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Solutions for Stretch Marks

We love our babies, and some of us love them enough not to mind the marks they leave on our stomachs. That's great! But if after childbirth or for other reasons you have stretch marks that bother you, don't give up. Today, there are solutions. **Dr. Kirk Brandow**, founder and director of the Brandow Clinic for Cosmetic Surgery in Philadelphia, offers four:

- **Prevention with topical creams and nutrition.** Although Brandow says that creams like cocoa butter won't help much once you have fully formed stretch marks, he does recommend them as a preventive measure. "Coconut oil mixed with beeswax is said to prevent stretch marks especially when applied throughout the day," he reports. You also can eat to increase the collagen in your body. Adding gelatin powder to foods and eating foods rich in vitamin C like

red peppers, broccoli, kale and citrus fruits may prevent stretch marks.

- **Lasers.** Brandow says, “Lasers are known for a high level of safety and efficacy, and most patients come away very pleased with the result. The treated area heals within one to three weeks. Lasers do have some risk in that they can burn the skin or cause tissue damage. “Therefore, it’s very important for people to choose doctors who know what they are doing.” The Coolbeam laser requires up to five treatments at about \$5,000 per treatment, according to Brandow.

- **Platelet Rich Plasma (PRP) with Micro-needling.** Micro-needling is done to make microscopic holes in the outer and inner layers of the skin. Blood taken from the patient is put into a machine that separates the platelet rich plasma from the blood, and the plasma is spread over the area after the micro-needling is completed. The holes heal within a few hours, and the process triggers a healing response in the dermis layer that works to fade the stretch marks. The cost is about \$1,000 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,” Brandow says. “Micro-needling is a safer option for ethnicities with varying skin tones. This is a big advantage over cool beam lasers, Intense Pulsed Light (IPL) and chemical peels.”

- **Tummy Tuck.** This procedure removes excess skin in the abdominal region and tightens the muscles. Any 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 nonsmokers in good physical health and be certain they will not want more kids after surgery,” Brandow says. “It’s the only option for complete and permanent stretch mark removal. Recovery time can be up to six weeks and, again, it is critical to choose a reputable doctor. A botched tummy tuck can lead to off-centered belly buttons, scars and dangerous infections.”