



The thin black line

If you notice a dark line running from above your bellybutton down to your pubic bone, don't be alarmed! Called the linea negra, this pregnancy phenomenon is a deposit of melanin (the pigment that gives skin its color) that usually appears in the second or third trimester and is more common in women with dark skin. Unfortunately, there's not much you can do about it while you're expecting. Over-the-counter lightening creams aren't effective because the pigment lies too deep within the skin. The line should fade within a year of giving birth; if not, chemical peels and lasers (which should only be used after you've finished breastfeeding) can also help.

TAKE COVER

Foundations that will conceal pregnancy-induced imperfections

Sheer Cover (\$30) is a natural mineral powder that can be custom blended to match your skin color.

Dermablend Smooth Indulgence Foundation (\$25) evens out skin tone by hiding even the darkest melasma ("mask of pregnancy") blotches.

Maybelline Superstay Silky Foundation SPF 12 (\$11) comes in 12 shades and offers all-day coverage while protecting skin from damaging UV rays.

SKII Air Touch Foundation (\$150, shown) mists your face with an even coat of foundation in seconds.



Safe skin care

For a worry-free pregnancy, stay away from these commonly used remedies.

We asked New York-based pediatric and adult dermatologist Jody A. Levine, M.D., who is expecting her fourth child, for advice on which prescription drugs and over-the-counter product ingredients to avoid.

1. ACCUTANE This retinoid (or vitamin A derivative) taken orally for severe acne is known to cause birth defects of the brain and heart. Doctors even recommend waiting at least 30 days after discontinuing the drug before you try to conceive. You should also avoid applying any topical retinoid products, including Avage, Differin, Renova, Retin-A, retinols, retinyl palmitate and Tazorac.

2. TETRACYCLINE This antibiotic acne treatment has been shown to cross the placenta, potentially staining the developing baby's teeth and impairing skeletal growth. It should also be avoided if you are nursing, as it is excreted in breast milk.

3. TOPICAL SALICYLIC ACID This beta hydroxy acid that's used on acne-prone skin has not been shown to be harmful, but when taken orally, salicylic acid (aka aspirin) has been associated with birth defects and bleeding later in pregnancy. Dermatologists suggest avoiding salicylic acid in any form.

4. BENZOYL PEROXIDE While there have been no animal or human studies on the use of benzoyl peroxide, an antibacterial ingredient, during pregnancy, some may be absorbed when it is applied topically. You should avoid using products with this ingredient.