



# Bare All

A clear complexion is within reach with today's high-performance products and lasers. Anyone for no foundation? by Laura Keogh

I have a distinct divot on the right side of my face. It sits on the farthest end of my cheek, just before my ear, and when I was a kid it looked as if I had taken an errant kickball to the side of my head. It's one of those things on your face (like a zit the size of an acorn) that people talk at during conversations. While the depression has become less visible with age (I guess you could say

I've grown into it or, better, I've grown used to it), the dark pigmentation that defines its contour has never waned.

And today, it is not alone. It is only one component of a mosaic of skin care woes that I've accumulated over time. From my pigmented black hole to sun damage spots and dark circles, my complexion has become a badge of dishonourable conduct. ►



## Help is on the way:

Brighten the darkness on your skin with Peter Thomas Roth Potent Skin Lightening Gel Complex, Origins Grin from Year to Year Brightening Face Firmer and Sjal Kura Intuitif Cellular Repair Cream, or use Sothys Clarté & Confort Protective Cream to help with your fragile capillaries.

Every woman has her own set of emblems. And each summer, their presence on our complexions is more glaringly obvious than the coupling of Kenny Chesney and Renée Zellweger is odd. If we're not willing to embrace the experience that is recorded on our faces, how can we bare all with a more simplified summer beauty routine?

## Darkness

(Hyperpigmentation from sun damage, acne marks, liver spots or melasma, a.k.a. pregnancy mask or chloasma)

According to Hamilton, Ontario, dermatologist Dr. Peter Vignjevic, there are many different kinds of hyperpigmentation. "A freckle, a liver spot and seborrheic keratoses [brown spots] can all look the same on your skin, but under the microscope they appear different." Still, many are the result of the same skin function: an overproduction of melanin that is deposited in the cells. In the case of melasma, the increased stimulation of melanin is "caused by hormones, particularly estrogen," says Vignjevic. "However, it can also be the result of UV rays and certain drugs, like birth control pills." The nasty little care packages left behind by acne, which are most common for olive, black and Asian complexions, are caused by melanin produced as a response to inflammation. After the zit has healed, all the excess melanin ends up squatting in your

epidermis for a few months. Inflammation associated with eczema, allergic reactions and the dreaded (but oh-so-delicious) UV rays from sun exposure also does the same trick.

Like a once-pristine lawn that has sprouted dandelions, my skin is now dotted with dark spots. I have a sneaking suspicion they are the result of very long days spent on the beach, a requisite of a seaside childhood in New England. So I decided to visit my dermatologist to research ways I could rid myself of these marks, as well as the shaded basin that has tugged at my self-confidence since adolescence. "Brown spots are a good telltale sign of sun damage," says Dr. Paul Cohen, a dermatologist at the Rosedale Dermatology Centre in Toronto. "Some people have had them since they were kids, while others develop them in their 20s, 30s or 40s. There is a partial genetic predisposition, but a lot come from sun exposure." With the bloated pride only a beauty director could muster, I shot back that I've been diligent about my sun care for the past few years. "Big deal," exclaims Cohen. "It's important to wear sunscreen, but you got the damage 10 to 20 years ago." So the challenge is to keep it from getting worse. "If you start to see sun damage early, it is going to progress. You have to stay on top of it." A good way to prevent spots from darkening (or worse, evolving into skin cancer) is by staying out of the sun. There goes the rest of the summer.

## Product Remedies

The best treatments for excess pigmentation are products that contain bleaching agents. Ingredients like hydroquinone, vitamin A and vitamin C can help blanch these areas, but a key component to their success is how deep the pigmentation runs. Spots on the stratum corneum (surface of the skin) or epidermis (first few layers) will respond better than those located in the dermis (deeper level). But like a finely tuned menstrual cycle, "the epidermis has a 28-day cycle, so it can take one to three months for pigmentation to start to lighten," says Michael Ibbott, a national educator at Europe Cosmétiques, a North American cosmetics distributor. However, Vignjevic points out that in the case of melasma, it can be more difficult to treat with creams if the melanin runs down into the dermis.

**Try:** NeoStrata HQ Plus Cream (\$33, at drug-stores), Peter Thomas Roth Potent Skin Lightening Gel Complex (\$70, at lux-beauty.com), Origins Grin from Year to Year Brightening Face Firmer (\$39, at select Bay stores) or Sjal Kura Intuitif Cellular Repair Cream (from \$175, at 800-548-9009).

## Dermatological Remedies

For blemishes as persistent as a sugar-starved kid in a candy store, Cohen says there are a few alternatives a dermatologist can offer. One or two random marks can be treated with a spritz of liquid nitrogen, which will make them scabby and peel off. A pinkish or white tone will be left in their place. You decide what's better. You can also try intense pulsed light (IPL) lasers for the face. "They are excellent treatments for both red and brown areas," says Cohen. Depending on the number of spots and their pattern, a couple of IPL therapies in conjunction with chemical peels or microdermabrasion (they exfoliate the skin, allowing the lasers to penetrate better) can be successful. But for birthmarks and melasma that may originate in the dermis, treatment is limited to Q-switched ruby lasers and YAG lasers, whose rays are long enough to penetrate that deep. "The effectiveness of lasers is variable when treating melasma," explains Cohen. Instead, consider creams combined with peels or microdermabrasion. With my low pain threshold and the fear of a half-dozen or more uncomfortable YAG laser sessions (which can be costly, around \$150 to \$450 per session, and may ►

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only marginally lessen the appearance of my birthmark), I opt out of the procedure. Instead, I vow to make friends with my divot.

### Dark Circles

I've always been a night owl, but you can't blame my dark circles on my lifestyle. I had them even as a kid. And while there is a belief that lifestyle factors like smoking and lack of sleep can contribute to dark circles, Vignjevic says that nobody really knows what causes them. But he and Cohen agree on the theories that abound. "One [theory] is prominent pigment in the skin, especially for those with dark skin. Another is more-obvious blood vessels and the pattern of blood vessels under the eyes," says Cohen. Dark circles could also be due to inflammation of what Vignjevic calls "the fat pad on the lower eyelid" or damage to the vessel walls, causing a leakage of blood that pools under the skin.

### Product Remedies

"You have to have realistic expectations," says Cohen. We all know concealers are a fantastic way to mask the shadows, but according to Cohen, additives like vitamin K and arnica help prevent blood pooling. When I ask about cosmetically treating my undereyes, Cohen says to take it easy because they're sensitive. "A laser in an area where there is thin skin can permanently attack the pigment. You could have white discoloration." But he does note that technology is continuously evolving and is reassuringly optimistic about future treatments.

**Try:** Cover Fx SPF 30 Camouflage Cream (\$37, at [beautymark.ca](http://beautymark.ca)), StriVectin-SD Eye Cream (\$89, at The Bay) or La Roche-Posay Active C Eyes (\$31, at drugstores).

### Redness/Broken Capillaries

Another juicy effect of sun damage is broken capillaries. "They're not actually broken," says Vignjevic. "Sun exposure

weakens the walls of the capillaries, and they dilate like an old rubber hose. More blood flows through them, so it becomes easier to see them through the skin."

### Product Remedies

Two medicated green creams—La Roche-Posay Rosaliac and Avène Diroseal—can offer noticeable improvements and help make the blood vessels less visible. These are also extremely helpful if you have rosacea, a skin disorder that affects more than 2 million Canadians, according to Cohen. Resembling a permanent flushing or blushing and commonly appearing on the nose or cheeks, it can flare up as a result of intense cold or heat, spicy food and wine.

**Try:** La Roche-Posay Rosaliac (\$25, at drugstores), Sothys Clarté & Confort Protective Cream for Skin with Fragile Capillaries (\$63.75, at 800-361-3004) or Avène Diroseal Treatment Cream (from \$24, at drugstores).

### Dermatological Remedies

"If you really want something specific for red, dilated blood vessels, pulsed dye laser therapy or IPL is considered better," says Vignjevic. These lasers collapse the vessels in two to four sessions, improving the look of skin.

With all these problems and solutions, it's imperative to remember sunscreen. Even after using products or getting treatments from a dermatologist, many of these skin conditions (like melasma) reoccur with a vengeance if you slide into your old routine of basking in the sun. "The higher the better," exclaims Cohen about the recommended SPF. "Wear at least a 30. Wear a hat and minimize your outdoor exposure during peak hours." And, like me, you could make peace with what tarnishes your clear complexion. ■

*For information on treating freckles, go to [fashionmagazine.com](http://fashionmagazine.com).*