

Dark Spots and Uneven Skintone



Of the many skin disorders that affect the darker races, **hyperpigmentation**, (uneven skin tone and dark spots), is the chief complaint. Many skin problems, medications, medical conditions and esthetic services can lead to hyperpigmentation, including the aftermath of acne, razor bumps, melasma, chemical irritation, eczema, friction, electrolysis, allergic reactions, abrasive scrubs, certain prescription medications and hormones, obesity, thyroid disease, chicken pox, sunburn, waxing, electrolysis, insect bites, picking, wiping the eyes, rubbing tampering with the skin, trauma, tweezing, surgical procedures, over-zealous microdermabrasion and chemical peels.

Hormonal and post-inflammatory **hyperpigmentation on all races can be improved dramatically** with light acid peels, conservative use of topical alpha hydroxy acids and retinoids in formulations containing hydroquinone and other brighteners, sun avoidance and diligent use of non-comedogenic, full-spectrum sunblock suited to skin type.



The **key to controlling hyperpigmentation** includes having a complete medical history and addressing specific lifestyle issues. Hormones, pregnancy, unchecked acne flare-ups, sun exposure, allergic reactions, over-scrubbing, eczema and sensitivities to ingredients such as hydroquinone, glycolic acid and Retin-A® and inappropriate beauty procedures are only a few of the many factors that can make or break any dark spot lightening program. The exact cause of the skin disorder, and the aggravating factors that worsen it, must be addressed before pigmentation problems can be improved or overcome. If you have acne, razor bumps, "rashy" skin, take sun-sensitizing medications or are overweight, these must be factored in to the plan of action.

Kojic acid, licorice root extract, bearberry extract, arbutin, azelaic acid and ascorbic acid are welcome developments for those allergic or sensitive to hydroquinone. Like hydroquinone, they can be combined with glycolic and lactic acid, whose small molecules can penetrate the pore and act as a vehicle to the target tissues. Unlike hydroquinone, they have a lower incidence of adverse reactions.

Discuss past hydroquinone usage and subsequent reaction, sun care and sun avoidance. Passive sun exposure, such as riding in a car, waiting for the bus, working in the sun, gardening and outdoor sports poses the greatest risk. Many people mistakenly feel that they do not need to use sun protection for intermittent sun exposure.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- 1) Lose weight. Dark pigmentation is much easier to address if you aren't overweight. Address the exact causes of the darkening, no matter what they are. Ingrown hairs, tweezing and picking, shaving irritation, obesity and too much sun exposure are examples of what can make one person's problem more difficult to treat.

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- 2) Avoid the sun! Never skip your sunblock. Reapply your full-spectrum product often and include the entire neck and hands.
 - 3) Get your car windows tinted to the legal limit (not more).
 - 4) If your skin gets irritated, skip a day or two of all “active” products in the problem area and use only cortisone cream and sunblock. Call you skin therapist if necessary.
 - 5) Get a Treatment every two weeks. This superficial exfoliation allows therapeutic products to penetrate better and boosts your efforts at home.
 - 6) Get follow-up visits no less than every four weeks and get product potency and lifestyle issues reevaluated.
 - 7) Get refills before you run out or you may have to start over.
 - 8) Reapply sunblock hourly when golfing, doing double days in training camp, running, swimming, outdoor labor, vacations and even walking.
 - 9) Do not apply scented aftershaves or cologne on any exposed body parts because perfume + Sun = dark spots.
 - 10) Wear 100% UV protection sunglasses at all times; you can get your glasses “coated” at your optometrist’s office.
 - 11) Remember to apply sunblock to all exposed body parts (especially hands, neck and ears) thirty minutes before sun exposure, even on overcast days.
 - 12) Do not scrub off dead skin cells if you start to peel or flake. Apply a sulfur clay mask in the A.M., allow it to dry 10 minutes and shower off with fingertips only.
 - 13) This will help remove the dead skin cells without irritation. Don’t use washcloths, buffing pads or abrasive scrubs. Don’t rub with towels! Ask for help if you need it.
 - 14) Apply retinoid (vitamin A) and skin lighteners, creams and astringents with a light touch. Start every other night at first. Always apply a scant amount, massage into skin until all traces are absorbed, and slowly build up to nightly usage exactly as directed. Avoid the entire mouth area and smile lines every other day. Never dot lighteners onto spots only or apply too thick; this causes light halos around the spots and irritation and darkening of the spot itself. Avoid the mouth area for a few days if it becomes darkened, too dry or irritated. 09/14