

BY DR MAUREEN ALLEM

new breakthroughs

IN TREATING AND PREVENTING SUN DAMAGED SKIN

aGEING SKIN IS ASSOCIATED WITH A RANGE OF COSMETIC CONCERNS. AS THE SKIN'S TEXTURE AND COLOUR DECLINES DRAMATICALLY, SUPERFICIAL VEINS, SUN SPOTS AND WRINKLES BECOME EVIDENT. THIS PHOTOAGEING IS CAUSED BY ULTRAVIOLET LIGHT EXPOSURE AND TENDS TO ACT MORE ON THE SURFACE OF THE SKIN ESPECIALLY ON SUN EXPOSED AREAS.

Cutaneous ageing signs due to sun damage become visible from as early as the twenties especially in sunny climates like South Africa which has excessive sun or environmental exposure. However between the ages of 35 to 49 years, there is a sharp increase in prevalence of the skin changes mentioned above. Asian and African skin is also prone to excessive freckling, hyper-pigmentation and uneven skin tone. Without protection from the sun's rays, just a few minutes of exposure each day over the years can cause noticeable changes to the skin.

Ageing sun damaged skin unsettles women more than men because unfortunately society believes a woman loses her attractiveness once visible signs of facial ageing set in. Dr Maureen Allem, medical director of Skin Renewal Aesthetic centres, takes a look at this problem and treatment options.

THERE ARE NUMEROUS TOPICAL AND IN OFFICE EXFOLIATION AND RESURFACING PROCEDURES WHICH ADDRESS DIFFERENT GRADES OF SUN DAMAGE.

- For mildly sun damaged skin, traditional topical home therapies such as alpha hydroxy and polyhydroxy acids, retinols, peptides and growth factors can improve texture, wrinkles and pigmentation over a period of 3 to 12 months depending on which product is used.
- In office therapies such as a series of superficial exfoliation treatments such as alpha and beta hydroxy acids peels and microdermabrasion can improve discolouration and texture over a period of 3 to 6 months. These mild exfoliation treatments are usually suitable for all skin types including those patients who have mild sunspots, hormonal pigmentation, acne and dry or oily skin with enlarged pores. Beta-hydroxy acids, such as salicylic acid, are particularly effective in reducing excess oil production and may be a good fit for oily, acne-prone skin.

However all exfoliation products and treatments make your skin more sensitive to the sun and thus a sunscreen

of SPF 15 should be used daily and sun exposure avoided. In addition, before any resurfacing or exfoliation procedure, the skin should be prepared for a period of 2 weeks with traditional home lightening products such as Kojic acid, Arbutin or the newly launched Luminesce Range by Lamelle. These will downregulate the enzymes that produce melanin and will help prevent post peel hyper pigmentation.

The terms peels and exfoliation are often used interchangeably but there is a clear distinction between them. Exfoliation treatments using enzyme peels, mild strength alpha and beta hydroxy acids and microdermabrasion can be performed in a beauty salon as they have only a superficial penetration and action. Peels such as the more aggressive full face TCA, Resorcinol and Phenol peels are better performed by a medical doctor in a medical setting, as the techniques used, such as the layering of peels, have a medium to deep dermal action with a downtime ranging from 3 to 14 days depending on the product used.

However, once the advanced signs of ageing such as wrinkles appear on the facial skin, it is time to initiate the most powerful corrective treatments and topical therapies available such as growth factors and peptides which improve collagen content and wrinkling within a period 6 to 12 weeks. Dermaheal, crafted with concentrations of Nobel Prize winning molecules offers the ultimate topical therapy for anti-ageing skin remodeling.

More advanced sun damaged skin with visible wrinkles and pigmentation should only be treated in medical aesthetic clinics with advanced exfoliating resurfacing treatments. These include mid dermal peels viz. TCA and Mela M and Photo rejuvenation with Class 4 medical lasers such as IPL or the more advanced laser resurfacing procedures such as Pearl™. These all offer a safe, non invasive approach to skin rejuvenation in a medical setting with trained and experienced professionals. It is also very important to have the correct assessment of the type of pigmentation one has as hormonal pigmentation is treated differently to the pigmentation of sun damage. Badly sun damaged facial skin with deep, ingrained wrinkles and diffuse discolouration is a challenging condition to treat. In these cases the above mentioned topical therapies and resurfacing treatments on their own cannot make a big difference and success at combating this kind of sun damage needs more aggressive laser resurfacing treatments such as Active X, Fractionated Pearl or Fraxel Repair which are available at selected

medical aesthetic clinics. These treatments have a downtime of 4 to 10 days but one treatment usually results in a marked improvement of discolouration, deeper wrinkles and acne scars.

These advanced treatments must be customized for different skin types, ageing skin conditions and predisposing medical conditions. Thus it is essential that a medical doctor with experience in these treatments be consulted to prevent unwanted effects such as full thickness burns, permanent scarring and post inflammatory hyperpigmentation. These treatments offer exceptionally effective skin rejuvenation results with minimal discomfort and downtime.

Recent advances in topical pigmentation technology such as the recently launched Luminesce range with its patented pigment brightening peptides prevent and treat pigmentation that can result from exfoliation procedures by reducing melanin at eight pathways in its production, as opposed to just one pathway as with traditional treatments such as Kojic Acid and Arbutin. An added benefit of the Luminesce range is that the combination of peptides used in the range offers anti-ageing benefits to the skin as they stimulate collagen producing cells and it is safe for use on all skin types.

No matter how great one's skin is at age twenty five, the inevitable volume loss, sagging, wrinkling and skin discolouration will slowly leave their marks on one's face by the time one reaches 45. In order to stem the slow downhill decline, intervention has to take place sooner than later with a combination of medical grade cosmeceuticals and innovative customized exfoliation and resurfacing procedures. Fortunately there are numerous aesthetic medical clinics that are well placed around the country with doctors experienced in the latest aesthetic procedures who will assess your ageing concerns and recommend a customised solution dependant on budget and expectations. Awareness of the damaging effect of UV radiation on the facial appearance and sun avoidance and protection before the age of twenty will help reduce the risks for developing sun damaged skin later in life. By combining and adhering to the protocols of the different resurfacing and exfoliation procedures and cosmeceuticals mentioned above together with sun avoidance and adequate sun protection, one is able to take an average sun damaged skin to the next level and effectively reset the skin's "ageing clock" by a minimum of five years. ■

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Pic Courtesy Ericson Laboratoire

