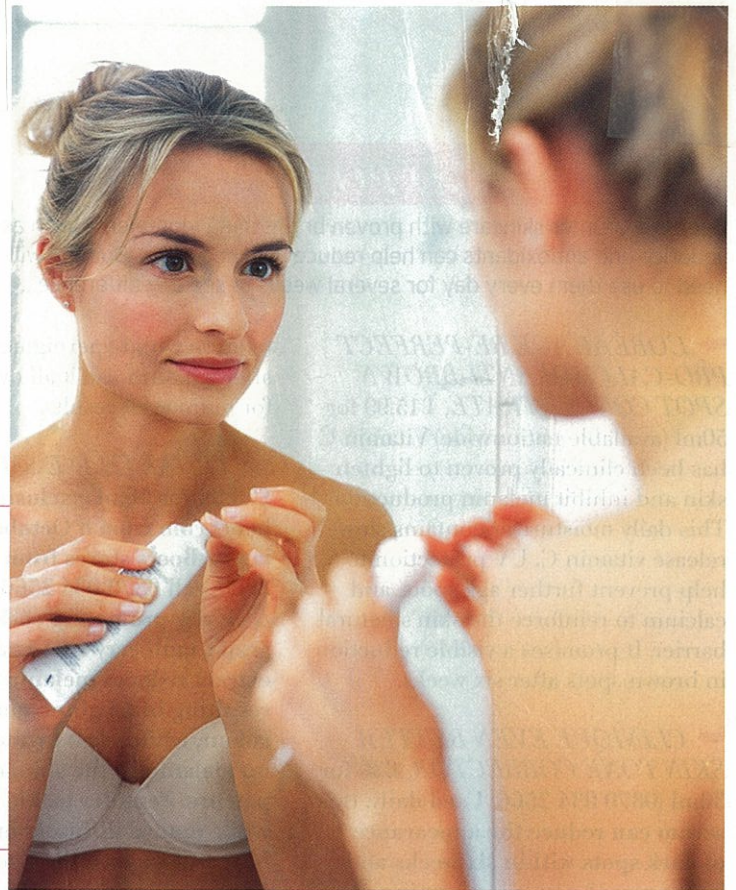


Not just about the sun

As well as sun exposure, hormonal fluctuations such as those resulting from taking the Pill, pregnancy and the menopause can trigger age spots and other forms of hyperpigmentation. Also, genetic factors could mean some people are more likely than others to develop sun spots. Pigment production tends to become less uniform as we get older, especially after the age of 60, so uneven pigmentation is even more likely as time goes by.

GET A PRESCRIPTION

If you think it will take something more powerful than over-the-counter skincare to zap your sun spots, visit a dermatologist. Formulations with higher concentrations of pigment fighters such as Retin-A (a form of vitamin A) and hydroquinone (a bleaching agent) can only be obtained on prescription, so call the British Association Of Dermatologists on 020 7383 0266 to find a dermatologist near you.



Feature: Trish Lesslie Photos: Camera Press, Getty Images, Urbanlip.com

How big can they get?

Grey, brown or black, age spots are flat and range from freckle-size to more than 1cm across. Sometimes they group together, making them more prominent.

Go for treatment

Whether over-the-counter or on prescription, lotions and potions take a long time to work. 'It can be about eight months before you see a substantial difference,' says Frances Furlong of City Skin Health Spa in London. 'And you have to apply your product every day or it's going to take you even longer to see an improvement.' For quicker results, you might want to consider light treatments such as ruby lasers, Fraxel or intense pulsed light (IPL). Chemical peels are another speedier alternative. It's best to

visit a clinic that offers the whole range of treatment options – that way, your skincare professional can choose what's best for your skin as a whole. 'It's also important to see someone who specialises in this area,' advises Dr Lowe. 'Some of these spots can be cancerous, so you want to consult someone who's trained in spotting them.'

IN MY CASE

I first noticed a few dark spots on my face in my late twenties, but they didn't really bother me. It was only after one particular spot started showing up clearly in photos that they began to trouble me. I decided to try the new Vitamin A Skin Peel Brightening Facial from Skin Health Spa (£85 per treatment or £425 for a course of six), which is suitable for all skin types. At the consultation I was advised to use a retinol (or vitamin A) cream for two weeks before my first treatment and to apply a broad-spectrum sun cream every day. Retinol makes the skin more sensitive to UV rays, so if you don't protect your skin, your age spots will get worse.

Two weeks later I had my first session, which began with microdermabrasion to blast away dead surface skin cells. The vitamin A solution

was then applied to my face and neck. Unlike some chemical peels, it didn't itch or sting. My face was a little flushed, but it was fine to apply foundation to hide the mild redness. The next day, my skin felt a little dry and tight. The day after that, I looked like a snake shedding its skin. Tons of moisturiser helped, but I was glad it was Sunday so no one would see me. A few days after that, once the peeling had stopped, a colleague said that my skin looked amazing and asked what I'd been using!

After just two sessions, the dark spots appeared lighter and they'd faded considerably after a course of six. The overall texture has improved, too – my complexion looks brighter and clearer and fine lines and wrinkles seem softer.

TRISH LESSLIE,
BEAUTY EDITOR