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Tips for maintaining a youthful complexion

WRITTEN BY **JENNIFER L. NELSON**

Most women would do anything to retain their youthful complexion. While there's no shortage of cosmetics and dermatological procedures that are available to achieve that goal – from concealers to laser treatments – there are some signs of aging that prove harder to combat.

Along with wrinkles and age spots, infraorbital dark circles (or dark under-eye circles) can age a woman's appearance dramatically. Fortunately for most people, it's purely a cosmetic issue and can be controlled and even eliminated with simple lifestyle changes and other at-home remedies.

"A healthy lifestyle makes all skin look better, and that's particularly true for your thin, lower eyelid skin," says Dr. David J. Goldberg, director of Hackensack-based Skin Laser and Surgery Specialists of NY and NJ and chief of dermatology at Hackensack University Medical Center.

CAUSES

According to Goldberg, dark circles are very common in people older than 40 and tend to be more pronounced in those with darker complexions. Though they can appear in both men and women, and even children in rare cases, dark under-eye circles are more common in those who suffer from skin conditions like allergies or eczema.

Women concerned about exhibiting infraorbital dark circles as they age might want to take a hard look at their parents' complexions, as they are often hereditary and run in families.

"However, the most common cause is just plain aging of the skin," Dr. Rebecca Baxt, board-certified dermatologist at Baxt Cosmedical in Paramus, says.

She explains that the aging process causes the loss of fat and collagen in a person's face, and red and blue blood vessels may begin to show more prominently through the thinner skin under the eye.

PREVENTION

Fortunately, women don't necessarily have to spend their hard-earned cash on cosmetics or laser treatments. Baxt says dark under-eye circles are linked to several

lifestyle factors, including stress, alcohol consumption, tobacco use and lack of sleep. Slathering on sunscreen or wearing sunglasses year-round not only prevents the formation of wrinkles – or worse, skin cancer – but can also prevent under-eye circles from developing later in life.

"The bottom line," Baxt says, "is live a healthy lifestyle, moisturize your skin, avoid the sun and use cover-up."

She also recommends keeping the skin under the eye hydrated by applying an eye cream at night.

"There are lots of good creams, ointments and serums out there, but I sometimes recommend plain Vaseline petroleum jelly," she says.

TREATMENT

For those concerned about severe under-eye circles, Dr. Achiamah Osei-Tutu and Dr. Naana Boakye, co-owners of Bergen Dermatology in Englewood Cliffs, recommend cold compresses to reduce swelling around the eyes. Over-the-counter products containing retinol and vitamins A, C, K and E can sometimes be effective, as can cosmeceuticals, which are more potent products you can buy at a physician's office.

Women with drastic cases of infra-orbital dark circles should seek the advice of their dermatologist, who can also provide other treatments. Goldberg explains that the delicate under-eye skin can be bleached with prescription products, or your doctor might instead focus on treating eczema and allergies with prescription pills and creams to minimize their effects on the skin's appearance.

"We can use topical growth factor products in combination with lasers to slightly thicken the aging, thinning skin," Goldberg says.

Your dermatologist also might recommend wrinkle fillers to improve the appearance of the lower eyelid area.

"One can expect to look five to 10 years younger," he says.

Whatever treatment you choose, it's best to coordinate with a dermatologist. Osei-Tutu notes that while lasers, fillers and chemical peels might improve the appearance of the under-eye area, they can worsen the condition or cause irritation or even permanent scarring if not administered correctly. ■



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