

Brighten Up!

If years of basking in the sun's rays have left you a bit freckled and spotted, there are ways to get your complexion glowing again

By Denise Wild

When a scientist from a leading beauty brand teamed up with two behavioural biologists to conduct a study that measured people's perception of age, health, and attractiveness as it related to skin tone, the results were astounding. Skin texture and wrinkles aside, the researchers discovered that bright, luminous skin, with an even skin tone free of age spots and freckles, is what many people consider youthful, attractive, and healthy.

"People want a refreshed look, a glow," says Dr. Peter Vignjevic, a dermatologist and assistant professor at the DeGroot School of Medicine at McMaster University in Hamilton, ON. "They want their skin to look brighter, be all the same colour or tone, and have no discoloration or redness."

Exposure to sun is the

main cause of most skin discoloration. Those pesky ultra-violet (UV) rays damage the cells of the skin, and the damage shows up as freckles, broken blood vessels, and age spots (also known as sun or liver spots), Vignjevic explains.

UV rays speed up the skin's production of melanin (the dark pigment that gives



colour to your skin and hair); age spots happen when more melanin is produced than normal and in higher concentrations.

"The damaged skin cells overproduce melanin in a localized area, and then recruit neighbouring cells to do the same. The result is the formation of an age spot," says Mary Begovic Johnson, principal scientist for Proctor & Gamble.

Fortunately, there are numerous treatments available at your dermatologist, by prescription, and over-the-counter that can reduce the appearance of age spots and brighten the overall tone of your skin. But, according to Johnson, none of these treatments has lasting effects: "If the skin is repeatedly exposed to sunlight, the spots can return." She recommends using a broad-spectrum sunscreen on a daily basis to prolong the treatment benefits and to protect the skin from additional sun damage.

At the Dermatologist

Lactic acid peels are in-office exfoliating treatments that even skin tone and pigment. "They give skin a glow, a freshness and brightness," Vignjevic says, adding that repeated treatments offer even more benefit. Lactic acid peels can also help alleviate acne and blackheads. The cost of a treatment can vary, but typically ranges between \$75 and \$125, and is done about once a month. "It's a gentle treatment," Vignjevic assures, adding that there's

no redness or puffiness immediately after the procedure.

Intense pulse light (IPL) therapy is a process known as photorejuvenation. "It's a broad spectrum of light—not a laser—containing many wavelengths that can remove different colours [from your skin, specifically red and brown]," Vignjevic explains.

Dr. Robert Miller, a dermatologist and associate professor of medicine at Dalhousie University, in Halifax, explains how IPL works: "As the light passes through the skin, the pigment that causes freckles and age-related brown spots absorbs the light energy and converts it into heat. The heat then helps destroy the blood vessels and pigmentation." Discoloured areas of the skin become darker at first, but then they eventually peel off. "The entire process is your skin healing itself," Miller says.

IPL works especially well at reducing freckles. And while it can also decrease red tones in the skin, a few added treatments may be required before that can happen. "Reds are more stubborn," Miller says, "so you may need four or five more treatments." Typically, a patient will see the dermatologist for an IPL treatment once a month with the cost of a treatment ranging anywhere from \$300 to \$500, depending on what's being treated.

Another treatment that can have an effect on the skin's tone and overall appearance is the ProFractional laser. The ProFractional laser makes

microscopic holes deep in the skin's layers to promote rapid wound healing in the healthy skin surrounding the heat-created holes. "It stimulates new collagen growth, improves tone, texture, and some pigmentation, and freshens the overall skin on the face and neck," Miller says.

Although the main target of the ProFractional laser is improved skin texture, you'll still notice a boost in its tone and brightness. A ProFractional laser treatment can cost from \$500 to \$1,000. Patients may experience some redness and swelling after the procedure, and may require only two or three treatments.

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Hope in a Jar

Fortunately, a treatment at the dermatologist's office isn't always required for a bright complexion. Creams are available by prescription for use at home.

"Topical prescription vitamin A is one of the most effective anti-agers," Vignjevic says, "and it helps a bit with age spots." For the best outcomes, Vignjevic often pairs vitamin A (which should be

used only at night because it makes the skin more sensitive to the sun) with products that include vitamin C. "Vitamin C can help improve collagen, cell turnover, and abnormal pigmentation," he says, "and it refreshes the skin's appearance while reducing pigment production by the skin."

Another popular treatment cream is hydroquinone, also known as a bleaching cream. Hydroquinone helps reduce brown spots and pigmentation by inhibiting the enzyme involved in melanin production, Vignjevic explains.

If you're looking for something right off the shelves,

you precisely target age spots.

2. La Roche-Posay Mela-D Bright (\$43.50) offers oil-free hydration with kojic acid, an ingredient derived from mushrooms that gently stops melanin production for a more even skin tone. The addition of vitamin C smoothes the skin's surface and maximizes the reflection of light.

3. Clarins Bright Plus Intensive Age Control Brightening Program (\$162) is a 21-day skincare program that lifts, firms, and brightens the skin. Lotus root lightens the skin and pro-

contains a yeast extract derived from mushrooms that helps break up the appearance of existing age spots and discoloration. Antioxidants and the addition of a UV protection ward off the formation of new pigmentation while salicylic acid exfoliates to remove any surface discoloration.

5. Lancôme Blanc Expert NeuroWhite X³ High Potency Brightening Serum (\$129) contains Lancôme's Mela-NO Complex, which fights melanin production to reduce brown spots and pigmentation. The Mela-NO complex inhibits communication between the cell messengers and the melanin source, while vitamin C and liquorice extract decrease the production of melanin.

6. Alyria Intense Complexion Lightener (\$100) contains vitamin C, which increases the skin's clarity and tone. The added bonus is that vitamin C works as an antioxidant and also stimulates collagen production (a protein that supports the body's tissues, giving it strength and firmness), improves the skin's elasticity, and reduces the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles. ■



the following products target dark spots and contribute to improving the skin's overall tone.

1. Olay Definity Night Anti-Spot Treatment (\$34.99) contains niacinamide, a B vitamin that blocks the transfer of melanin to the outer layers of the skin and promotes exfoliation. The ingredients penetrate the skin to reduce discoloration while you sleep, and the convenient wand applicator lets

rects it from environmental elements while other ingredients stimulate the renewal of skin cells.

4. Clinique Even Better Skin Tone Corrector (\$55)

Where to Buy?

Alyria: <http://alyria-med.com/> or call 1-800-636-3664
 Clarins: available at the Bay and Sears
 Clinique: available at department and large drugstores
 Lancôme: www.lancome.ca and at large drugstores
 La Roche-Posay: available at drugstores
 Olay: available at large retail stores