

THE DILEMMA OF DARK CIRCLES UNDER YOUR EYES

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Facial structure and skin coloration: Bone structure, including prominent cheekbones and deep-set eyes, and light, translucent skin over a darkish underlying tissue color will make the orbital eye area appear much darker than the rest of the face. Genetic under-eye fat deposits appear in youth and gradually worsen with age. A large amount of under-eye fat can cause severe dark circles, especially below the fat deposits. Surgical removal of under-eye fat through an incision placed inside the lower eyelid (with no visible scar) is a simple surgical procedure that is performed as early as late teens or early twenties. Ask for us for a referral to a board-certified plastic surgeon.

Genetics: Does a parent or other family member also have dark circles? If so, mild, non-drying skin lighteners and wearing 100% UV protection sunglasses can help their appearance dramatically. In some cases, however, warm-toned, corrective camouflage cover cream is the only real answer. Unfortunately, most cover creams tend to look dry, accentuating under-eye wrinkles. To help solve this problem, hydrate the under-eye area with a good moisturizer ten minutes before applying an under-eye cover cream. Blend the cover cream well with a small amount of moisturizer on the back of your hand. Stipple (tap) this mixture gently around the eyes, blending into surrounding areas with a make-up sponge. Set with a micro-milled loose powder.

Lack of sleep: Does one of the following describe you? Chronic lack of sleep? Sleep disorder like insomnia, waking up during the night, etc? Frequent air travel, crossing time zones? Night-shift employment? Interrupted sleep during the day? All of these factors involve physical stress, causing dark under-eye circles, darkened orbital eye area and skin problems, including acne. Changing sleep habits at least seven uninterrupted hours a night should help relieve symptoms. Sleeping too little, then trying to catch up on the weekend simply won't help.

Dehydration: Lack of water impacts darker skin tones dramatically. Dehydrating substances like smoking, alcohol, medications, coffee and black tea significantly increase the body's need to re-hydrate with water. Rule of thumb: Drink enough water to equal half your weight in ounces. For every drink, dehydrating beverage, cigarette or medication, drink a lot of extra water. Drink even more if you take antibiotics, diuretics, allergy meds, cold meds, sleep aids or any other medicine known to cause dehydration, dry mouth and/or excessive thirst.

Chemical irritation: Topical acne medications like benzoyl peroxide (BPO), Retin-A, AHA, BHA, and resorcinol can cause temporary darkening when applied too close to the eye area. Acne washes containing benzoyl peroxide (BPO); salicylic acid (BHA) or glycolic acid should not be rinsed over the eyes. Moisturizer applied to (or near) the eye area simultaneously with BPO can cause BPO to migrate right through the cream into delicate tissues surrounding the eyes. Overuse and/or thick applications of Retin-A, AHA, glycolic acid and anti-aging exfoliating creams or serums can cause temporary darkening. The resulting dryness, itching and rubbing can prolong the situation. Use of fluorinated corticosteroids in the eye area leads to darkening, broken capillaries and swelling.

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Contact dermatitis: Hyperpigmentation accompanied by itching and mild peeling can be caused by frosted eye shadows, contaminated mascara, scented skin care products, contact lens products, overuse of vitamin K, Retin-A or glycolic acid and D & C red dyes. Switch to hypoallergenic matte eye shadows and unscented, non-irritating skin care products. Avoid D & C red dyes. Change mascara every three months and never share. Apply Aloe-Cort four times daily until rash and itching disappears.

Wiping and rubbing: Tearing, rubbing, wiping and scratching increases the darkening. Remove make-up and cleanse very gently. Keep irritating cleansers away from the eyes and pat dry. Address those allergies and use caution with those contact lenses. Wear lightly tinted glasses when going out into the wind, even in the evening, so debris, dust and pollutants won't blow into the eye.

Contact lenses: Irritation from contact lenses can cause tearing and itching resulting in rubbing, wiping, "dry eye" and darkening. Wear sunglasses, glasses during the day. Wear lightly tinted shades out into the wind in the evening, so debris, dust and pollutants won't blow into the eye. Replace contacts often, keep them clean, and get regular check-ups. Forget the extended wear contact lenses.

Chronic allergies: Out-of-control allergies, whether or not one rubs or wipes their eyes, can cause dark circles, called "allergic shiners" even in children. Swelling, tearing, wiping and/or rubbing, blotting and scratching the orbital eye area contribute dramatically to dark circles. Many antihistamines are accompanied by unpleasant side effects and daytime drowsiness, so many allergy sufferers are inconsistent with treatment. In addition to exploring and removing the irritants causing the allergy, control can often be achieved by consistent use of the newer, non-drowsy antihistamines (Claritin, Allegra and Zyrtec will be over-the-counter in the near future), and steroid nasal sprays, which work on swollen nasal tissues without entering the bloodstream. Daily use of some antihistamines (Benadryl) can cause sun sensitivity, leading to increased darkening around the eye. Use sunblock, avoid direct sun, and 100% UV protective eyewear religiously.

Obesity and sudden weight gain: Fat cells seem to boost the body's production of estrogens, which causes the skin to become sensitive to the sun and darken as a result. Sun avoidance and daily use of sunblock and sunglasses are a must. Drugs often associated with obesity including diuretics, oral anti-diabetic drugs, some anti-depressants and blood pressure medications increase photosensitivity. Cut back on salt and high sodium foods. Reduce fats, carbohydrates and sweets, and exercise regularly. This will help reduce bodyweight, water retention, and the need for sun-sensitizing medication, and improve blood pressure, self-esteem and general health.

Sun exposure: Failure to wear sunglasses during even short episodes of sun exposure (including rainy and overcast days when glare and UVA rays are intense) can cause delicate eye tissues to darken dramatically.

Thyroid problems: Modern medicine is doing a better job of diagnosing thyroid problems these days. Darkening in the orbital eye area, constant tearing, puffiness, fluid retention, disturbed sleep cycles and delayed healing are symptoms that often accompany thyroid disease. Rubbing and wiping the eyes can intensify the darkening.

Hormones & pregnancy: All hormonal changes, imbalances and hormone medications cause sun-sensitivity leading to skin discoloration and other skin problems.

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Medications: Hormone replacement, birth control pills, antibiotics, antihistamines, painkillers, diuretics, oral anti-diabetic drugs, Accutane, anti-depressants and blood pressure medications and a lot of other prescription and non-prescription drugs can cause sun sensitivity that can lead to darkening. Some topical skin care preparations and medications, including skin lighteners and Retin-A, can cause sun sensitivity.

Smoking: If you smoke cigarettes, “Bidis”, cigars, clove cigarettes, blunts, or weed, and even if you are exposed to secondhand smoke, dark circles are a common side effect, especially on black skin. Even only two or three cigarettes a day (or 30 minutes of secondhand smoke) can cause darkening in the eye area. Now you have good reason to either quit smoking, or put a stop to your exposure to secondhand smoke!

Lighten up: If the orbital eye area is darker than the face, skin lighteners are available that contain mild glycolic or **lactic acid** (exfoliants and “vehicles” to the deeper tissues), **dimethylisobutylcamphor** (a potent deep-penetrating vehicle), **vitamin A** (retinoids including Retin-A, tretinoin and vitamin A propionate), **hydroquinone** (the only FDA-approved skin lightener), **I-ascorbate** (stable, absorbable vitamin C), and other highly effective botanical brightening ingredients including **kojic acid, azelaic acid, licorice root and licorice extract, vitamin K, mulberry extract, bearberry extract, I-arbutin, mandelic acid, quinchona extract, lime and lemon extracts.**

Unless you have used eye creams or serums containing “active” brighteners (hydroquinone, kojic acid, azelaic acid, bearberry, arbutin, mulberry, vitamin K, etc.) or exfoliants with ingredients like mixed AHAs, active retinoids (vitamin A), glycolic or lactic acid in the past, a three-day patch test is a good idea. These specialty products, formulated especially for the delicate skin in the orbital eye area, contain just enough AHA or vitamin A to help the active lighteners and brighteners penetrate, lightly exfoliate and repair the under-eye area. They help reduce fine lines and dark shadowing. Ceramides and other moisture-building factors help hydrate the delicate tissues, which lack sebaceous (oil-producing) activity and tend to dry out first. Remember, drink plenty of water!

You must gradually wean the skin onto active eye care products, using caution to apply very sparingly and rub in well until all traces of the product have vanished into the skin. Follow directions and then use even less. More is definitely not better and may cause temporary darkening of the epidermal cells, a dry, parched appearance and peeling accompanied by itching and redness. Start out every second or third night if you aren’t using BPO (benzoyl peroxide). Follow with an emollient non-AHA moisturizer or eye cream to reduce the risk of excessive dryness. Always practice sun avoidance, apply full-spectrum sunscreen and wear 100% UV protective sunglasses.