



## “What are these purple marks?”

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A 21-year-old male weightlifter is bothered by the appearance of purple markings in his axillae. He has experienced significant weight gain and weight loss in the past few years. He has a family history of diabetes and takes no medications.

### 1. What is the most likely diagnosis?

- a) Striae distensae
- b) Lichen planus
- c) Psoriasis
- d) Impetigo
- e) Solar elastosis

### 2. What is the scenario for the development of these lesions?

- a) Pregnancy
- b) Growth spurt
- c) Prolonged systemic steroids
- d) Prolonged topical steroids
- e) All of the above

### 3. How might you manage this condition?

- a) Reassure as to benign nature
- b) Reassure that appearance will improve with time
- c) Pulse dye laser or intense pulse light
- d) Topical retinoids
- e) All of the above

Striae distensae (stretch marks) is a common skin finding and can be of significant distress to those affected. It represents a combination of epidermal atrophy and linear dermal scarring. Increased stress on connective tissue, as a result of vertical (growth spurt) or horizontal growth (pregnancy, obesity), results in striae. The shoulders of bodybuilders can similarly be affected. Prolonged use of topical, or



Figure 1. Purple marks in the axilla.

oral steroids, or Cushing’s syndrome can similarly result in striae. There is likely a genetic propensity to develop striae.

Patients should be notified that striae are both common and normal developments. One-third of adolescent males, two-thirds of adolescent females and 90% of pregnant women are affected. Early striae show a thinned skin with a pink hue and occasional pruritus. With time, they enlarge and become red-purple in appearance with a finely wrinkled surface. Mature, stable striae are white, depressed and irregularly-shaped bands which run along the lines of skin tension.

Treatment is difficult. Patients can expect striae to improve with time. Topical tretinoin, used early on, has shown some benefit. Various lasers have also been used with some benefit and, less commonly, trichloroacetic acid can be applied in low concentrations over several visits. White (mature) striae are very difficult to treat, but fortunately, are far less noticeable. Dx

Answers: 1-a; 2-e; 3-e

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