

Dermatology Image of the Week

Melasma

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Melasma is a disorder of hyperpigmentation that occurs in sun-exposed areas, primarily the face. The most common presentation is irregular, often symmetric, hyperpigmented macules involving the cheeks, forehead, upper lip, nose, and chin.

Women account for 90% of melasma cases, and the disorder is relatively common in women of childbearing age.^[1] While all races are affected, the condition appears to be more common among Latinos -- especially Latinos of Caribbean origin -- and Asians.

The exact cause of melasma has not been pinpointed, but factors implicated in the pathogenesis include genetic factors, oral contraceptives, pregnancy, intense sun exposure, endocrine dysfunction, and certain antiepilepsy medications.

Treatment requires sunblocks, bleaching agents, and time.^[2] Without the religious, daily use of a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30, treatment is doomed to failure. Bleaching agents include 2% to 4% hydroquinone creams or gels, which are also available in combination products containing sunscreen. Tretinoin and azelaic acid are also used. A combination corticosteroid/hydroquinone/tretinoin product in a cream formulation is effective. Chemical peels have also been employed.

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 2. Mosher DB, Fitzpatrick TB, Ortonne JP. Hypomelanoses and hypermelanoses. In: Freedberg IM, Eisen AZ, Wolff K, eds. *Fitzpatrick's Dermatology in General Medicine*. CD-ROM edition. New York: McGraw-Hill; 1999.
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