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medical dermatology update

Questions and Answers

Chocolate craze

Q: I am a chocolate lover, but have always thought that chocolate is bad for the skin. However, I recently heard that my favorite food may actually be beneficial in protecting the skin. What do you think?

A: The jury is still out on chocolate, but it is true that chocolate is a rich source of antioxidants. It has been touted for its firming and smoothing effect on the skin, and may actually afford some antioxidant protection. More objective research is needed to determine the potential benefits of skin care products and treatments containing cocoa.

Morphing mole

Q: What should an expecting mother do if a mole changes during pregnancy?

A: While moles commonly enlarge and change during pregnancy, pregnant women should seek evaluation of any changing mole, especially one that becomes symptomatic, irregular, asymmetric or variegated in color. The incidence of melanoma in pregnancy is one per 1000, and melanoma accounts for 8 percent of all cancers during pregnancy.

Pregnant pause

Q: When can a woman safely become pregnant after treatment for melanoma?

A: Any women contemplating pregnancy following a melanoma diagnosis should consult with her gynecologist and oncologist prior to becoming pregnant. As a

Starting this month, female patients using Accutane must have a monthly pregnancy test prior to receiving a prescription refill.

guideline however, women should avoid conception for two to three years after excision of melanomas that measure less than 1.5 mm in depth, and five to eight years after removal of a melanoma greater than 1.5 mm in depth.

Treating facial scars

Q: What is the best way to treat facial acne scars?

A: There are various modalities to improve acne scars. The most effective treatments include Fraxel laser, Smoothbeam and Cool Touch laser, dermabrasion, subcision, injection of filler substances, and LED photomodulation. Often, a

combination of these treatments helps maximize improvement.

Cream for capillaries

Q: Is there a topical product that can be applied to the skin to get rid of small, broken capillaries?

A: If it sounds too good to be true, it often is. While there are many topical therapies to lessen skin erythema, including Nicamide, Rosaliac, vitamin C creams and Cutanix, among others, there is no topical therapy to decrease skin telangiectasia. Fortunately, however, facial telangiectasia responds well to vascular laser therapy.

Accutane restrictions

Q: I have heard that there are new restrictions for patients being treated with Accutane. Are you familiar with these new restrictions, and if so, what are they?

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A: The iPLEDGE system goes into effect in December 2005 and it will substantially change the way physicians prescribe Accutane. The iPLEDGE registry is designed to improve safety and lessen the likelihood of patients becoming pregnant during, and for one month following, therapy. Patients, pharmacies and physicians must register and comply with certain procedures before filling and refilling Accutane prescriptions. Physicians must provide confirmation of two negative pregnancy tests from each patient. Patients must go online or call to receive information about Accutane, which details the risk of depression or suicide. Female patients need to confirm that they are using two

forms of contraception, and have a monthly pregnancy test prior to receiving a prescription refill.

Reappearing moles

Q: I'm not sure about this, but can a mole grow back after it's removed?

A: A mole can grow back if it is incompletely removed. This is especially common when moles are removed through shave excision. Nonetheless, if a previously excised mole recurs, one should seek a dermatologist's evaluation to determine if the regrowth represents a benign recurrence or warrants a biopsy to exclude a precancerous or malignant change. ■

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