



Acne, eczema and allergic reactions are the main causes of hyperpigmentation in African-Americans, says Grimes.

**WHY IS HYPERPIGMENTATION SUCH AN ISSUE FOR US?**

In one word: melanin. The great thing about it is it gives us our gorgeous brown hues. The not-so-fabulous fact is melanin is likely to kick into overdrive when something disrupts our skin. When we get a pimple, bug bite, burn or cut, our pigment cells overproduce melanin, leaving behind a dark mark. That process is called postinflammatory hyperpigmentation (PIH). "The more pigment you have, the more sensitive the melanocytes are to this type of trauma, so those with darker skin have an increased risk of hyperpigmentation," says Valerie D. Callender, M.D., director of Callender Dermatology and Cosmetic Center in Glenn Dale, Maryland.

Another common type of hyperpigmentation that affects skin of color more frequently is melasma—brown blotches that pop up on the face, forehead, cheeks or upper lip. This disorder is set off by hormonal shifts caused by pregnancy, birth control pills, menopause, hormone replacement therapy or sun exposure. "It's chronic.

It's not like dark spots from a curling iron burn," says Callender.

As for those dark elbows and knees? Heredity, uneven pigmentation, sun damage and friction are the likely culprits behind the discoloration. Experts say that the time it takes to lighten discoloration depends more on the level of trauma and how deep-seated the spot is rather than where it is located on the body. But generally, you can expect hyperpigmentation on the face to fade faster than it does on the body. Why? "Cell turnover rate is much slower on the body and feet than it is on the face," says Elena L. Jones, M.D., a dermatologist ▶

**IS HYDROQUINONE SAFE?**

The FDA proposed a ban on the sale of hydroquinone back in 2006. But doctors still prescribe it and it's still available in store products. So what gives? Our experts agree that hydroquinone, which has been on the market for more than 40 years, is safe. They also say using the agent is one of the speediest and most effective ways to nix discoloration. "The FDA considered pulling hydroquinone because some data suggested that it causes cancer [in mice], but you would be hard-pressed to find studies that suggest it causes cancer in humans," says dermatologist Pearl E. Grimes, M.D., who participated in a study on the ingredient. What should you worry about? Improper application. Carefully apply the fade cream with a Q-tip to avoid getting a halolike ring around the area you're treating.

**Skin Protectors & Correctors**



- 1. **STRIVECTIN-EV** Get Even Spot Repair (\$49, Macy's stores)
- 2. **SKINCEUTICALS** Ultimate UV Defense SPF 30 (\$37, skinceuticals.com)
- 3. **ESTÉE LAUDER** Idealist Even Skintone Illuminator (\$58, estee lauder.com)
- 4. **NEUTROGENA** Microdermabrasion System (\$20, drugstore.com)
- 5. **LAROCHE-POSAY** Mela-D Pigment Control (\$59, drugstores)
- 6. **AVON** Anew Clinical Luminosity Pro Brightening Serum (\$54, avon.com)
- 7. **LANCÔME** Bright Expert Dark Spot Corrector & Radiance Activator (\$65, lancome-usa.com)

in New York City. She notes that body hyperpigmentation could take up to a year to fade; face discoloration could take from three to six months.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT**

Treatment takes patience, especially with older spots where the pigment has really set in. If you have mild PIH, over-the-counter fade products can do the trick, but be sure the one you choose addresses your type of discoloration—some anti-dark-spot lotions are designed to treat unevenness from superficial sun damage. “And that’s different than pigmentation from melasma or acne that can be very deep,” says Callender. Here are other steps you can take now:

**USE SUNSCREEN.** As Callender reminds us, “Sunscreen [at least at an SPF of 30] is the number one thing that’s going to prevent you from getting hyperpigmentation. It needs to be worn year-round.” Every day. Ultraviolet rays stimulate the pigment in dark marks, causing them to get even darker. Without protection, anything you’re doing to lighten PIH will be a waste of time.

**SHOP AROUND.** For the best results, go with a product with 2 percent hydroquinone. Other proven lighteners, such as kojic acid, azaleic acid and licorice, work well, too, but it will take longer to see improvement. One ingredient that doesn’t work: cocoa butter. “That’s a myth. It’s just a moisturizer,” says Rosemarie Ingleton, M.D., a New York City-based derm. To brighten elbows and knees, treat them as you would other darkened areas on the body. Book an appointment with a derm for seriously stubborn discoloration.

**EXFOLIATE REGULARLY.** As we age, our skin’s natural cell turnover process slows down. To give it a boost, derms recommend using an at-home microdermabrasion kit or a peel with

glycolic acid. A peel is gentle enough to use daily, but limit aggressive exfoliation—like a scrub or cleansing brush—to two times a week at max. “Scrubbing is like microtrauma to the skin; you may actually be worsening the condition,” says Ingleton.

**SOOTHE IRRITATION.** Spots on the body tend to be the result of pesky bug bites, burns, bruises and cuts. To soothe irritation from insects or injuries, apply a 1 percent hydrocortisone cream. “You want to calm down inflammation quickly to decrease the likelihood that pigment is deposited,” says Pearl E. Grimes, M.D., director of the Vitiligo and Pigmentation Institute of Southern California in Los Angeles.

**WHAT THE PROS CAN DO ABOUT IT**

If your pigment problems don’t budge after four to eight weeks of at-home treatments, it’s time to see a derm. Your doctor may combine a few different hyperpigmentation-fighting methods, depending on the severity of the problem and whether acne is involved. Below are some professional remedies:

**MIX CREAMS.** It’s common for a derm to mix prescription strength 4 percent



FAKE IT WHILE YOU FIGHT IT

Celebrity makeup artist Janice Kinjo displays her know-how on our executive editor, Vanessa Bush, who suffers from acne-induced dark spots.

- Step 1: Cover with a color corrector.** “A corrector [inset] literally cancels out the blemish,” says Kinjo. Brown-skinned beauties can usually use the orangey pink or yellow shades, which cancel out any bluish, brown or gray blemishes. Kinjo applied **Bobbi Brown Corrector in Dark Peach** (\$22, [bobbibrowncosmetics.com](http://bobbibrowncosmetics.com), right [#3]), with a damp sponge. “Wet the sponge first so it’s full and doesn’t absorb the product off your face,” she says.
- Step 2: Conceal.** Use concealer to bring the color back to the skin. Apply with a foundation brush.
- Step 3: Put on your foundation.** If you used a corrector, go a shade darker than your complexion for a natural result.
- Step 4: Set with powder.** This gives your coverage staying power—especially if your skin is oily in the T-zone.

**1 & 2. DERMABLEND** Skin Perfector Pigment Correcting Primer and Leg and Body Cover (\$45 and \$27, [dermablend.com](http://dermablend.com)). **4. BLACK OPAL** Total Coverage Spot & Scar Eraser (\$9, drug-stores). **5. CLINIQUE** Even Better Makeup SPF 15 (\$25, [clinique.com](http://clinique.com)).

