THE LOVELY CLINIC'S GUIDE TO HANDLING HYPERPIGMENTATION

Hyperpigmentation (discolouration, dark patches, or circles triggered by an excess of melanin, the pigment responsible for skin colour) affects a huge number of people due to the wide variety of contributing factors: hormonal changes, trauma such as post-acne marks, and - the biggest one - excessive sun exposure. While no skin type is immune, the good news is that there are numerous ways to manage or even banish it, with many of the key treatments taking skin health to the next level.

Here's our guide to the best ways to handle hyperpigmentation including an insight into potential causes and easy methods for alleviating some of the symptoms; accurately identifying the main types of hyperpigmentation to create a plan that's perfect for your skin; specialist facials and skincare recommendations for reducing discoloration; condition-combatting prescription medications; and a rundown of the most cutting-edge corrective in-clinic treatments.

Key Causes of Hyperpigmentation & Lifestyle Changes that May Offer Relief

The main triggers include sun exposure; smoking; trauma to the skin such as acne, eczema, psoriasis or an injury (sometimes skin cells react to damage or irritation by putting melanin production into overdrive, creating what's known as post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation); medication that spurs a sensitivity to light; and hormonal changes which makes those who are pregnant, taking hormonal contraceptives or hormone replacement therapy especially susceptible.

With hormonally driven and genetic hyperpigmentation, it's important to know that the discolouration gets worse in the sun or heat, regardless of which part of the body is exposed, so large hats and long-sleeved shirts are vital. Tinted sunscreen, because it reflects more of the damage-causing visible spectrum and UV light, can also be a major help - some people even opt to use a clear chemical sunscreen and a tinted one over the top.

For overall sun-safe skin health, we recommend a teaspoon of sunscreen on the head and neck several times a day.

Vitamin C can also be a powerful tool for reducing hyperpigmentation and achieving a more even skin tone, with specialist skincare also a serious boon (see below for more on this).

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Recognising the Main Types of Hyperpigmentation

Hyperpigmentation typically sits falls into one of these four core types:

1: Sunspots or 'Solar Lentigines'
Dark patches developed as a result of the sun, most commonly found on skin that sits on the frontline of exposure - the face, hands, shoulders, shins and arms.

2: Melasma
Connected to both hormonal changes and sun exposure, melasma is typically characterised by symmetrical, blotchy, brownish facial pigmentation and often appears on the forehead, cheeks, and upper lip. Due to its relationship with hormonal fluctuations, it's more prevalent in women.

3: Post-Inflammatory Hyperpigmentation (PIH)
This form of discolouration comes from inflamed or traumatised skin (including picked scabs or popped pimples!) but can also be the result of eczema or psoriasis flare-ups. The end result in all instances is that, after healing, the injured area will appear darker than the surrounding skin.

Hyperpigmentation-Reducing Skincare Suited to You

Switching up your skincare products can make a major difference to hyperpigmentation-prone skin because of a suite of ingredients with ultra-relevant properties: retinoids, which speed up cell renewal to reduce superficial hyperpigmentation, even skin tone and inhibit the melanin-producing tyrosinase enzyme; the skin brightening vitamin C (which also slows tyrosinase production); and acids including glycolic - whose USP is gently sloughing off dead skin cells to reveal a brighter skin tone, and azelaic acid - which regulates melanin production in pigmented areas).

We can help you find the most relevant products for you with our game-changing Skin Wardrobe - a brand-agnostic skincare concierge service where our expert therapists curate a bespoke skincare edit.

Condition-Combatting Prescription Medication

While curated skincare is a superb way to handle hyperpigmentation for many people, those with recurring or more deep-seated problems will benefit from prescription medication.

For the bigger challenges, particularly melasma, we offer two key treatments - oral tranexamic acid and hydroquinone - both of which interrupt melanin production and as such are available only following a suitability consultation with a TLC doctor or prescribing nurse.

Tranexamic acid is ingested for a 'global impact' (improvement across the entire body), while hydroquinone comes as a cream that's applied with the fingertips. Hydroquinone is often used in conjunction with tretinoin, a potent form of vitamin A that's effective in reducing hyperpigmentation, as well as wrinkles and acne.

In-Clinic Treatments that Go Deeper

Lots of people suffer simultaneously from multiple types of hyperpigmentation, which can make the deeper dive option of an in-clinic treatment ideal. All in-clinic treatments should be performed in concert with a topical skincare depigmentation regimen to help maintain results.

If you have melasma, these treatments will help you manage the condition; for sun damage, it's feasible to reset the clock entirely. For individuals with evidence of pre-cancerous cells, both the Contour TRL and MOXI can effectively destroy certain types of pre-cancerous cells, such as actinic keratosis.

The key treatments include:

- **BBL® HEROic** - an ultra-innovative, age-defying, skin-transformative light therapy suitable for post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation, sun damage, and melasma (although it's too powerful to be used for melasma in the summer months).

- **MOXI**, a laser treatment which is considered a comparatively gentle prejuvenation powerhouse, making it superb for everyone when it comes to improving the early signs of ageing caused by sun damage and pigmentation and is especially effective against actinic keratosis, melasma and solar lentigos.

- The tightening, retexturing and pigmentation reduction of heavyweight laser **HALO®** (is suitable for patients of all skin tones and is effective against melasma, sun damage and post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation.

- Due to the inflammatory component seen in melasma and post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation, we often use **ClearSilk®** laser to reduce this inflammation, either alone or in combination with other laser treatments.

- Feted for its capacity to create glass-like skin, **ProFractional™** is a highly powerful laser treatment that uses Erbium YAG lasers to combat general sun damage.

- For those with heavy sun damage, the resurfacing faculties of the **Contour TRL** make it a superb contender; it can precisely remove damaged outer layers of skin while stimulating deep collagen renewal.