

Pregnancy Skincare

What makes it different?

Pregnant women are becoming increasingly conscious of the products they use on their bodies. Often this is because they want to feel the life growing inside them is safe from potentially damaging ingredients. The body and emotions go through many changes during the pregnancy journey as a result of increased circulation and hormonal functions designed to help nourish and support the new baby's growth, as well as preparing the mother for delivery.

Changes in oestrogen, progesterone and melanocyte stimulating hormones can cause skin changes including sensitivity, dryness, stretching, itchiness, and darkening in certain areas. Nails may become thinner and more brittle, or in some cases harder – they should return to normal within 3 to 6 months after childbirth.

In terms of hair, the ovaries secrete large amounts of oestrogen during pregnancy and to balance this there is an increase in androgens. This can cause excessive hair growth which usually affects the upper lip, chin, and sides of the face; don't worry it's only accelerated vellus hair, a fine peach like fuzz, which usually disappears after childbirth.



In my experience, once pregnant, expectant mums should immediately start using rich body lotions or body oils to ensure the skin is deeply moisturised to prevent the itching sensation caused by stretching skin as the baby grows. Rapid stretching of skin can tear the underlying connective tissue, resulting in scars known as stretch marks. The thighs, bust, back of hips are other areas that experience stretching and need continuous deep moisturising. Stretch marks are very common in a large percentage of women who become pregnant. As elasticity and stretching are a physical issue, using daily applications can greatly improve the skin's flexibility and suppleness to help decrease the chance of stretch marks.

In our increasingly polluted modern world, it is important to do all we can to avoid increasing the toxin load in our bodies. An understanding of the nature of skin, and how ingredients in skincare products might actually penetrate the skin to be delivered into the blood stream, can help us see why, its imperative we avoid synthetic ingredients at all costs.

Our skin is responsible for letting substances in, as well as keeping them out, and this 'active' function depends largely on the environment in which the skin finds itself.

Let me go into more detail on transdermal (across the skin) absorption...

The skin is made up of several layers. The basic divisions are the epidermis (the part we usually think of as our skin because it is the part we can touch), the dermis (where most of our blood vessels live), and the subcutaneous tissue. The outermost layer of the epidermis, called the stratum corneum, is made up of cells high in keratin, a substance that helps maintain skin hydration by reducing moisture loss – in effect, keratin contributes to the creation of a semi-waterproof barrier. This hydrophobic (water-fearing) layer sits just on top of a hydrophilic (water-loving) layer which readily accepts water and water-based substances.

In order to easily cross the skin a substance must have a low molecular weight. Essential oils, which are not 'oils' at all, but are actually closer to alcohols in their characteristics, are often added as ingredients in high quality skin care products. All essential oils are characterized by a lower weight to fixed oils. This means that all of the often wonderful effects associated with essential oils are absorbed quite readily into the bloodstream. It is important to note that some essential oils can cause irritation for some skin types so it's worth having an informed discussion with your skincare supplier when purchasing. Fixed oils on the other hand are absorbed at an extremely slow rate. Consequently, these oils will sit on the surface of the skin and act to lubricate it, the reason we use them in the first place.

Many mainstream lotions contain ingredients other than fixed oils and essential oils – namely, synthetic fragrances and preservatives. Unfortunately, most of these types of substances can cross the skin and are readily taken up into the bloodstream.

Information about the nature of our skin helps us understand how ingredients in skincare products actually penetrate the skin and enter the blood stream. If we are trying to maintain a toxin-free body, clearly it's a logical choice to choose natural and organic body care products.

The benefits of natural products as opposed to general skincare are that natural organic ingredients and plant-based oils (that are cold pressed without solvents to ensure their purity), along with organic healing herbs, such as:

- Achillea mille folium (organic yarrow) herb
- Comfrey leaf
- Lavendula angustifolia (lavender flower)
- Hamamelis virginiana (wild harvested witch hazel) leaf
- Plantago major (organic plantain) leaf
- Calendula officinalis (organic calendula) flowers
- Rosa centifolia (rose petals).

Contain no artificial colours, preservatives and fragrances, and should be all cruelty and toxin free.

Medicinal plants and herbs have been used throughout the centuries, and now modern science has confirmed the earth has many varied offerings that can support expectant and new mothers.

This knowledge is comforting and soothing and helps women feel that they are doing the very best for their pregnancy, bodies and babies.

Of course a healthy pregnancy and skin should include a good whole foods diet, plenty of water, exercise, sleep, daily oil applications, and avoidance of any chemical exposures. This will ensure great benefits to new baby and mother.

In summary the major difference in term of pregnancy skincare is intent and awareness. It's about being more informed about the products you use on your body, as soon a new baby is coming into this world, and what you do before they arrive is just as important as what you do after.

Claire

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