



permanent pigment clumps and scarring. Not surprisingly, hydroquinone was banned in over-the-counter products throughout Africa, and skin-lightening products gained a terrible reputation. Today, more women are embracing their natural beauty, yet according to Clinique's Global Truth in Beauty Survey, a broad selection of South African women interviewed ranked uneven skin tone as their biggest skincare challenge – above wrinkles. Makes sense, considering the amount of sun we're exposed to on a daily basis.

So what exactly are we talking about? Pigmentation, or melasma, is a chronic skin condition where patches of darker pigment appear on normal skin tone, often on the forehead, lower jaw and around the eyes, neck and hands. It is a dynamic (active) condition that needs lifelong management, says Dr Maureen Allem, founder of Skin, Body & Health Renewal and the Oasis Spas. It's important to know this: hyperpigmentation is not freckles – freckles are genetic; pigmentation is caused by certain factors. Skin brightening is not skin lightening (total lightening of the skin) – its function is to fade blotchy pigment so that the natural skin tone looks even.

There are different types of pigmentation, requiring different kinds of treatment, depending on how deep it is in the skin...

HORMONAL PIGMENTATION

Increased oestrogen levels (in pregnancy, when using contraceptive pills or HRT) are thought to trigger pigmentation. The darkened pigment occurs in symmetrical patterns on the forehead, cheekbones and along the jaw line. 'Discontinuing use of contraceptives rarely clears the pigmentation and it can last for many years afterwards,' Dr Allem explains. 'It has to be managed daily, by applying active pigment-regulating products. One day of sunburn can set you back.'

HYPERPIGMENTATION

This is mainly caused by chronic inflammation of the skin due to injury – acne, dermatitis (eczema, psoriasis), aggressive chemical peels, severe sunburn, wounds or irritation. Post-inflammatory pigmentation usually appears where the injury actually occurred.

DERMAL PIGMENTATION

The most common form of pigmentation. The sun's UVA rays stimulate melanin (the body's natural brown pigmentation) to develop on the skin after sun exposure. The deeper the pigment,

the more difficult it is to treat. It appears as sunspots on the temples, nose, cheeks and sides of the face, usually starting with the first signs of sun damage, says Dr Allem, and getting worse with age.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

'Dermal pigmentation is easily treated with a combination of superficial chemical peels, microdermabrasion, Limelight or IPL laser procedures, together with a home topical cream and sunblock,' Dr Allem explains. The home treatment may well contain hydroquinone, which is perfectly safe and legal under medical supervision. It has to be used short-term though, and only on affected areas, repeated once-yearly.

'Limelight laser procedures (not suitable for ethnic skins) can target brown pigmentation in the upper layers of the skin,' she continues, 'In one to two weeks, darkened spots will flake off and fade.' The non-invasive Laser Genesis treatment can penetrate into the dermis to reach the pigment. It gently heats the dermis, causing unwanted pigment to break up into smaller particles, which move up to the skin's surface, where they're easily removed with exfoliation.

For mild to moderate pigmentation, home-use skin brightening treatments can be very effective. For severe pigmentation, see a dermatologist or doctor specialising in skin treatment. □

CARDINAL RULES FOR EVEN-TONED SKIN

There are no quick-fixes. Treatment requires time, patience and, most of all, doing the routine every day according to instructions. You can't expect instant results. It takes two months for old pigmented skin cells to slough off and healthier, normally pigmented cells to rise to the top.

It's best to do your active skin-brightening treatment in winter when the sun is less harsh.

Protect, protect, protect in summer.

Don't be too aggressive in treatment, as this could cause even more pigmentation. Choose gentle cleansing and exfoliating products, like Elizabeth Arden Skin Illuminating Smoothing Cleanser, R260, as well as enzymatic exfoliators.

Find an effective DIY skin-brightening treatment range. Tip: use at least two of the products (one must be a serum or concentrate) from a brightening range, as they're designed to

enhance each other's actions and be more effective.

Prevent further melanin stimulation by using a sunscreen or day cream with SPF 30+ every day on your face and other affected areas to protect against UVA rays.

It is vital to use very high SPF if you use a skin-lightening product. Bioderma Photoderm Max SPF 50+ UVA 38 Tinted (R179.95), Dermalogica Protection 50 Sport (R445), Filorga UV-Defence SPF50+ (R575).

Try to avoid these pigmentation-inducing culprits: Wearing fragrance when going in the sun. You could end up with pigmentation on your skin. Certain medications such as tetracyclines, diuretics, Roaccutane and anaesthetics. Skincare ingredients such as oestradiol, oestrogen, genistein, black cohosh, chasteberry, hops, red clover, soy and wild yams.

PICK YOUR POTIONS

READ YOUR LABELS

When buying non-prescription skin-brightening products, check the label. If you see the following, you know the product has ingredients that are proven to help combat hyper-pigmentation:

arbutin, kojic acid (a plant extract), extracts of licorice, cucumber, mulberry, raspberry and bearberry, turmeric root, retinol, resorcinol, beta-hydroxy acid, azelaic acid, vitamin C (including magnesium

ascorbyl phosphate), vitamin B3 (niacinamide), biotin.

NEW PRODUCTS WE LIKE

Skinceuticals Advanced Pigment Corrector, R1 645 for 30ml (1). Their claim: it's proven as effective as 4% hydroquinone + 0.025% tretinoin (vitamin A). It is highly effective and safe for reducing stubborn discolouration and its reoccurrence, plus it boosts skin tone evenness and radiance.

Lancôme DreamTone, R850 (2), is a new multibenefit care product which targets all skin tone defects – from unsightly dark spots and unevenness to specific colour irregularities. It is available in three customised formulas. Also great: Eucerin Even Brighter Spot Corrector, R159.95 (3), Garnier Dark Spot Corrector Daily Illuminating Moisturiser, R109.95 (4), Clinique Even Better Clinical Dark Spot Corrector, R590 for 30ml and R840 for 50ml (5).

CAMOUFLAGE THE ISSUE

If you want to cover up as you wait for your skincare to kick in, a high-cover foundation is your best bet. Try Estée Lauder's Double Wear Maximum Cover Camouflage Makeup for Face and Body SPF 15, R415 (6), M.A.C Studio Fix Fluid, R310 (7), Black Opal Cover All Plus Total Coverage Concealing Foundation, R147.95 (8), or M.A.C Studio Tech Foundation, R330 (9).

ORIGINAL SKIN

Uneven skin tone is a nightmare for many of us. But wait, there is light ahead, says Daniela Massenz

Skin lightening. Two innocent words with a big, dirty reputation, raising the spectre of the bad old days when black women used skin-bleaching products to lighten their skin because they thought 'pale is beautiful'. Tragically, many of these unregulated products had the opposite result. Containing unacceptably high levels of the bleaching agent hydroquinone, and toxic ingredients like mercury, they did make the skin lighter, but they also caused disfiguring,



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