



Advising customers about scars and stretch marks

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What customers might be looking for advice?

According to a recent survey of pharmacists¹, pregnant women, new mums and young women are the customers who most often ask them for advice on scarring and stretch marks, however, any of the following groups may seek your help.

- **Pregnant women and new mums:**

Between 50-90% of pregnant women will develop stretch marks, usually in the latter half of the pregnancy. Women may be looking for advice to help prevent them from occurring or ways to reduce the appearance of existing ones. New mums may also have a scar from a C-section delivery.

- **Teenagers with stretch marks:**

Stretch marks occur when the body is subjected to rapid periods of growth or weight gain. They can commonly develop during puberty growth spurts or when breasts develop.

- **Weight loss customers:** Following a period of weight loss, customers may be looking for ways to reduce any stretch marks left on their skin.

- **Post-operative patients:** Not all patients will receive advice on scar care when they have an operation so they may pop into their local pharmacy to find out what they can do to reduce any scarring left by a surgical procedure.

- **People with a burn, cut or scrape:**

Minor skin damage is unlikely to leave a scar but even fairly small cuts and burns may leave behind a mark.

- **People with acne or chicken pox:**

Both can cause depressed scars, called atrophic scars, which can be hard to reduce the appearance of.



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¹Survey of 100 pharmacists conducted by 3GEM Research & Insights in April 2018.

How to proactively approach patients about scarring and stretch marks

1 in 5 pharmacists admit to feeling slightly uncomfortable discussing sensitive topics like scarring and stretch marks¹, and this is likely to extend to members of the pharmacy team. Here's a few ways to initiate a positive discussion.

- **Reassure them:** Scars and stretch marks are extremely common so you can reassure customers that it's something you are used to advising on. Try saying: 'We often see people looking for advice in this area, it's really common'.
- **Understand more:** To be able to advise your customer, ask open questions beginning with 'what' or 'how'. Questions like 'how did you get your scar' or 'what caused the scarring' can help you understand the situation more and demonstrate that you are interested and listening.
- **Be positive:** Both scars and stretch marks will naturally fade over time (up to 2 years) but there are ways customers can help to improve the appearance of them. Try asking: 'When did you get your scar/stretch marks?' If they say less than 18 months ago you can reassure them that the scars/stretch marks are still maturing, so will continue to improve for up to 2 years from when they first got it.
- **Be sensitive:** Ask your customer if they would prefer to talk in private and move the conversation to a consultation room.

- **Ask more questions:** Don't assume they are only bothered by the appearance of scars and stretch marks. Stretch marks can feel tight and itchy and some scars, such as those on joints, can interfere with mobility so be sure to ask them what aspect of their scar or stretch marks is troubling them so you can advise them accordingly. Ask 'how does your scar feel' or 'what impact does having this scar/stretch mark have on you?'

Top tip: Running a health promotion campaign and display on managing scars and stretch marks may encourage more people visiting your pharmacy to ask questions and seek help.

58%

of pharmacists said they do not actively approach patients to offer advice on scarring, without being approached first¹

What can you advise them?

Scars



- ✓ **Ensure any wounds have healed** before they apply any products; this usually takes around 3 weeks but can vary.
- ✓ If a wound is still fresh, **keeping it clean and dry** to help prevent infection is really important.
- ✓ **Protect new scars from sun exposure** as it can cause pigmentation.
- ✓ Once initial healing has taken place, **massage a moisturiser or an oil**, such as Bio-Oil, into the scar daily to keep the scar hydrated and soften the scar tissue.
- ✓ There may be a **temporary loss of sensation** due to interruption of the nerves, this will change over time.
- ✓ **Scars mature for up to 2 years** with any redness reducing over time. The texture of scars will also often change but will never completely disappear.

Stretch marks



- ✓ **Itching can often be the first sign** of stretch marks but there may not be any signs.
- ✓ **To help prevent stretch marks in pregnancy**, massage a moisturiser or an oil in daily to improve skin elasticity and help it to stretch. Advise to start at the beginning of the 2nd trimester and massage the abdomen, hips and breasts twice daily.
- ✓ Stretch marks are more likely to occur **during rapid growth or weight gain or during pregnancy**, so advise your customer to try and gain weight steadily if possible.
- ✓ **New stretch marks will fade** from red/purple to fine silvery lines that are harder to see but massaging a cream or oil, such as Bio-Oil, in to the skin can help this process.

Where can you find out more?

Bio-Oil has produced a range of resources for healthcare professionals in order to:

- Improve the advice given to patients
- Ensure healthcare professionals are confident discussing this topic
- Encourage patients to self-care for their scars and stretch marks

You can read and download them at www.bio-oilprofessional.co.uk

Notes



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