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Beauty

YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIVE WITH AN UNEVEN SKIN TONE. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE LATEST TREATMENTS TO KISS DISCOLORATION GOOD-BYE

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Luckily for us, companies have stepped up their efforts on the hyperpigmentation front, giving us more options than ever to erase dark spots. But do they work? We talked to the experts to find out what treatment breakthroughs have been made, and put a few products through our own road test. Read on to discover which method will work best for you.

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CASCIANO: MANICURIST, DAWN STERLING/STARWORKS; ARTIST'S USING DIOR VERNIS; STYLIST, WOURI VICE; PROP STYLING, MARIANA VERA/HALLEY RESOURCES.

WHAT WE KNOW

THE CAUSE: We mainly suffer from post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation (PIH), which is discoloration caused by injury or irritation. "No matter what color you are, we all have the same amount of pigment cells, called melanocytes," explains board-certified dermatologist Cheryl M. Burgess, M.D., founder of the Center for Dermatology and Dermatologic Surgery in Washington, D.C. "What makes our color different is the little globs of pigment inside the melanocytes, which are called melanosomes. The larger and more numerous they are, the darker your skin is." And the more prone you are to discoloration issues.

THE GO-TO: However controversial hydroquinone may be—a side effect can be a light halo ring that forms during spot treatments or a negative reaction causing more darkened skin—our experts continue to call it the gold standard treatment for PIH. "No long-term side effects have been proven," says Jeanine Downie, M.D., a dermatologist in Montclair, New Jersey. "And things like the halo occur with improper application." Frequent follow-ups and a limit on the amount of time a patient is on a hydroquinone regimen help to ensure safety. Miami-based dermatologist Andrea Trowers, M.D., uses formulations of 8 to 10 percent to achieve significant results in a shorter time span: "I typically use compounded formulations [custom-made strengths ordered by a doctor], which allow me to use stronger strengths of hydroquinone than are available at a regular pharmacy."

THE SUNSCREEN: "It should contain a physical blocker such as micronized zinc oxide and/or titanium dioxide," explains Trowers. But what about the ashy appearance it leaves? "Now there are micronized options in which the physical blockers are ground into fine particles, reducing that white cast and providing better coverage," notes Trowers. One of her faves for brown skin is **SkinCeuticals Physical Fusion UV Defense SPF 50** (\$32, skinceuticals.com).

WHAT'S NEW

IN PRODUCTS: Most treatments that lighten skin work by interfering with the



production of melanin. This means blocking tyrosinase, the melanin-producing enzyme. But it turns out that all melanin is not the same. "Eumelanin is found in darker skins and pheomelanin is found in fair skin," explains Ni'Kita Wilson, a cosmetic chemistry expert at beautysage.com. A breakthrough is the enzyme lignin peroxidase. Initially used to lighten wood for paper production, it is derived naturally from a type of fungus or mushroom. The difference with this ingredient is how it works on hyperpigmentation: It targets and breaks down existing eumelanin instead of just stopping future production. The enzyme could do wonders for existing marks. Currently it's in Luminaze and trademarked as Melanozyme in the Elure lines of lighteners. Other companies have also turned to mushrooms for success. The songyi mushroom has been used in Asia for centuries as a skin lightener, and now its extract is in the new **Palmer's Eventone** skin care line. **Shinto All Evens Out** products use beta glucans, found in mushrooms, to revitalize skin cells.

IN THE DERMATOLOGIST'S OFFICE: Derms are excited about the DermaCeutic Spot Peel (see photos above). Popular in the Middle East, it's gaining ground stateside. "For the first time we have a spot peel that has a unique combination of ingredients from which we get high efficacy, no downtime and no side effects," explains New York City dermatologist Bruce Katz, M.D. The peel, which is left on the face for 2 minutes, contains alpha and beta hydroxy acids, mandelic acid and idebenone, one of the most powerful antioxidants for neutralizing the damaging effects of free radicals. Following the

initial application, patients keep a solution on for eight hours. "It's this kind of multimodal approach that really gives a lot more benefits than a single-ingredient peel," says Katz. Another benefit: You could save money in the long run. Other peels usually take four to six sessions before a patient sees a significant difference. At \$300 or more per visit, expenses can add up quickly. On the other hand, you'll pay only \$300 to \$400 for the DermaCeutic treatment, which may require just one peel session at the doctor's office, followed by a 30-day at-home regimen that includes a spot treatment (at one third the strength of the in-office version), cleansers and moisturizers. "Because the ingredients aren't harsh and are in low concentrations, the peel is ideal for skin of color," adds Katz. ▶

Fade Treatments vs. Brighteners

"The difference between faders and brighteners is primarily the strength of the ingredients used," explains chemist Ni'Kita Wilson. "Faders, which are used to spot-treat, are more concentrated with higher levels of skin-clearing ingredients. Brighteners have lower concentrations of active ingredients and are typically used on the entire face to exfoliate." **The verdict: Adjust your expectations. Opt for the fade treatment if you have serious pigment issues, and turn to brighteners, like NARS Skin Illuminated, to exfoliate, to refine skin cells and to reveal a radiant glow.**