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Questions and Answers

Generic vs. brand names

Q: Are over-the-counter products just as good as some prescription products, and are generic products, which are cheaper, just as good as brand names?

A: Generally, over-the-counter products are less effective than topical prescription remedies in clearing acne and hyperpigmentation. Over-the-counter hydroquinone products have maximum percentage of 2 percent as opposed to prescription hydroquinone products that are 4 percent or higher.

Combination prescription remedies such as Triluma are more efficacious than agents containing hydroquinone alone. Over-the-counter benzoyl peroxide and salicylic acid cleansers, topical lotions and creams have some efficacy in treating early acne but are less effective than oral and topical prescription products. Some generic products are as effective as their brand-name counterparts, but others are less so. So the answer is that patients should consult with their doctor before considering a generic substitution.

Sure you're insured?

Q: When is a cosmetic procedure covered by insurance?

A: Most cosmetic procedures are not covered by insurance. The exception is breast reconstruction fol-

lowing breast cancer, blepharoplasty in individuals who are experiencing a decrease in their visual field because of obstruction from sagging upper eyelids, and breast reduction for individuals experiencing back pain. Laser treatment of port wine stains (a red birthmark) and scars resulting from surgery or following trauma are also sometimes covered. You should check with your insurance carrier to determine their specific policies regarding cosmetic coverage.

Out-of-pocket

Q: In your opinion, what's the better deal? A series of peels or a one-shot-and-you're-done facelift? Also, what is the most economical and effective filler?

A: The answer should be individualized based on the nature of the correction desired. Peels are more effective for individuals with dyspigmentation and wrinkles with significant sagging. Filler agents are the best solution for volume loss, and facelifts are the procedure of choice in individuals with sagging facial skin and neck laxity.

For fillers, again, that depends on the nature of patients' wrinkles. Cosmoderm is most efficacious for fine lines, and Restylane is an ideal filler for deeper wrinkles and volume loss.

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The mean duration of correction is four months and six months, respectively. Fat injections are also beneficial for volume loss. Sculptra is an ideal filler for HIV-positive patients with facial wasting. One should choose a filler based on optimal efficacy rather than financial considerations.

No stubble

Q: In your opinion, what's the most economical and effective hair removal treatment?

A: Although the cost may be higher initially, ultimately laser hair removal is the most effective and economic solution for excess hair.

Truthfully speaking

Q: Is it true that skin care products that cost more are more effective?

A: Unfortunately, the answer is no. The pricing of skin care products often reflects image and the associated costs of marketing, packaging and brand-name identification more than efficacy. Many larger, established skin care lines such as Proctor and Gamble, Oil of Olay, L'Oréal and Neutrogena do perform clinical research to substantiate their efficacy claims while maintaining reasonable pricing structures. Skin care lines with

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niche markets focusing on a particular cosmeceutical ingredient such as green tea, growth factors, pentapeptides or hyaluronic acid tend to be more expensive but often worthwhile if their formulations have been tested. Skin care lines using the same active ingredients in different formulations that have not been studied may not be equally efficacious. In general, expensive consumer skin care lines without proven advantages over less expensive alternatives should be avoided.

Insurance issues

Q: Many new drugs have been released for treatment of psoriasis. How does this affect the out-of-pocket costs to a psoriasis patient?

A: Again, the answer depends on each patient's insurance coverage. Many insurance carriers are covering the newly FDA-approved biologic agents for treatment of psoriasis.

Cheap substitutions

Q: Are there any supplements that could substitute drug therapy for hair, skin or nails?

A: Biotin is helpful in improving nails. Despite a large market of oral supplements touting efficacy in rejuvenating skin or stimulating hair growth or improving hair quality, there is no evidence that these supplements work.

Sound investments

Q: In your opinion, as a dermatologist, what's the best investment you can make with skin?

A: Daily use of a broad-spectrum sunscreen is the most important investment to protect the skin from photoaging and maintain a youthful appearance.

New technology

Q: Are laser treatments more cost-effective and less dangerous than Accutane?

A: Smoothbeam laser and photodynamic therapy utilizing blue light, V beam laser or IPL are highly effective in improving acne. The risks of these laser treatments are significantly less than Accutane. However, the treatments are generally not covered by insurance, so the cost may be higher for patients. Accutane remains a ideal choice for individuals with moderate to severe cystic acne. ■

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