

The truth about hyper-pigmentation

From debunking common myths to understanding causes and effective skincare ingredients.

Section: Focus area stories

What is hyperpigmentation?

Flawlessness is a beauty cliché with a lot to answer for – it's actually more common to have an uneven skin tone than not. Dark areas appear wherever we're exposed to the sun or develop scars, no matter your skin colour. It's caused by the melanin that also makes some skins tan.

What causes hyperpigmentation?

“You can't stop hyperpigmentation”

Yes, you can

With a powerful beauty product called a sunscreen. Since hyperpigmentation is caused by melanin and triggered by the body's response to UV, a good SPF 30 is a great first step, even when you're indoors and it's cloudy outside.

“The treatments work fast”

Consistency and patience required

Topical solutions work on melanocyte (melanin-making) cells, although they also remove melanin already in the skin. You may see some initial lightening, but you should set your expectations at about three months. Make treatment a consistent part of your routine and you'll start to see results.

“All hyperpigmentation is the same”

There are three types of hyperpigmentation

The first is sun damage, making the skin less able to regulate melanin. Second is post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation (PIH) from spots, scars or even laser treatments. The third is melasma, which is linked to hormones. It's what causes the famous ‘mask of pregnancy’ and is also linked to thyroid conditions.

The ingredients you need for pigmented areas

Alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs)

Alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs) like glycolic acid, lactic acid and citric acid all work on existing pigmentation and can reduce melanin production too. Another one called mandelic acid is a safe and effective peel that's great for Asian, Arabic and African skin.

Retinol

As well as speeding up cell renewal, retinol puts the brakes on melanin production. Start slowly with gentle retinyl palmitate. Avoid retinol acid or tretinoin if you have darker skin as they make darker skin sun sensitive, which won't help at all.