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# A farewell to stretchmarks

**A** REVOLUTIONARY laser treatment means women with disfiguring stretchmarks may be able to have them improved dramatically. Seventy-five per cent of women develop stretchmarks — medically known as striae — during pregnancy and they also commonly affect adolescent girls during the growth spurt.

Appearing as red, raised lines, the marks become purple and eventually flatten, often fading to form shiny silvery or red streaks. In Ellie Waldock's case, the mass of stretchmarks on her lower abdomen seemed certain to put an end to the modelling career which she had intended to resume after the birth of her daughter.

Ellie, who is 22 and lives in Stevenage, Herts, with her partner Chris and one-year-old Deyonne, had Erbium laser treatment two months ago and is delighted with the results.

Until now, there has been no effective treatment for stretchmarks and the only option has been to try to disguise them with fade-out creams or make-up.

Although the Erbium laser has been used for some time for acne scarring, it is only recently that the problem of stretchmarks has been tackled with this laser. Other lasers used for facial resurfacing are said to have produced too much redness and swelling when they were tried on stretch marks.

The Erbium laser, it is claimed, can produce dramatic results with few side-effects.

It works by emitting an intense beam of light which vaporises the tissue. This removes the top layer of skin and, it is claimed, stimulates collagen production and smooths the outer layer of skin, which continues to gently tighten the skin for months.

'I first noticed the stretchmarks when I was around seven months pregnant,' says Ellie. 'I admit I'd put on a lot of weight but I don't think I deserved these dreadful, jagged dark purple marks. The marks on my tummy bothered me the most. They were really disfiguring.'

'I asked my GP if there was any-



By **BONNIE ESTRIDGE**

thing that could be done, but the answer seemed to be nothing. This was very depressing because I had to face up to the fact that there could be no way I'd be able to return to modelling.

'I decided to make some inquiries into cosmetic surgery — but I'll admit that I thought I was clutching at straws. I found cosmetic surgeon Mr Jaya Prakash through the Surgical Advisory Service. Although he felt I would be suitable for the new laser treatment, I have to admit that at first I was still reluctant. I was scared it might end up even worse.'

'Mr Prakash explained that one should not expect a miracle, but seemed confident of a pretty good improvement. So, I decided to go for it. I was in hospital overnight. A local anaesthetic cream numbed my tummy and I opted for a full sedation so I wouldn't know anything about it.'

**W**HEN I came round, my tummy was not sore, but very red. The nurses came in all night to change the gauze covers and put ice packs on my tummy. The next day it looked so livid that I wondered what on earth I had done.'

'But once home, I religiously rubbed moisturising cream over my tummy and kept it wrapped in clingfilm, changing the dressings every three or four hours.'

'The itching was dreadful. I had to take antibiotics to stop infection and amica to reduce swelling.'

'Thankfully, by about day five, it started to clear up and there was a continual improvement. Mr Prakash seemed very pleased with the results, even though the skin

still looked rather pink. He explained that the colour would fade completely over the months. My tummy is still slightly pink, but the improvement is fantastic — around 80 pc.'

Mr Prakash says: 'Ellie was unfortunate in that her stretchmarks were bad for someone of her age and with good skin tone.'

'Putting on a lot of weight doesn't help, but that's not the whole story. There's nothing one can do to prevent stretchmarks during pregnancy and so-called special ante-natal creams will make the skin nice and soft — but that's all.'

'Although nothing can wipe stretchmarks out completely and take the skin back to how it was before pregnancy, we have seen fantastic improvements.'

'The best results and most dramatic improvements depend on good skin tone and texture. Also, the tummy should be as flat as possible — it won't work on very "pouchy" stomachs.'

Dr David Fenton, consultant dermatologist at St Thomas' Hospital, London, says: 'The treatment by Erbium laser sounds very interesting, but I have not previously heard of its use for this purpose. There have not been any actual scientific studies written up anywhere and this is important for the changes in the skin in the long term to be assessed properly.'

The cost of abdominal stretchmark resurfacing with the Erbium laser is £1,500, which includes one night's stay in the clinic.



Back in good shape: Ellie Waldock is all set to continue as a model having lost her stretch marks through pioneering laser treatment