



Secrets of SPOTLESS SKIN

Sheree Mutton

investigates the causes of those unsightly dark spots and discovers the best treatments and products to banish hyperpigmentation.

WHEN IT COMES to preserving a youthful and smooth complexion, wrinkles are usually the

number one concern for women. Yet research suggests that hyperpigmentation can be just as much of a problem, leaving skin looking dull and adding years to your face. “Colour variation is, along with wrinkles, synergistic in our appearance of ageing,” says Associate Professor Greg Goodman, from the Dermatology Institute of Victoria. In fact, one such study in Austria by doctors Karl Grammer and Bernhard Fink found that facial skin discolouration can make you look up to 12 years older. The good news is that hyperpigmentation is a common condition and can be treated with

a range of new technologies and topical fading agents.

Causes of hyperpigmentation

Hyperpigmentation is the presence of excess and uneven melanin in the skin. It occurs when cells known as melanocytes become damaged due to sun exposure, free radicals such as smoke and pollution, inflammation or hormones. This can result in dark spots, skin discolouration, blotchy patches, ephelides (freckles) and melasma, which is also referred to as the “mask of pregnancy” because many women develop the brown patches on their face during pregnancy. We all know they are unsightly and difficult to cover with make-up, so it’s no shock to learn that 81 per cent of Australian women said they were >

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said they were concerned by facial pigmentation.

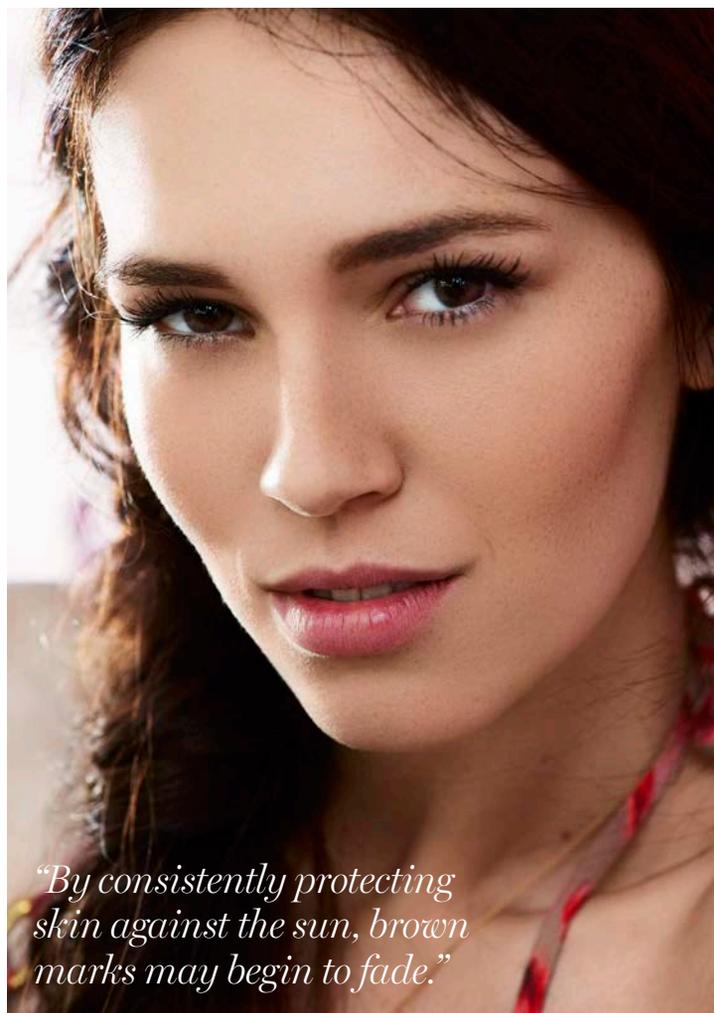
concerned by facial pigmentation in the Skincare Usage and Attitude Study of 2009. In order to treat hyperpigmentation effectively and reclaim glowing skin, you first need to identify the cause.

According to dermatologist Dr John Sullivan, sunlight and particularly UVA is a big complexion killer in Australia. "Sun damage produces uneven and blotchy skin changes," he says. "Many [people] with olive skin feel they are protected against the sun's harmful effects and although they are to a certain degree, they will still get accelerated ageing changes with sun exposure."

So if you're after porcelain, dewy skin like Cate Blanchett and Nicole Kidman, the first rule is to avoid long periods in the sun and wear SPF50+ sunscreen daily to protect your skin. "Make sure your sunscreen offers broad-spectrum cover against UVA and UVB," explains Rachel McAdam, Scientific Communications and Education Manager for La Roche-Posay.

"By consistently protecting skin against the sun, brown marks may begin to fade."

Unfortunately for many of us, the sun is not our only skin enemy. Being exposed to a range of free radicals, including pollution, smoke and stress on a daily basis, can lead to dark spots as can acne. The spots that develop following a pimple are called post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation.



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Then there are hormonal changes. Pregnancy, the oral contraceptive pill and hormone replacement therapy (HRT) after menopause can all wreak havoc on the skin. "Melasma or chloasma is partly due to a person's skin type, with a big component due to UVA and hormones, made worse with many oral contraceptives and pregnancy," says Dr Sullivan.

"Where melasma mainly affects the face [cheeks, nose, forehead and upper lip], the

HRT-related one can be more the forearms or chest."

Fading and lightening products

So how can you get rid of stubborn dark spots for good? The truth is, it can be a lengthy process. Topical fading and brightening agents have flooded the market in the past five years, but which ones actually work and what ingredients should you look out for? Dr Sullivan favours alpha hydroxy acids (glycolic acid, lactic acid, citric acid) and beta hydroxy acids in the form of salicylic acid. "AHAs and BHAs can enhance penetration of other agents and remove surface scale and layers that highlight pigmentation," he says.

Rachel McAdam agrees. "These exfoliate the top layer of melanin-filled cells, encouraging a fresher, less pigmented layer."

Other ingredients that have skin lightening and anti-ageing properties include vitamin C, retinol and niacinamide (vitamin B3). Results from fading and lightening products are usually visible within eight to 12 weeks, but make sure you avoid further sun exposure.

Visit a professional

If you have more severe hyperpigmentation, you might consider booking in to see a >

8 OF THE BEST CORRECTORS

- 1 La Roche-Posay Pigmentclar Serum, 30ml, \$59.95.
- 2 Ultracuticals Ultra Brightening Serum, 30ml, \$135.
- 3 Garnier Dark Spot Corrector, 50ml, \$16.95.
- 4 L'Oréal Revitalift Laser X3 Complete Care SPF15, 50ml, \$44.95.
- 5 Avène D-Pigment, 30ml, \$61.95.
- 6 Clinique Even Better Clinical Dark Spot Corrector, 50ml, \$92.
- 7 Sisley Paris Intensive Dark Spot Corrector, 7ml, \$165.
- 8 Skin Doctors Even Brighter, 30ml, \$39.95.



dermatologist or skin therapist. “For sun-damaged, uneven and blotchy pigmented skin, there are a number of treatments you can have to help repair the damage,” according to Dr Sullivan. “These include chemical or fruit acid peels, Intense Pulsed Light (IPL), along with laser and light treatments.”

Peels

A peel involves a professional applying a solution (usually containing glycolic acid or lactic acid) to remove a layer or layers of the skin. Remember, the strength and type of the skin peel chosen should be tailored to your type of hyperpigmentation, as excessive skin irritation can make the problem worse. Salicylic acid peels are better for hormonal-related hyperpigmentation.

Results: Peels can help diminish the dark spots to reveal a brighter complexion. Dr Sullivan says superficial peels “have minimal downtime with maybe some transient redness, dryness and skin flaking the following day.”

Cost: \$80 to \$150 for superficial or light peels, about \$1000 for deeper peels.

Intense Pulsed Light (IPL)

IPL is the use of intense pulses of non-coherent light and is one of the most popular treatments for hyperpigmentation. The procedure, which involves short bursts of light, is like being flicked with an elastic band, but is tolerable. “IPL is good for general sun damage, uneven pigmentation, redness and capillaries, along with skin rejuvenation,” says Dr Sullivan, adding that “results are best when repeated several times”.

Results: Dark spots normally lift off the face in about five to 10 days. Downtime



following IPL can vary depending on a person’s skin type, the nature of the problem and treatment parameters, but this tends to involve a sunburn-like reaction for a few days and dry peeling skin.

Cost: \$400 to \$700 per treatment for full face.

Fractional laser

The buzz around fractional laser is largely due to A-list celebrities singing its praises, but this type of laser is a more intense treatment for hyperpigmentation.

A topical analgesic is

applied before the treatment because it is quite painful. “Ablative or stronger laser devices, such as fractionated and resurfacing lasers, can have greater benefits for more severe sun damage, but have greater downtime and risks,” explains Dr Sullivan.

Results: It creates fresher, smoother and younger-looking skin, but be prepared to have redness, swelling and peeling for up to seven days after treatment.

Cost: Fractional non-ablative resurfacing can cost from \$700 to \$1500. Fractional ablative resurfacing usually costs \$1800 to \$2500 and upwards.

TOP TIPS TO PREVENT HYPERPIGMENTATION

- 1 Stop smoking
- 2 Protect yourself from the sun
- 3 Include antioxidants in your diet



Microdermabrasion

During a microdermabrasion treatment, a machine for exfoliation gently removes the outermost layer of dead skin cells from the epidermis.

Results: Texture is improved to give you a more glowing complexion, but it usually only has minimal or temporary benefits for hyperpigmentation. Associate Professor Greg Goodman says the treatment is good for “setting the scene”. That is, getting the skin into a condition to make the most of skincare and other procedures.

Cost: \$150 to \$200 per treatment. #

REMEMBER TO SEE YOUR DOCTOR

If you develop a new pigmented skin lesion that is different to your other spots or notice a change in a mole, you should have it checked by your doctor promptly.