



# UNMASKING YOUR PERFECT COMPLEXION

Forget wrinkle woes or laughter lines, hyperpigmentation could be the only barrier between you and perfect skin. *Stylist* investigates

PHOTOGRAPHY: RENNIO MAIFREDI | WORDS: ANITA BHAGWANDAS

**T**here's a certain 'feeling' when you're on the cusp of something huge. An intrinsic knowledge that you're at its mercy until you surrender, entirely. That's what's happening right now, in skincare. A seismic shift is bringing colossal change to the way we approach anti-ageing. Forget laughter lines and crow's feet, the biggest news on the anti-ageing scene this summer is pigmentation, specifically the over-production of pigmentation (hyperpigmentation) – and there's an explosion of products promising 'even-toned' skin to prove it.

We've all done it – been lax with our SPF protection, I mean. And we

return from our sun-drenched idyll with a new smattering of freckles or an irksome cluster of pin-prick sized brown spots. Although we're enamoured with the idea of appearing sun-kissed, we think nothing of the damage to our skins, and yet this hyperpigmentation (those freckles are pigmentation. Sorry) is the main thing standing in the way of truly glowing skin – the biggest measure of youth, over and above wrinkles and sagging. And the studies concur. Evolutionary biologists Dr Bernhard Fink and Dr Karl Grammer found that evenness in skintone was not only linked to the perceived health of a person, but terrifyingly, the study also found that discolouration from



uneven pigmentation can add up to 20 years to our perceived age. Cue the boom in products promising to brighten hyperpigmentation such as BBs (blemish balms), CCs (complexion correctors) and, soon, DDs (Daily Defence), that have taken over the shelves, from Boots to Selfridges, in search of glowing skin.

But what is hyperpigmentation exactly? Put simply, it's the overproduction of melanin (the pigment in our skin), by the melanocytes (the cells responsible for this colour). It can be triggered by sun (UVA) exposure, trauma to the skin (such as scars after acne) or by hormones, and it shows up in the form of anything from freckles on a redhead to brown spots on darker skintones, and the dreaded, more pronounced brown age spots. (To some extent freckles are genetic, which explains their presence on children. But the appearance of freckles in adulthood is suggestive of hyperpigmentation.) This damage then impedes our skin's ability to reflect light. It goes back to physics lessons at school; darkness is the absence of light, so if a surface is speckled with lighter and darker pigments the reflection of the light is mottled and less uniform. That's basically a nice way of saying dull, unfortunately.

Never fear, however. While everyone is under threat, there are plenty of preventative and reparative measures you can take to halt hyperpigmentation in its tracks. And those measures have become the Gwyneth Paltrow of skincare – misunderstood, but utterly brilliant once you've given them a chance to shine. It's easy to be thrown off course by the terminology of hyperpigmentation solutions (lightening, whitening) that evoke archaic notions of making everyone the same pale skintone – but that's not what they do. Their function is to regularise areas of hyperpigmentation, creating a flawless canvas – one that's reflective, glowing and in no need of foundation. And who can say that since they were 13? Like choosing a new religion, or getting addicted to *Game Of Thrones* (series one and two in 24 hours, true story), once you've seen the transformative, youth-giving effect of a blemish-free complexion and pinpointed where you've been going wrong, we're positive you'll join us on the bright side. Read on to discover the six main causes of hyperpigmentation and the best products to deal with them.

## 1 THE SUNSHINE TRAP

We think we're safe from the sun if we're inside, but sitting near a window can cause hyperpigmentation – whether it's in the office or on the bus. "We still get about 80% of the UVA radiation inside compared to what we'd be getting if we were directly outside," consultant dermatologist Dr Nick Lowe explains. This UVA exposure is often the cause of those brown spots on our faces, hands and décolletage. "Sun spots or solar lentigo are the most common results of hyperpigmentation," says Dr Lowe. "They are usually a round uniform dark brown colour, but if they become irregular or darker you must speak to a specialist."

**REMEDY:** Use your regular SPF day cream further down your neck, ears and décolletage and don't forget your hands and lips – SPF versions of your handbag staples make a big difference. Try Lip Balm Stick SPF15, £8.50, Mentha and Even Better Dark Spot Correcting Hand Cream SPF15, £22.50, Clinique.



## 4 THE EFFECT OF HORMONES

Melasma – known as the mask of pregnancy – is symmetrical discolouration that can occur on the face, especially around the eyes. It's caused by an excess of oestrogen which sensitises the pigment cells to react to UVA. "It can develop several years after pregnancy or taking the contraceptive pill as a result of hormonal fluctuation," says Dr Nowell Solish, consulting cosmetic dermatologist for Indeed Laboratories. But you can minimise your risk – use a high SPF in the sun (try Urban Shield SPF50, £38.85, Germaine De Capuccini), on the eyes and cheekbones, and wear UVA-protection sunglasses.

**REMEDY:** Although melasma can be treated by prescribed 4% hydroquinone creams, a less aggressive treatment is Pigment Control Concentrated Conditioning Serum, £32 by La Roche-Posay which contains kojic acid to calm the pigment cells.



## 2 THE BEAUTY BAD BEHAVIOUR

A simple burn from a curling tong, or squeezing a spot over-zealously can disrupt melanin function, causing post-inflammatory pigmentation. "This type of post-traumatic pigmentation tends to affect darker skins more, anyone from olive through to dark black skins," Dr Lowe explains. Darker and sensitive skins should also be wary of harsh exfoliators, facial hair removal, peels or microdermabrasion treatments. If applied incorrectly, they can damage the skin, causing hyperpigmentation.

**REMEDY:** Forever Light Creator Serum, £82, YSL interrupts the melanocytes as they start to overproduce melanin ensuring that the distribution of the pigment remains even. It's for all skintones, but its potency makes it a brilliant choice for darker skins. To replace a harsh exfoliant or peel, Intensive-C Radiance Peel, £49.50, Dr Murad is the ultimate brightening face mask, with vitamin C for a peel-like effect without the damage.



## 5 THE COMPUTER GLARE

Studies have revealed that laptops placed on our laps can cause heat-induced hyperpigmentation, so using a computer table or cushion can help avoid this. Another thing to be wary of is that box-type CRT computer screens give out a small amount of UV radiation, so it's worth investing in an anti-glare screen to block the UV out. Those with LCD screens, or newer flat-screen monitors can rest safe, although it doesn't give you a reason to ditch the SPF entirely – you can still get some UV light from lightbulbs in the office, not to mention any time you step outside.

**REMEDY:** For a potent SPF protection that doesn't feel heavy or clog your pores, try Ultra Sun Protection SPF50 Primer, £76, Chantecaille. Wear it with a potent serum such as Brightening Facial Treatment, £86, Kerstin Florian for maximum impact.



## 3 THE SKINTONE MYTH

Relying on my darker skin as a 'natural SPF' has led to a woeful case of sun-induced hyperpigmentation. "Darker skins are more prone to pigmentation because they naturally produce skin pigment more effectively. Black skin has a natural SPF value of 4, olive skins are 2-3SPF and white skin is 0-1SPF, so the natural protection for darker skins isn't as strong as we think," Dr Lowe cautions. Paler skins know they need to wear at least SPF15, but this also applies to those with olive and darker skintones, even under the cloudy skies of the UK. "Vitaly, you need to keep using an SPF, and your hyperpigmentation treatment, even if your skin clears up," Dr Lowe warns.

**REMEDY:** Pepta-Bright, £29.99, Indeed Laboratories has lightened my hyperpigmentation visibly. I also use Even Brighter Day Cream SPF30, £22.50, Eucerin which doesn't turn a blueish colour on darker skins like some SPFs. Plus it contains a high-enough protection for all skintones, when in the UK.



## 6 THE PILLS YOU'RE TAKING

Certain medications can cause hyperpigmentation, consultant dermatologist Dr Krishnan Bhagwandas explains. "Minocycline is an acne drug that can cause hyperpigmentation, for example." There could be an alternative available so ask your doctor if hyperpigmentation becomes an issue.

**REMEDY:** Infuse your daily routine with problem solvers; Dr Andrew Weil Mega-Bright Skin Illuminating Treatment Lotion, £25, Origins, brightens and moisturises the skin; follow with Idealia Pro Deep Corrector, £29, Vichy to target the hyperpigmentation, and finish with Instant Mineral Powder SPF45, £21.49, Peter Thomas Roth. Crème De La Mer's The Brightening Facial (£190 for six) is the ultimate pre-event pick-me-up for dull skin.



THANKS TO DR NICK LOWE (NICKLOWE.COM), PHOTOGRAPHY: RENNIO MAIFREDI/TRUNKARCHIVE.COM, STOCKISTS: CHANTECAILLE (UK.SPACENK.COM), CLINIQUE (CLINIQUE.CO.UK), CREME DE LA MER (CREMDELAMER.CO.UK), DR MURAD (MURAD.CO.UK), EUCERIN (BOOTS.COM), GERMAINE DE CAPUCCINI (GERMAINEDECAPUCCINI.CO.UK), INDEED LABORATORIES (BOOTS.COM), KERSTIN FLORIAN (KERSTINFLORIAN.CO.UK), LA ROCHE-POSAY (BOOTS.COM), MENTHA (LIBERTY.CO.UK), ORIGINS (ORIGINS.CO.UK), PETER THOMAS ROTH (CULTBEAUTY.CO.UK), VICHY (BOOTS.COM), YSL (SELFRIDGES.CO.UK)