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dermatology update

by Dr. Debra Price

Questions and Answers

Licorice lightens?

Is it true that licorice applied topically can lighten skin pigment? Licorice contains glycyrrhetic acid that has been shown to decrease skin inflammation and may reduce skin pigment. Many over-the-counter products now contain licorice, and I suspect we will see more in the future.

Banish blackheads

What's the best way to get rid of blackheads? Pore adhesive strips can be highly effective in removing blackheads and can be an adjunct to manual extraction. Manual extraction is generally tolerated well, but for particularly sensitive individuals, the topical use of EMLA (a prescription topical anesthetic) can be helpful.

Stretch marks

What treatments do you recommend for men who develop stretch marks? Stretch marks are more common in women, but can develop in men, especially those that gain weight rapidly or take steroids as a supplement to weight training. Although stretch marks cannot be entirely eliminated, they can be improved through the topical use of prescription retinoids. Glycolic acid creams may also be helpful. The V beam laser can improve erythema and the eximer laser can repigment hypopigmented old striae. The nonablative lasers such as the Cool

Touch and Smoothbeam lasers can stimulate collagen formation and improve stretch mark texture. Men who develop stretch marks in association with steroid usage should be strongly encouraged to discontinue their use.

Common protocols for AKs (actinic keratoses) include cryotherapy, peeling, topical chemotherapeutic agents such as Effudex or Carac, immune response modifiers such as Aldara, and photodynamic therapy (PDT).

AHAs cause aging?

Does AHA use actually cause aging? Although the studies are not conclusive, scientists have reported that antiwrinkle creams containing alpha hydroxy acids may actually cause the skin to age more rapidly. These studies found that alpha hydroxy acids put the user at greater risk of ultraviolet damage from the sun.

Temp tats

Are there any risks to temporary tattooing? Temporary tattooing can sometimes trigger lifelong allergic reactions. The tattoos often contain paraphenylenediamine. Individuals who experience a reaction

to the dye may be left with a permanent allergy to sunscreen, local anesthetics and certain cosmetics.

Puffing away

Is there any definitive evidence that smoking ages the skin? Smoking does age the skin. There is association between solar elastosis, wrinkling and smoking in both sexes and smoking and telangiectasia in men. If you are concerned about your appearance, don't smoke.

Men and sunscreen

What types of sunscreens do you prefer to recommend to male patients? Male patients generally prefer gel-based sunscreens or sunscreen sticks over creams and lotions. The former is less water resistant. The latter are easier to apply and less likely to run into the eyes with sweating, which makes it a preferable choice for athletes.

OK for AKs?

What's the appropriate protocol with AKs? Actinic keratoses are erythematous rough and hyperkeratotic precancerous lesions that commonly occur in sun exposed skin, including the backs of the hands. Common therapies include cryotherapy, peeling, topical chemotherapeutic agents such as Effudex or Carac, immune response modifiers such as Aldara, and photodynamic therapy

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(PDT). You should refer your patient to a dermatologist for evaluation and treatment.

Spider veins

Are there any lasers that are effective in treating spider veins? The Lyra and Cool Glide long pulse Nd:Yag lasers can effectively clear spider veins. These lasers are most effective for treatment of veins between 1.5 millimeters to 4 millimeters.

Supplements to avoid

Aside from garlic, what other supplements may increase bleeding during or after surgery? Ginkgo and ginseng. Ginseng and garlic should be discontinued one week prior to surgery and ginkgo three days prior to surgery. ■

Debra Price, M.D., graduated from New York University School of Medicine and interned at New York University Medical Center. She is a diplomate of the American Board of Dermatology and is an assistant professor at University of Miami's department of dermatology and cutaneous surgery. An author of several scientific papers, Dr. Price is an award-winning dermatologist and past president of the Miami Dermatologic Society, in Florida. She has a private practice in Kendall, FL. To reach her, please call (305) 670-1111.

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