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How to Get Rid of DARK SPOTS

Those pesky little speckles and splotches on your face? They can be the result of acne scarring, hormonal changes, or (very likely) simply too much sun. Here's how to fade 'em

Gently fades discoloration with salicylic acid



20s

Acne scars and over-aggressive facial scrubbing can lead to post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation, or dark spots on the forehead, nose, and chin, says Dr. David E. Bank, director of the Center for Dermatology, Cosmetic, and Laser Surgery in Mt. Kisco, N.Y. "Applying a spot treatment with salicylic acid twice daily will gradually exfoliate the excess pigment in the skin and reduce marks," he says. Try: Vichy ProEven Total Dark Spot Corrector, \$42; vichyusa.com.

During these years, hormonal changes due to pregnancy or birth-control pills often produce brown patches known as melasma, says N.Y.C. dermatologist Anne Chapas. "It's difficult to treat, as the patches often reappear with the slightest UV exposure." Look for a treatment with resorcinol or hydroquinone. If you're pregnant, choose a formula with a natural brightener, such as licorice root.

Try: Clarins Vital Light serum, \$85; clarins.com.

30s



Safe to use during pregnancy

"More serious photodamage from years of sun exposure starts to emerge now in the form of dark clusters on the face, upper chest, and hands," says Dr. Bank. Soy combined with vitamin C will help even out your complexion and neutralize free-radical damage. Another option is Elure, a nonprescription yeast-enzyme cream that helps remove spots in two to three months (\$125; at dermatologists' offices).

Try: Prevue Clarity Targeted Skin Tone Corrector, \$125; elizabetharden.com.



40s

Shifts in estrogen and progesterone levels, along with the natural breakdown of DNA that occurs with age, often set off pigmentation changes, says Dr. Bank. "Applying a night cream with retinol helps increase cell turnover to minimize discoloration with the added benefit of stimulating collagen production to firm skin," says L.A. dermatologist Ava Shamban.

Try: Roc Retinol Correxion Sensitive night cream, \$23; at drugstores.

50s+



Also helps wrinkles!

Doctor's Orders

Tried all of the above and still screaming, "Out, damned spot!?" It may be time to consider a more heavy-duty treatment

PRESCRIPTION-STRENGTH HYDROQUINONE

Over-the-counter treatments typically contain 2 percent hydroquinone; a physician can prescribe a 4 percent formula, such as Lustra-Ultra, which can help fade patches in one to two months. **Cost** About \$150

MEDICAL-GRADE GLYCOLIC PEELS

Performed by a dermatologist, a glycolic acid peel dissolves the superficial layers of skin without causing excess irritation. It's ideal for acne scars and mild dark spots. **Cost** \$200 each (up to six treatments required)

FRACTIONAL LASERS

Also used for softening facial lines; these devices break up pigment from deep below the skin's surface. They are good for treating larger discolored patches. **Cost** \$1,000 per session (two to four required)

Q-SWITCHED RUBY LASERS

These lasers can be used for the most stubborn dark spots. They work by creating small scabs over the treated area, which then peel off to reveal new skin underneath. **Cost** \$500 per treatment (one to three required)