

Beauty | January 19, 2017 | By Korin Miller

Stretch Marks Are Actually Completely Normal (And Incredibly Common)

Even supermodels like Chrissy Teigen have them.



A lot of celebrities use social media to show off their perfect new haircuts or enviable vacation pics. And while Chrissy Teigen certainly does, too, she also uses social media to give fans an unfiltered glimpse into who she is, both mentally and physically. The most recent example: Teigen, 31, posted a close-up of her inner thigh, complete with stretch marks, on Twitter Wednesday night with the simple caption, “Whatevs.” Fans immediately praised the supermodel and new mom for her honesty, and some even shared their own photos. “Appreciate you,” one wrote. “Thanks for reminding everyone that not everyone is 100 percent flawless,” said another.

This isn’t the first time Teigen has shared a stretch mark photo on social media. In August, she posted another close-up of her thighs on Snapchat with the message, “LOL my thighs have tributaries.” She also showed off

her stretch marks in a photo of her legs on Instagram in April 2015 with the message, "Bruises from bumping kitchen drawer handles for a week. Stretchies say hi!"



It's no secret that people get stretch marks, but women who have been pregnant, like Teigen has, appear to be especially prone: A 2015 study in the *Journal of American Academy of Dermatology* found that more than half of all pregnant women will develop stretch marks on either their abdomens, hips and thighs, and/or breasts.

Joshua Zeichner, M.D., a New York City-based board-certified dermatologist, tells *SELF* that stretch marks are "very common," whether someone's had kids or not. People develop stretch marks when there is rapid

stretching of the skin, he explains—for example, during times of quick growth or weight gain. “This why we see them during pregnancy or puberty,” he says. “The skin stretches more quickly than it can accommodate, leading essentially to scarred tissue in those areas.”

Some of the skin's connective tissue, such as collagen and elastin, can literally snap during periods of weight gain or growth, decreasing the amount of connective tissue in that area, Gary Goldenberg, M.D., medical director of the Dermatology Faculty Practice at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, tells SELF. “This causes the appearance of stretch marks, and in some this is accompanied by inflammation,” he says.

While weight gain can be a factor, Zeichner says a lot of it comes down to genetics—if your parents have stretch marks, you’re more likely to get them as well. For pregnant women, stretch marks typically show up in the third trimester of pregnancy when the fetus (and a woman’s stomach) grows rapidly. “They may become more apparent after the baby is delivered because the belly essentially deflates,” Zeichner says.

Initially, stretch marks may appear lighter than your skin tone, board-certified dermatologist Jill Waibel, M.D., medical director and owner of Miami Dermatology and Laser Institute in Miami, tells SELF. Over time, they can grow in width and length, and can have a reddish or purple-ish color, she says. Eventually, they often become paler, with a color that tends to fade to more closely resemble a person’s skin tone again.

Goldenberg says stretch marks may fade to be practically unnoticeable in some people, but in others they won't. They don't actually ever go away, since the broken collagen and elastic fibers are still under the skin, he explains. And, as Teigen shows, that's perfectly fine. So many people have stretch marks that they're essentially a rite of passage, whether it's due to a teenage growth spurt or getting pregnant. And many people have learned to embrace stretch marks as beautiful and natural parts of their bodies.

With that said, if you have stretch marks and they bother you to the point that getting rid of them would make you happier, there are a few options to make them less obvious. One is lasers that your dermatologist will use in their office. KTP lasers can treat redness, while fractional resurfacing lasers like Fraxel can help restore the texture of the stretch mark closer to its previous appearance, Zeichner says.

Retinol can also stimulate collagen production and improve the appearance of stretch marks, but it’s not recommended while you’re pregnant or breastfeeding, Zeichner says. He recommends using an OTC cream, like Neutrogena Rapid Wrinkle Repair Cream, but note that the longer you have stretch marks, the less likely a cream will be to reduce their appearance.

Whether you have early or mature stretch marks, if you want to reduce them, Waibel says it’s always a good idea to check in with your dermatologist to see what treatment options are available to you. Your doctor may also be able to reassure you that they're completely normal—no treatment necessary.