

“Common sense is perhaps the most equally divided, but surely the most underemployed talent in the world.” CHRISTIANE COLLAGE

## Soothing South Asian skin



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HAVING grown up in Florida, I was exposed to one of the highest skin cancer rates in North America.

Exposure to sun and poor prevention are well known risk factors to many cultures but does this apply to darker ethnic skin?

In New York, many of my friends with darker skin tones have asked for tips on skin care and common skin problems. Along with the advice on common skin problems I also preach the inclusion of sun protection in any skin care routine.

It's true that many women with darker skin are blessed with the ability to look younger later in life than their lighter skin counterparts. However, all women should try and maintain a regimen of products which help in improving skin tone, preventing

sun damage, and maintaining good looks. I generally recommend a routine which includes a cleanser, moisturizer, and sun protection.

Every skin regimen should begin with a cleansing routine. However, there are certain factors to be considered when choosing a cleanser. If you have oily or acne prone skin, I recommend a cleanser with alpha hydroxy or salicylic acid. For more sensitive skin types, a gentle soap-less cleanser is ideal. A mistake that most patients make is over-washing their skin. Washing face twice a day with a cleanser appropriate for your skin type works best.

The next step is using a good moisturizer twice a day. This is absolutely essential regardless of whether you have oily or dry skin. If you have oily skin, make sure the products you use are non-comedogenic meaning that they don't clog pores. Simply moisturizing regularly with the right product can add hydration and radiance to your skin.

Don't forget your sunscreen. Patients with darker skin types often think they are naturally protected from the sun's damaging rays. True the "melanin" or pigment within your skin cells does offer some protection, but these days we are diagnosing more and more skin cancers in patients with darker skin types. Sunscreens not only help protect against skin cancer, but also help prevent future wrinkles and skin discolorations. So remember to add an SPF to your daily routine. Typically I like products with a SPF of at least 15 with both UVA and UVB protection for daily use and an SPF of 30 or higher for outdoor sun exposure.

### Some common skin concerns of South Asian patients:

**Acne:** Every South Asian woman knows that not only do they have to deal with acne but also the discoloration it leaves for months later. The first step is to get an acne regimen that not only treats but also helps to prevent pimples. Retinoids (Retin-A, Differin,

Tazorac) actually help to prevent the formation of "micro-comedones" which are the precursor of acne. For women with lots of blackheads (comedones), retinoids can lead to significant improvement, but it may take several weeks to see improvement. The key is to use the medication properly as excessive dryness and irritation may result from overuse.

We do extractions of blackheads but we don't recommend patients to do that on their own. If done improperly, one may actually end up pushing the blackhead material deeper causing an inflammatory reaction.

Depending on the severity of your acne, in addition to retinoids, your dermatologist may also recommend benzoyl peroxide, oral and/or topical antibiotics, birth control pills, and for the most severe cases isotretinoin (Accutane).

**Some key tips:** If you are prone to deep, painful pimples that last for weeks, don't despair. Often a cortisone injection done by a dermatolo-

gist can get rid of these within days. If you want to speed up the improvement in your acne, you can consider a series of physician administered superficial chemical peels. This will not only help the discoloration and acne scarring, but also penetrate into oil glands to treat the underlying acne. But remember all chemical peels are not the same and only the one which is safe for darker skin types should be chosen.

**Dark spots:** Your dermatologist can create a regimen to help get rid of these troublesome spots. Typically a combination of bleaching creams (hydroquinones), retinoids, and alpha hydroxyl acids are used. To get even faster results, your dermatologist may also perform a series of microdermabrasion (a vacuum exfoliation of the skin) and/or superficial chemical peels. And don't forget, sunscreen is an absolute must when dealing with dark spots **Laser hair removal:** The laser technology is now very safe and effective in all skin types.

Because darker skin types are more prone to hyper-pigmentation (dark spots), it is important to choose the right laser and work with someone who is experienced with darker skin types. Long pulse Nd-Yag lasers are one of the best for darker skin types. Older lasers had trouble distinguishing between the pigment of the skin and hair leading to problems with discoloration. The newer longer wavelength lasers with specialized cooling systems help to avoid this problem. Multiple sessions are necessary but this new technology offers hope for doing away with waxing and threading.

Regardless of the place you live and your age, pay attention to your skin care regimen. This will go a long way in helping you look radiant and younger for longer.

*(Dr Neha S. Parikh, is a Manhattan dermatologist. Her interests are ethnic skin care, acne, and lasers in darker skin-types. She works at the NY Dermatology Group)*