

In This Skin

There's no reason to cover up this summer. The newest body care treatments are non-invasive and will rid your skin of its blemished past.

Text By Anne Rasminsky

The skin on our body is a veritable scrapbook of our existence, a time capsule of sorts, containing physical tokens of the past: the scar on your knee you got the first time shaving; the marks on your back from that terrible strain of chicken pox; the web of spider veins on your thigh, a badge you earned from carrying three children to term – hence those stretch marks on your stomach. Getting nostalgic? We didn't think so – especially at this time of year, when our history haunts us in the form of bumps, spots and marks. But it's not just the trademarks of our past; it's the things we have the power to control but conveniently ignore, like the day spent in the sun without sunblock. Or the months of winter denial: "In winter, everything is covered up and neglected," says Christina Milton, a paramedical aesthetician and national educator for Europelab Inc., which distributes European skincare products and services. "As it gets warmer, women are more aware of the skin on their bodies." When the mercury climbs, we're forced to confront what lies beneath, and then we hit the panic button. We camouflage with a tan. But that's definitely not the smart solution. Are you thinking sunburn, photo-aging and skin cancer? We are. Instead, adopt a more direct approach. "It's a great time to have a body wrap, and do focused procedures on the back or legs," says Milton. So pull out the microscope, take a deep breath and dive in, because the experts have weighed in, and we've got a solution for the skin conditions standing between you and your Narciso Rodriguez city shorts.

Keratosis Pilaris: Keratosis pilaris, a genetic skin condition more commonly known as those fine "bumpies" on the backs of your arm that make a camisole not an option, is "caused by a protein, keratin, that our skin naturally produces," says Dr. Karen O'Neill, a cosmetic dermatologist in Mississauga, Ontario. "Normally, our skin cells should flake off and exfoliate, but in keratosis pilaris that exfoliation process is impaired, so you get a buildup of dead skin in the hair follicles, which looks like tiny pimples or goose bumps." While there is no cure for this condition, there are methods of controlling its appearance and texture. "I generally recommend patients use a moisturizer containing alpha-hydroxy or beta-hydroxy acid or urea, found in over-the-counter [OTC] products [because of their ability to exfoliate]," says O'Neill. Also try body scrubs with protein-digesting enzymes. "If OTC doesn't work, sometimes I'll recommend prescription-strength tretinoin. Brand names would be Retin-A or Stieva-A."

Scars: For men, a scar can be a great source of material for a tall tale, usually gang related or involving a shark. But women generally don't take pride in their imperfections. Fortunately, there are topical treatment options, depending on the kind of scarring. "The two types we worry about are hypertrophic, scars that are raised instead of healing nice and flat; and keloids, scars that are raised as well but grow beyond the original wound," says Toronto-based cosmetic dermatologist Dr. Lisa Kellett. One option is silicone gel sheets. "Silicone has an anti-inflammatory action; it's occlusive, and it's though that the occlusion helps flatten the scars." For atrophic (depressed) scars, like pockmarks and acne

scars, resurfacing lasers like erbium or CO2 lasers are very effective, "because they actually burn off layers of skin to smooth the surface," says Kellett. FASHION recommends: Polysporin Scar Solution (\$38, at drugstores) and Elastoplast Scar Therapy (\$30, at drugstores).

Dry Skin: Dryness can make even the best of us flakier than Anna Nicole Smith on Letterman. There are a variety of causes for dry skin, including "lack of humidity in the air; depletion of moisture from frequent washing of the skin; and exposure to hot water, solvents, greases, soaps and detergents – which remove the skin's own moisture and damage the skin barrier," says Hamilton, Ontario-based dermatologist Dr. Peter Vignjevic. "It can also be a sign of an underlying skin disease." And while the act of shedding skin can be a beautiful image, metaphorically speaking, there's nothing poetic about psoriasis. For dehydrated skin, Vignjevic recommends humectants, "which absorb water, then hold it onto the skin's surface." Look for products containing lactic acid or urea, and apply them to wet or damp skin. Other products that feature occlusive agents like shea butter or petroleum help by "reducing evaporative water loss from the skin." FASHION recommends: La Roche-Posay Lipikar Lipid-Replenishing Body Emmolient (from \$20, at drugstores) and Eucerin 3% Urea Lotion (\$16, at drugstores).

Body Acne: "Bacne," the hysterical amalgamation of back and acne, is only funny when you don't have it (that goes for "chestne," too). If you do, it's not only humiliating, but very limiting to your wardrobe options in the summer months. Body blemishes are caused by an "interaction between your genetics and oil production, and follicle-plugging bacteria," says Dr. Frances Jang, a Vancouver dermatologist. "We can't do anything about genetics, so we normally suggest using a mild exfoliant, if the skin is not too sensitive, to decrease follicular plugging and also allow any medicinal agent we're using on the skin to penetrate better." Standard treatments include benzoyl peroxide, which paralyzes bacteria, or exfoliants like salicylic acid and sometimes glycolic acid, "which can help by de-roofing the areas that are plugged. Retinoids like Retin-A can help bacne as well, particularly blackheads and whiteheads." FASHION recommends: Clinique Acne Solutions Body Treatment Spray (\$25, at department stores) and NeoStrata Body Lotion 10% Glycolic Acid (\$29.50, at drugstores).

Stretch Marks: You lost 30 pounds, and all you have to show for it are those lousy stretch marks. Or maybe they're left over from an adolescent growth spurt and snake across your upper thigh. "Stretch marks are due to broken elastic fibres in the dermis, the second layer of skin," says O'Neill. "They are typically the result of a change in body shape, which results in quick stretching or distension of the skin." Unfortunately, you can't make stretch marks disappear; you can only make them less noticeable. Using tretinoin, found in Retin-A, can help reduce redness. Laser treatments are also effective and help fade the red marks into more mature white ones. "By remodeling collagen [with a laser], you basically decrease the redness and improve the texture, which makes them less noticeable," says Kellett. But be forewarned: Laser procedures are expensive, costing \$350 and up for each session (usually five). For a more economical alternative, look for treatments with peptides (multiple amino acids that stimulate collagen renewal) to combat both stretch marks and wrinkles. FASHION recommends: Dermaglow NuVectin Advanced Wrinkle Therapy (\$120, at drugstores) and Phytomer SeaTonic Stretch Mark Reducing Cream (\$63.25, at 800-361-6089).

Spider Veins: If you have spider veins, it's just one more thing to blame your mother for.

"Sometimes it's genetic, sometimes it comes from trauma, and other times it comes from pregnancy," says Jang. OK, so that last one isn't Mom's fault. "A spider vein is a little dilated vessel that is superficial. It's redundant; we don't need it for our circulation and our well-being," says Jang. Treatments range from sclerotherapy (injections used to treat superficial vessels), and long-pulsed YAG laser treatments (for larger and deeper articular veins), which target the hemoglobin in the vein and ultimately clog the vessel. While there is no topical treatment available as a cure, Arachnotherapy by East Four promises to help with prevention, using ingredients like eucalyptus and peppermint oil to "stimulate the capillaries and help the blood flow through them," says New York-based creator Molly Greene. Likewise, Connecticut dermatologist Dr. Nicholas Perricone's treatment for spider veins features alpha-lipoic acid and tocotrienols (a natural derivative of palm fruit and rice bran), making a potent blend of antioxidants. The cocktail is said to be anti-inflammatory, impeding damage to collagen from enzymes created by daily stress. FASHION recommends: East Four Arachnotherapy (\$23, at eastfour.com) and N.V. Perricone, M.D. Cosmeceuticals Anti Spider-Vein Leg (\$235, at 866-681-2800) and La Mer The Body Serum (\$205, at Holt Renfrew).

Sun Damage: "I see this as a huge problem for women in the 35-plus age group, particularly in the décolleté area," says Jang. Blotchy red and brown marks, wrinkling and the appearance of precancerous spots are all symptoms of damaged skin. "I think Retin-A is the gold standard of therapy for sun damage. It can reverse damage we see visually—the brown spots, the sallowness, the fine wrinkling – and it can encourage new collagen. However, it is irritating to the skin and can bring out blood vessels." Retinol, the non-prescription equivalent, can be helpful, but Jang warns that it is potentially irritating to already sensitive sun-damaged skin. As for chemical peels, "you can go to the drugstore and get a topical glycolic acid peel," says Kellett. "But the ones they offer for home use – you'd have to use a lot and many treatments to get results." In general, the most effective ones are found in a physician's office. FASHION recommends: MD Skincare Alpha Beta Daily Body Peel (\$101.40, at Sephora.com) and Reversa Skin Smoothing Body Lotion 10% Glycolic Acid (\$28, at drugstores).