

# The Dark Circled Eye Syndrome

By Suzanne Patterson

The eyes are the first thing we see and make visual observations about when we encounter someone for conversation, and it's the eyes that we notice the most about them during the exchange. Many people deal with a unique problem that is prominent in their complexions and in some ways it can be more obvious than other skin surface blemishes or flaws.

It's no wonder that the appearance of dark circles or discoloration in one's eyes can make a person self-conscious about their looks, because they are a prominent feature that can disrupt the otherwise visually pleasing features of the face. A variety of methods to reduce or eliminate the problem, including treatment creams and makeup concealing methods, are tried but most of these aren't effective down to the root problem. Concealing and camouflage products can actually highlight the problem if used incorrectly, and in some cases the circles seem to get worse as the day wears on and makeup wears off!

Dark circles can be a complex problem with multiple contributing features, but understanding what causes them first can help in choosing solution options. Dark circles are physically induced by one of two (or both) primary factors: hyper-pigmentation and hyper-circulation.

## **Hyper-pigmentation:**

Hyper-pigmentation in this case is related to the overabundance of melanin production in the eye area from the cell type that produces pigment, and is visually prominent because of the thinness of the tissue in the orbital region, or eye socket. It can give the appearance of a mask-like or "raccoon" look, and the eyes can appear tired and pulled down with an overall dull look to them. Hyper-pigmentation is an inherited trait that usually encircles the entire orbital region, and is more commonly seen in people native to certain geographical regions who have unique skin tones to begin with. People with this heritage in their backgrounds can also have this feature.

There is not much that can be done about hyper-pigmentation because it is a cell function, short of medical intervention to alter melanin production. It is a permanent condition and often becomes more noticeable with age as the skin under the eyes begins to sag or wrinkle. Sun damage can worsen this condition further by stimulating melanin cells to produce more pigment, so it is extremely important that some kind of vigilant sun protection be used. Dry skin in the eye area also further enhances the look of dark circles, especially if it is flaky or overly dehydrated.

Topical creams cannot physically reverse hyper-pigmentation but some can help to reduce any hyper-circulation swelling, or add moisture to dehydration conditions to make the skin look smoother in the eye area. Lasers have also been used to alter melanin production and lighten skin, however there are some risks and results are not

always satisfactory. Topical skin lightening or bleaching creams don't work because the active ingredient, hydroquinone, doesn't affect the layer where melanin is created. Eliminating sun induced UV stimulation of melanin cells in the eye area is extremely important in reducing the visual impact of hyper-pigmentation. Wearing the proper UV blocking sunglass lens is an absolute must, and one that has proven performance in 100% UV protection in extreme sunlight conditions.

### **Hyper-circulation:**

Another condition is hyper-circulation, which is also a hereditary tendency, and causes blood to swell into the capillaries under the tissues in the eye socket. This gives a deep purplish undertone, which can appear very dark like hyper-pigmentation, but is most prominent under and up to the inner corners of the eyes. This condition can be exacerbated or made more prominent by stress, and the debate continues on whether a lack of adequate rest is a contributing factor. Excessive tiredness can pale the overall skin tone in the face and cause the "bloodshot" eye effect to the sclera of the eyes, which in turn sets off hyper-circulation to appear more prominent in the orbital tissue.

Medications can also be a factor if blood vessel dilation is a side effect, as any increased blood flow visually adds to this condition. Excessive or unprotected sun exposure to the eyes can also enhance the irritating effects of hyper-circulation, and increase the chances of adding permanent sun induced hyper-pigmentation damage in the area.

Hyper-circulation can be managed somewhat by keeping stress down and getting proper rest to reduce the effects of tissue swelling or puffing. Some products on the market can help minimize the swelling effects by acting topically on the epidermis, even though hyper-circulation originates below the dermis layer. General knowledge: all cosmetics sold over the counter are topical agents only, and any product that penetrates below the epidermis (and having access to the bloodstream) is classified as a drug and is only available by prescription.

### **Other Interplaying Factors:**

Secondary issues can add to the primary problems above, one of which is simply facial bone structure. How recessed or prominent the eye sits in the orbital bone, and how much light is reflected into or away from this region can cause shadowing which further enhances any visible eye darkness or circles.

Another is environmental or food allergies, which frequently shows up as a symptomatic eye irritation or swelling. Allergic reactions can be a complicating factor that feeds into the dark circle syndrome, such as itching or swelling in the face with constant surface rubbing or scratching, especially the orbital region. Getting allergies under control and eliminating the eye irritating side effects can be a major improvement in the appearance of dark circles.

## Helpful Suggestions:

The most important cosmetic option is vigilant sun protection, as it will do wonders to save your face, let alone the eyes! Make sure to wear a minimum SPF 15 sunscreen and sunglasses that provide the highest UV protection possible, and wear both together faithfully when outdoors. The wrap-around corner style sunglasses are the most effective in shielding the orbital region from UV radiation, especially the outer corners of the eye which is the first to show sun damage in the form of "crow's feet."

Some eye serums on the market have been helpful in topically reducing the swelling effects of hyper-circulation. Eye creams that have multi-peptide technology have also been shown to be helpful in hydrating and strengthening the delicate tissue in the under eye area.

Using an oil free moisturizer is important for makeup to be durable in wear so that your concealing efforts won't slide or disappear. A camouflage product formulated for paramedical use is very effective in coverage, durability, and long wear. Some makeup concealers that are wax or gel based also work well on some skin textures. Avoid using "neutralizing" colors or products as this will cause the area to look either more prominent or grayish under any makeup or concealing efforts.

Ideally, the product should be just light enough in color to cover and visually blend out the dark eye area into the complexion, and reflect light without looking lighter than the skin tone in the face. The inner corner of the eye is usually the darkest so pay attention to that area when blending. Your concealing efforts should not accentuate any baggy or lined areas under the eyes, and definitely should not appear as a whitish mask around the eyes.

Steer clear of eye shadow colors that visually enhance the problem, such as cool undertones, or any colors that are blue, violet, red, or green toned. In some severe cases eye shadow application should be avoided. Eyeliner products can also make matters worse, so if a liner is used try to keep it on the upper lid only and stick with powder liners for stability.

Avoid using mascara that flakes, or migrates down into the under eye region as the day wears on, making matters appear worse. Waterproof mascara is suggested to use for camera work because there is less chance this happening. Using mascara on lower lashes and lining under the eye can end up drawing attention to the dark under eye circles, especially in camera work. Be aware of this issue and the need for maintenance should you decide to extend makeup to that area.