



skulls. The resulting images were shown to 430 members of the public, all of whom were able to judge the age of the subjects from the evenness of skin colouration alone.

"It is known that we are drawn to faces that are evenly coloured," says Matts. This immediately has me cursing both my predilection for picking at pimples and my aversion to hats. Those little bumps and blemishes add years to my skin. What is the cure for carelessness?

"The worst thing for your skin is ultraviolet sunlight: it can cause all sorts of different pigmentary patterns"

"There's lots you can do," says Melbourne-based plastic surgeon Dr Alan Breidahl. He says there are a range of non-surgical options available to even out skin tone and texture. First, of course, is prevention. "The worst thing for your skin is ultraviolet sunlight: it can cause all sorts of different pigmentary patterns," he says. Apply a sunscreen that contains zinc and has a high SPF rating every day. Quitting smoking and limiting alcohol intake will also help prevent the formation of premature lines and broken capillaries.

If the damage is already done, the next step, says Breidahl, is the arsenal of new-generation laser and topical skincare treatments, such as the new intense pulsed light (IPL) therapy. This is a gentle form of laser with the ability to target different colours in the skin, making it ideal for evening out colour.

"If you want to just pick up the red capillaries, for example, and not the pigment, then you can dial [the laser] up to only remove the capillaries," Breidahl explains. He adds that the same focus can be applied to solar pigmentation.

IPL sessions cost about \$350, with patients generally requiring between two and four treatments. The recovery process

takes about 10 days and there is no scabbing or peeling.

Of course, not every condition is suited to IPL, says dermal therapist Emma Isaac, which is where today's topical creams come in. For the treatment of dermal pigmentation, both Isaac and Breidahl suggest using hydroquinone creams. These contain a bleaching agent; nightly topical application evens out pigmentation. The effect is long-lasting, provided future sun exposure is avoided.

Though over-the-counter lightening creams are much weaker than the professional-strength products, Breidahl says they can help maintain a brighter, fresher look. Alternatively, for a more concentrated formulation, Breidahl recommends Osmosis Correct face cream (available from selected cosmetic surgery clinics), which combines retinaldehyde (low-irritant vitamin A) and niacinamide (vitamin B3). "These are potent antioxidants and ... have been well studied scientifically to show they can reverse sun damage and possible skin cancers still developing at a microscopic level," he explains. Breidahl and Isaac are devotees of

the cream and, at \$100 for a three- to four-month supply, I soon may be, too.

For aesthetic medicine specialist Dr Jeremy Cumpston, the best anti-ageing skin tool is Fraxel Restore Dual. "I call it the gym for your skin," says Cumpston of the new-generation laser-resurfacing treatment first offered late last year, which uses a thulium laser to target skin problems. "It's been called the cougar's secret weapon in America."

The laser's dual action encourages both collagen formation (due to its penetration of the dermal layers) and evening of pigmentation. Recovery takes, on average, about a week and is marked by initial puffiness and a feeling of sunburn, followed by a feeling of tightness and up to five days of peeling.

Cumpston says most patients will require between three and five Fraxel sessions, which range between \$800 and \$1,500 for treatment of a single area (face, hands or décolletage), available at Ageless Clinics, tel 1300 372 935. But he is adamant that the results are worth it. Perhaps carelessness has a cure after all.

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THE SKIN YOU'RE IN

It seems that how old you look largely depends on how evenly your skin is coloured. So what can you do about the pigmentation and blemishes that are putting years on your appearance?

Words: Sarina Lewis

Wrinkles are not the only sign of ageing skin, according to recent research by Procter & Gamble skincare scientist Paul Matts. The red marks left behind from squeezed pimples, the small brown spots that come courtesy of years spent under the harsh Australian sun, hormonal discolouration – it all piles on the years.

"Uneven skin colour, along with shadows due to lines and wrinkles, is the key to our perception of age," explains Matts. He recently conducted a study to determine what characteristics define our perceptions of youth, using digital images of 170 women aged between 11 and 76. He created 170 identical virtual skulls with standard hair and bone structure and then electronically "draped" a virtual copy of the skin of each of these women over the

Estée Lauder CyberWhite EX Advanced Performance Brightening Essence, \$140.

Olay Definity Eye Illuminating Treatment, \$40.

Shiseido White Lucent Intensive Spot Targeting Serum, \$167.

Shu Uemura White Recovery EX+ Brightening Cleansing Oil, \$65.

SK-II Cellumination Essence, \$300.

Chanel Précision Ultimate Whitening Essence, \$156.

Osmosis Correct Aging/Normal Skin Serum, \$100.

Clinique Even Better Clinical Dark Spot Corrector, \$89.

Biotherm White D-Tox [Bright Cell] Tri Roll-on Concentrate, \$89.

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