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Spotlight

While it was once a skin concern we begrudgingly accepted, hyperpigmentation is quickly fading, thanks to the latest treatments and products that get straight to the source.
By Remy Rippon.

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You have a small amount of hyperpigmentation,” says clinical facialist Melanie Grant on a Monday afternoon, right before I fell under the hypnosis of an Omnilux treatment. I’d never given much thought to the slightly speckled skin tone hovering just above my lip line – textbook hormone-related hyperpigmentation, I later learnt, and an easy fix that, according to Grant, would do wonders for my complexion. “When we do treat hyperpigmentation, it makes the biggest difference, because we’re conditioned to really focus on acne or wrinkles or fine lines or pores, but it’s the pigment that makes the biggest difference in someone’s overall complexion,” she explains. At a beauty launch later in the week, I found out that more than half of the women in the room had battled with some form of hyperpigmentation, defined as uneven or excess pigment in the skin and often resembling a speckling of birth marks.



As it turns out, our makeshift focus group was fairly indicative of the rest of the nation. Of the Australian women surveyed by Clinique in 2010, hyperpigmentation affected 62 per cent. Since most instances of hyperpigmentation are spurred on by sun exposure, the smartest time to tackle the issue is in winter, when you’re not spending weekends at the beach. But be warned, the most effective approach is two-fold: in-salon treatments based on the type of pigmentation married with a targeted at-home beauty regimen. And the golden rule? Adhere to it religiously.

GET TO KNOW IT

While uneven or darkened skin tone may seem alike from one person to the next, to a well-trained eye, hyperpigmentation can present itself in vastly different forms. This, however, makes it rather simple to categorise. “During a consultation, where we find out the history of the client and so on, it’s easy to work out what we’re dealing with,” says Grant, who frequently treats hyperpigmented skin at her Sydney clinic, Melanie Grant Skin. These are the four most common types of hyperpigmentation.

UV-induced: also known as age spots, hyperpigmentation from UV exposure usually bubbles to the surface later in life, but can also present itself in younger skin.

Melasma: affectionately known as the “pregnancy mask”, melasma comes to life during pregnancy or when women are taking hormone-altering medications such as the contraceptive pill. It presents itself much more quickly than other types of hyperpigmentation.

Post-inflammatory: if you needed any other excuse to leave breakouts alone, this is it. “Minimise post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation by avoiding skin trauma, including picking and scratching the skin, and actively treating conditions such as eczema/dermatitis,” says cosmetic and laser dermatologist Michelle Hunt.

Photo-sensitive: “Perfumes, in combination with sun exposure, can also cause pigmentation, so avoid applying on sun-exposed areas such as the sides of the neck,” says Hunt. Instead, spray the fragrance into the air and glide through it.

UP THE ANTE

“Effective treatment takes time and a great deal of patience and using products and receiving treatments over several weeks and months,” says Emma Hobson, education manager for the International Dermal Institute and Dermalogica. Grant echoes this sentiment. “I have clients come in and they’re 35 and they haven’t been in the sun for 15 years and they use sunscreen every day, but they can have quite severe sun damage that starts to appear at 35. A lot of that is just pigment that has come up from sun damage 20 years prior.” While sun-induced hyperpigmentation may ►



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respond well to treatments like Fraxel (a fractional laser that omits light energy) and IPL (wavelengths of light that specifically target pigmentation), Grant warns against using lasers to treat hormonal pigmentation or melasma. “When it come to treating true hormonal pigmentation, I don’t use laser, as I believe it creates too high a risk of causing post-inflammatory or rebound pigmentation. So essentially your pigment can end up worse.”

Although melasma is considered the most difficult to treat, there are options that can help improve overall skin tone. Dermamelan is applied like a face mask in a salon and left on for up to eight hours before being removed and followed with a cream. The downside? One colleague who tried the peel following a particularly aggressive case of melasma during her pregnancy was housebound for the week following treatment (“My skin was literally peeling off in sheets,” she said). Week two, however, saw a brighter complexion noticeably absent of any dark patchwork.

For a decidedly less time-churning approach, Grant says that lunch-hour treatments, such as light therapy and lactic peels, still deliver a considerable improvement. “They work to slowly break up the pigment, especially for people who are hesitant to do the deeper peels,” she says. “They’re really effective if you’re doing them over a period of time, say every two to four weeks.”

HOME IMPROVEMENT

While doctor’s office treatments lay the groundwork for removing hyperpigmentation, most of the heavy lifting begins post-session. “These treatments can help get a fantastic result, but it’s up to the client to then maintain it,” says Grant.

Hunt, who treats all forms of hyperpigmentation from her Sydney-based clinic, notes there is a simple way to ensure pigmentation doesn’t return. “Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen and wear a hat and protective clothing,” she says. Opt for nothing short of SPF 50+, such as Dior Prestige White Collection Rosy Glow SPF 50+, which shields against UV rays via a lightweight formula. Likewise, Giorgio Armani Maestro UV Skin Defense Primer SPF 50+ creates a sun-protective shield when applied prior to make-up application. And for full protection, Shu Uemura Blanc:Chroma Brightening UV Cushion Foundation defends against future damage via UV filters and also targets dark spots.

Although protection against sun damage during the day is key, using products that act as melanin suppressors is tantamount. Take heed of ingredients like niacinamide (a brightening and collagen-boosting agent), hyaluronic acid (super-hydrating for improved overall skin texture) and vitamin C (a natural skin brightener). “Various ingredients affect the different stages of the metabolic chemical pathway involved in melanin production, so as a combined task force they can effectively target skin discolouration,” says Hobson, who cites Dermalogica C-12 Pure Bright Serum as a hyperpigmentation game-changer.

Skincare frontrunner Eve Lom took cues from our Eastern neighbours for the development of its new White brightening regimen. “I became interested in how advanced the East was in their approach to skin ageing,” says Amandine Isnard, head of



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: DIOR PRESTIGE WHITE COLLECTION ROSY GLOW SPF 50+, \$170; GIORGIO ARMANI MAESTRO UV SKIN DEFENSE PRIMER SPF 50+, \$99; EVE LOM WHITE BRIGHTENING LOTION, \$146; SHU UEMURA BLANC:CHROMA BRIGHTENING UV CUSHION FOUNDATION SPF 50+, \$72.

senior product development at Eve Lom. “Unlike the West, where the focus on lines and wrinkles dominates, the East was concerned with having more luminous even-toned skin. We realised that, in fact, it is not just lines and wrinkles that age us but actually genetics and hormone imbalance that denotes age, too.”

The range is a triple threat against pigmentation and uneven skin tone, with a serum, lotion and sheet mask all spiked with skin-refining and correcting ingredients, including Dermapep, which aims to block the overproduction of melanin and that clinical studies have found to be up to 20 times better at lightening pigmentation than ingredients commonly found in whitening products. Similarly, look out for product descriptions like “radiance”, “brightening” and “even skin tone”, which aim to pump up overall skin texture, not just the offending dark spots. When applied morning and night, Clarins Mission Perfection Serum corrects hyperpigmentation and age spots by promoting healthier skin cells that can protect themselves against aggressors such as UV rays and inflammation. ■