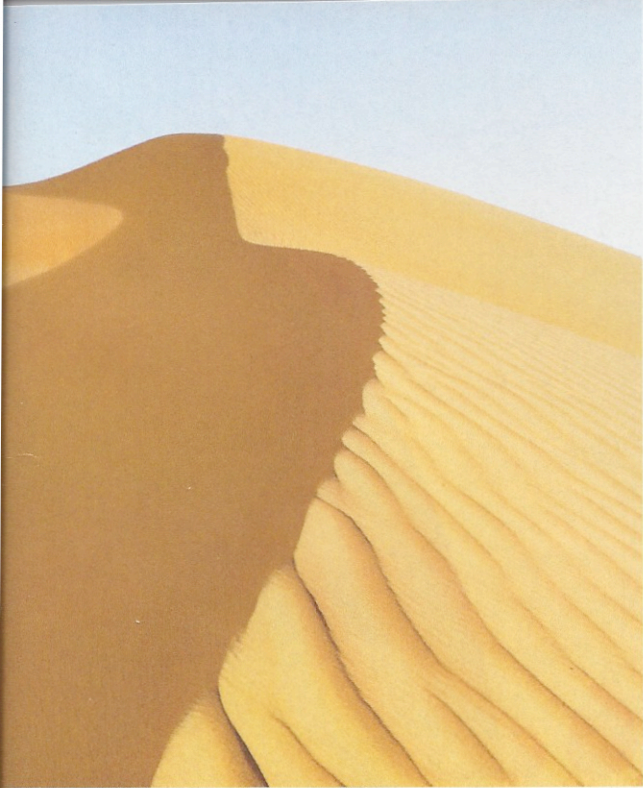
WHAT WE KNOW: The data is inconclusive, and study results

are mixed. "Research has failed to support the claim that products containing cocoa butter, vitamin E, or olive oil improve stretch marks," says New York City dermatologist Meghan Feely, M.D. But those containing retinoids or hyaluronic acid may repair damaged collagen or stimulate the production of new collagen, Dr. Feely says, adding that the extract of a medicinal herb, centella asiatica, also shows promise.

SHOULD YOU TRY THEM?

Sure, but discuss it with a dermatologist first, especially if you're pregnant or breast-feeding. Topical treatments are generally safe, but likely won't deliver huge results. Try them when marks are still pink or red, since making them fade is even harder once they mature, says Dr. Feely.

BRANDS: Mederma gels, creams, and oils (\$9 to \$30),



Bio-Oil skincare oil (\$6 to \$28), Scar-Away Silicone Scar Sheets (\$16 to \$27).

IN-OFFICE PROCEDURES

WHAT THEY ARE: A dermatologist can administer laser therapy, microneedling, and dermal fillers. Laser therapy shines beams of light on skin to target inflammation and collagen. Microneedling delivers tiny punctures, the healing of which is said to rejuvenate skin. Dermal filler injections aim to even out indented scars or bumpy skin.

WHAT WE KNOW: These treatments work. With laser therapy, the light is absorbed by the skin, prompting remodeling of collagen and reducing inflammation that

can make blemishes more apparent. Microneedling works, says Dr. Feely, because the “wound healing cascade” prompts collagen and elastin generation. Injections containing hyaluronic acid fill in pitted scars, and raised scars can be shrunk with corticosteroid injections, says Dr. Baxt.

SHOULD YOU TRY THEM? Yes, but they’re pricey.

Expect to pay \$200 to \$700 per session, and you may need multiple visits to see results.

SURGERY

WHAT IT IS: A plastic surgeon cuts out an old scar, leaving a new, neater scar that can be faded with a treatment like laser therapy, explains Dr. Baxt.

WHAT WE KNOW: There’s no surgical option for removing stretch marks, but people with large, raised, or jagged scars may prefer the smaller scars that remain after surgery.

SHOULD YOU TRY IT? Only if your scars are severe and you’re clear that this likely won’t provide a perfect result.