

# DR JUSTIN TUCKER

OBSTETRICS | FERTILITY

## SKIN, HAIR AND COSMETIC TREATMENT IN PREGNANCY

*Just because you're pregnant or breastfeeding doesn't mean you don't want to look your best!!! In fact, with all the stressors that pregnancy places on your body, it is even more important that we do all we can to make you feel confident and positive. The good news is that most cosmetically focussed treatments are perfectly safe in pregnancy as well as breastfeeding. Below we outline the evidence on a few of the more common ones. What follows is largely based on the advice given by the MotherSafe service and the Royal Hospital for Women, both of whom we thank.*



### Cosmetics, Moisturisers and other Skin Care Products

Cosmetics and over the counter skin products generally contain ingredients that are unlikely to be harmful in pregnancy as they are used by applying to the skin (rather than swallowing a tablet). Benzoyl peroxide, salicylic acid and glycolic acid are ingredients found in many acne treatments and cosmetics. They are considered to be safe to use in pregnancy.

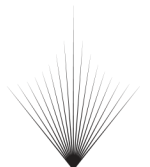
Hydroquinone, an over the counter skin product for skin bleaching absorbs through skin should be avoided while pregnant. Minoxidil for hair growth or tretinoin for acne are skin products requiring a prescription and should also not be used.

There has also been concern over use of vitamin A in pregnancy. However, these concerns are associated with amounts of vitamin A taken by mouth in large doses in medications such as Roaccutane. Vitamin A that is present in over the counter cosmetics is generally in insignificant quantities and is minimally absorbed through the skin and is therefore safe. Probably best to avoid any unbranded products sourced over the internet as often the actual ingredients cannot be verified.

### Hair removal creams and bleaching agents

Hair removal creams usually contain a product called thioglycolic acid. Although there is no specific data on its absorption, because the concentration of the chemical is low and the time applied to the skin is short, it would not be anticipated to be harmful in pregnancy. The creams may also contain low levels of the chemicals, sodium and calcium hydroxide. These chemicals form a normal part of dietary intake and use on the skin would not be expected to cause any alteration to levels in the body. Therefore, hair removal creams are safe to use in pregnancy.

Agents such as hydrogen peroxide are used for hair bleaching. Again, they are generally applied for short periods and in low concentrations and so are considered safe. However, products with hydroquinone should be avoided.



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## Sunscreens

Sunscreens contain various ingredients including oxybenzone, octocrylene and octisalate. Absorption through the skin is generally minimal and as a result, sunscreens do not pose a risk to pregnant and breastfeeding women.

## Hair

Many pregnant women express concern about chemical exposure from various treatments such as hair colouring and hair straightening. However, the actual exposure to an unborn baby is negligible because hair dyes and other treatments are applied to the hair and scalp and not ingested. Pregnant women can therefore safely have their hair done during pregnancy without putting their baby at risk.

## Nails

Women may have concerns about having their nails done during pregnancy. This is due to concern regarding chemical and dust exposure via inhalation or through the skin. However, because exposure is for a relatively brief period, it is not anticipated that any nail work would cause problems in pregnancy or breastfeeding.

## Tanning products

Spray tans or lotions use dihydroxyacetone in varying concentrations. It is thought that absorption via the skin is very low and it is therefore considered safe in pregnant women. For spray tanning, it is advisable to use protective measures such as nose plugs or masks to avoid excess inhalation.

## Botox

There is minimal research regarding botox use in pregnancy however the small doses of botox injected into a muscle are unlikely to enter the circulation. Furthermore, it does not cross the placenta so even if used, it is not able to reach an unborn baby. For these reasons, botox is safe to use in pregnancy.

## Laser

Laser treatment is most commonly used for hair removal. The laser is a light that heats the surface of the skin only. It does not penetrate beyond the skin and thus poses no risk to an unborn baby during pregnancy.

## Breastfeeding

Cosmetics, skincare products, sunscreen and hair removal or bleaching creams are generally considered safe to use while breastfeeding. However, hydroquinone should be avoided as the absorption is high. It is also safe to have any hair, nail or tanning treatments. Obviously, breastfeeding women should avoid application of spray tan to the nipple and areola of their breast as this comes into direct contact with your baby.

