

# SEE SPOTS RUN

Brown patches, dark marks, a pimple that looks like it's sticking around way too long: Make them (poof!) disappear with these skin-smart solutions. **BY** Janelle M. Hickman

**THEY SEEM TO** pop up out of nowhere: a small patch of brown on your forehead, a tiny freckle on your cheek. Is it a beauty mark? A blemish? The lighting in your bathroom? Spots of all stripes can happen to anyone—and if you have darker skin, you probably know this well. “People of color are particularly susceptible to hyperpigmentation,” says Kavita Mariwalla, MD, a dermatologist in West Islip, New York. “There’s plenty you can do, but it takes a nuanced approach to get rid of discoloration.”

The first step is knowing what causes an out-of-control pigment party. Essentially, your skin’s melanocytes—the cells responsible for giving your complexion its color—are churning out too much melanin. This process can be spurred on by unchecked sun exposure, as well as pollution and hormones. Darker women are especially prone because their melanosomes (think of these as mail carriers that deliver the melanin from your melanocytes to the top layers of your skin) are bigger and release more melanin to begin with. This becomes problematic when other factors are at play: “Inflammation caused by allergic reactions, psoriasis, acne, eczema, or superficial cuts can leave behind patches of discoloration, called post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation,” explains Michelle Henry, MD, clinical instructor of dermatology at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City.

Luckily, with a little time and care, topical products can fade the spots. And if you need some extra help to clear things up, advancements in in-office technology are giving dermatologists more tools than ever to care for your complexion. So let’s get those damned spots out.



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## **BECOME A SCREEN STAR**

You’ve heard it time and again, but daily SPF is a must for all women—especially those who want to get spots under control. “We know that UV light directly stimulates the production of excess pigment,” says New York City dermatologist Carlos A. Charles, MD, founder of *Derma di Colore*, a private practice that specializes in deeper skin tones. Plus, says Henry, any treatment you try will be less effective if you’re not adequately protecting your skin. What’s more, recent research suggests that blue light—visible light from the sun as well as your smartphone, computer, TV, and tablet—may also cause your skin to produce more pigment. For these reasons, many experts recommend zinc oxide-based sunscreens, which can protect against both forms of light. Unfortunately, they can leave a chalky white or purplish hue on darker skin tones, so

go with a tinted version like *Rodan + Fields Radiant Defense Perfecting Liquid Broad Spectrum SPF 30* (\$66; [rodanandfields.com](http://rodanandfields.com)).

## **FIGHT FREE RADICALS**

These unstable molecules can wreak havoc on your skin, breaking down collagen and damaging melanocytes, causing them to go haywire. Sunscreen alone can’t protect you here; you need antioxidants as well to shield against the onslaught. Vitamin C is considered the gold standard—and can also help inhibit the production of tyrosinase, an enzyme that sets the pigment-making process in motion, says Henry. Slather on *L’Oréal Paris Revitalift Derm Intensives 10% Pure Vitamin C Concentrate* (\$30; drugstores) before applying SPF.

## **CALL IN THE HEAVYWEIGHT**

Our experts agree that hydroquinone is one of the most effective topical lighteners. It helps minimize the activity of pigment-producing cells and is available over the counter in up to 2 percent concentrations or by prescription at 4 percent. It’s potent, so try a patch test first, applying it at night and only to areas of discoloration. Consistency is key: Henry estimates it can take up to four weeks to see an improvement in existing spots. Once you’ve faded them, you can stop using the product. Try *Urban Skin Rx Even Tone Night Treatment* (\$68; [urbanskinrx.com](http://urbanskinrx.com)).

## **ASK “WHAT’S UP, DOC?”**

In-office chemical peels that contain salicylic or glycolic acid can be a smart solution. “They’re pretty superficial and typically won’t create inflammation,” explains Charles. Lasers, too, can lessen the appearance of spots, but have been tricky to use on people with darker skin. The latest option, however, called the pico laser, can be safely used on most skin tones. “The beam moves quickly so it doesn’t heat the skin as much, making it much less likely to cause hyperpigmentation,” explains Henry, who says to expect results in two to six sessions. Be sure to see a board-certified dermatologist for either of these procedures and request before and after photos of past patients, she adds. Visit [skinofcolorssociety.org](http://skinofcolorssociety.org) for a database of professionals who specialize in darker skin.