

The Right Skin TLC for Women of Color

It's time to bust some long-standing myths about how women of color should care for their complexions. Turn the page for legit advice.

BY ANDREA ARTERBERY

HEALTHY IS HOT.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY DAMON FOURIE/SUPERNOVA CREATIVE MANAGEMENT. FASHION EDITOR: CLEO MARCOPOULOS. HAIR: ALET VILJOEN/SUPERNOVA CREATIVE MANAGEMENT. MAKEUP: KELLY PAITAKI/GLOSS ARTIST MANAGEMENT USING CHANEL. MODELS: KYRA COLE/BOSS MODELS, ALYSSA COLE/BOSS MODELS.

THE FIRST TIME I noticed sunscreen, it was on someone else's body.

Growing up in a tiny East Texas town where the unrelenting heat of summer was brutal (I'm talking 100-plus temperatures for days on end), hanging at the public pool was the best way to cool down. The second my mom dropped me off, I'd jump right into the water—usually off the high dive because I was a show-off like that.

One of my friends was a white girl whose mother slathered her in thick white cream before she'd let her swim. No matter how long we swam, the cream never seemed to budge. One day, out of curiosity, I asked her what the strange coating was.

"Sunblock," she replied. "My mom says I'll turn into a lobster without it." I didn't wear sunscreen—it was the first time I'd even heard of it! I wondered if I'd turn into a lobster too.

As a black woman on the lighter side of the shade spectrum (think Beyoncé), I wasn't immune to getting a little red from playing outside. So I asked my grandmother if I needed SPF.



"Oh, no, baby, that's for white folks," she said, laughing. "You are black—and black don't crack."

Staring up at my grandmother's smooth 70something skin, I figured it must be true. Over the years, I noticed how the other black women in my family looked compared to white women their age: always younger. And it was normal for them to use the phrase *black don't crack* to explain why they didn't use much on their faces except makeup. To me, it was like a free pass for not worrying about things like sun spots or wrinkles.

That is, until I became a beauty editor in my 20s. After interviewing countless dermatologists, I was horrified to find out that everyone—regardless of race—should be wearing sunscreen daily...and that I should be doing a lot more to reduce issues that specifically affect my skin color.

"PEOPLE WITH DARKER SKIN TONES VISIBLY AGE ABOUT 10 YEARS LATER THAN THOSE WITH WHITE SKIN."

"Although the average African-American has a 'natural' SPF of 13 due to increased melanin—aka pigment—the skin can still burn and is absolutely susceptible to skin cancer," explains dermatologist Susan Taylor, MD, associate professor of dermatology at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University

of Pennsylvania. Even more frightening: After diagnoses, we're more likely to die from skin cancer. According to a recent study published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*, African-American patients were more likely to be diagnosed with melanoma in its later stages than any other group in the study (including whites, Hispanics, and Asian-Americans). They also had the worst prognosis and lowest overall survival rate.

The black-don't-crack myth could play a role: Experts believe African-American patients don't seek medical attention for spots as early as other groups, as they may not think they're in danger. (There could also be biological differences in darker skin shades that make melanoma more aggressive; more research needs to be done.)

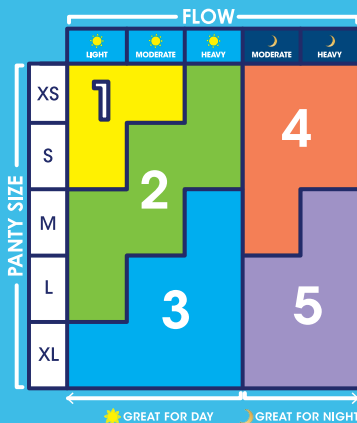
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BEAUTY

true—"people with darker skin tones visibly age about 10 years later than those with white skin," says Dr. Taylor—there are sneaky saboteurs unique to us that require specific precautions like these.

WEAR SPF DAILY

"Sunscreen should be an essential part of every woman's skin-care regimen, no matter her skin color or ethnicity," says dermatologist and *Cosmo* contributor Whitney Bowe, MD. Despite this, 65 percent of African-American patients surveyed in a recent Skin Cancer Foundation poll admit they never use it. If you skip SPF because of ashiness (the top complaint our derms hear), look for chemical sunscreens that contain avobenzone. They sink into skin, rather than sit on top of it, and absorb UV light, says dermatologist Joshua Zeichner, MD. However, if you have sensitive or acne-prone skin, Dr. Zeichner recommends a gentler, barely perceptible, noncomedogenic micronized zinc oxide (like Neutrogena's, above).

PROACTIVELY TREAT SPOTS

"Skin discoloration is the number one reason women of color come into my office," says Cheryl Burgess, MD, a dermatologist in D.C. Pigment-making cells (aka melanocytes) respond to any form of injury (inflammation from UV rays, acne, even excess rubbing) by producing more melanin, which can leave a long-lasting mark on the surface of the skin, explains Dr. Bowe. Daily SPF—whether as part of a treatment product (L'Oréal's, here, has glycolic acid to fade spots) or snuck into your makeup (like CoverGirl's foundation, above)—is the

easiest way to prevent an uneven tone. To target existing hyperpigmentation, our derms suggest hydroquinone. "It's one of the most powerful ingredients because it stops the production of pigment at the source by blocking tyrosinase, the enzyme that makes melanin," says Dr. Bowe. While effective, high doses of prescription versions can cause unwanted skin lightening, so try a less intense, OTC version (like this one by Urban Skin Rx).

BANISH BREAKOUTS... GENTLY

While we may have won the genetic jackpot when it comes to wrinkles, the opposite is true when it comes to acne. Studies have shown that breakouts are more common in African-American women than in white women. Possibly worse than the pimples themselves: the brown marks (known as post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation) that linger for months after a zit heals. If you're tempted to aggressively treat acne, stop! "Any irritation, such as that caused by strong acne medications like retinoids, can lead to hyperpigmentation," explains Dr. Bowe. Your best bet: a salicylic acid-spiked lotion (try Paula's Choice, here), which gently exfoliates, preventing clogged pores. A twice-weekly nonabrasive scrub (like Dr. Sturm's, specifically formulated for WOC) helps with oil buildup.

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1. NEUTROGENA Sheer Zinc Dry-Touch Sunscreen SPF 50, \$12, drugstores 2. L'ORÉAL PARIS Revitalift Bright Reveal Brightening Day Moisturizer SPF 30, \$20, lorealparisusa.com 3. COVERGIRL Queen Collection All Day Flawless 3-in-1 Foundation, \$10, drugstores 4. URBAN SKIN RX Even Tone Night Treatment, \$68, urbanskinrx.com 5. PAULA'S CHOICE SKINCARE Calm Redness Relief 1% BHA Exfoliant, \$27, paulaschoice.com 6. DR. BARBARA STURM Enzyme Cleanser for Darker Skin Tones, \$77, molecular-cosmetics.com