

Clear Talk

If you are suffering from dark brown patches on your face after being out in the sun, you probably have Melasma. This is a condition in which the skin darkens, unevenly, on sun exposed areas. It is often the result of hormonal influences including birth control pills, pregnancy and hormone replacement therapy. Views and News caught up with Dr. Heather Haley to find out more about this common skin problem and how to treat it.



Dr. Heather Haley



Dr. Laura Cepeda

V&N: Who gets Melasma and why?

Dr. Haley: Anyone can get Melasma. I even have it! Melasma is a condition where the color producing cells, melanocytes, in the skin are making too much color. It is like a rapid, uneven suntan. Under the influence of hormones, melanocytes that are exposed to sunlight release clumps of melanin which cause immediate darkening in splotches. It is my experience that once the cells have been activated to produce color, if you stop the hormones, the melanocytes will calm down and the color will fade. Unfortunately, this only happens half the time. Stopping the inciting event does not always correct the problem. That is when it is time to see a Dermatologist.

V&N: What advice would you offer women seeking treatment?

Dr. Haley: I don't have a single treatment for melasma; I like to use a combination of things. First, I recommend a bleaching cream that contains at least 4% Hydroquinone (HQ). Many patients come to my office and have already tried the nonprescription strength creams that contain a smaller amount of HQ. These rarely work. Second, daily sun protection containing a UVA protectant, like zinc oxide, is the most important thing. I see patients all the time that fade their dark spots only to have them return in the winter when they stopped using sunscreen. Don't let this happen to you! Wear your sunscreen every day. Melasma is a stubborn problem that tends to recur often. No treatment is 100% effective.

Other topical therapies that will help the HQ work better are vitamin C and retinoids. I recommend the Obagi skin care line. It has everything you need to keep your skin as healthy as possible.

V&N: All these products sound great, but is there a quick fix?

Dr. Haley: There are many second line therapies that help melasma. As I said, the above products are for everyone to clear and maintain good results. IPL is a laser treatment that helps remove the dark spots. IPL works very well, especially if this is a new problem for your skin. If you have suffered with melasma for years as I have, you will want to try our new peel. Many chemical peels can be used to remove the dark spots. My favorite is the Melanage Peel. I have personally tried everything and this peel has given me the best results! It is a beta-hydroxy acid peel that includes hydroquinone in the treatment process. It comes with a full regimen of aftercare products containing HQ and retinol to get long lasting results. This is the most effective treatment I have found for melasma.

V&N: What is an average cost a patient can expect to pay for treatment?

Dr. Cepeda: A good sunscreen ranges \$15-\$40 and lightening creams can cost from \$80-\$150. Obagi skincare for three month regimen of products is around \$350. The Melanage Peel is \$800. We also offer milder peels, the VI Peel (\$300) and the Vitalize Peel(\$150), that help with malasma as well. An IPL full face laser treatment costs \$300. I recommend a consultation with us to see which treatment option is best for you.

"The Melanage Peel is the most effective treatment I have found for melasma." says Dr. Haley.

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