



BLEACHING AGENTS

Bleaching creams are frequently used to even skin tones and fade discoloration caused by melasma, sun spots, and other skin conditions. Hydroquinone is the active ingredient found in most. Some are combined with a small amount of Retin-A (tretinoin) or glycolic acid to help even tones.

Instructions

- Sun protection or avoidance is critical to the effectiveness of these medications. Just a short sun exposure will result in recurrence of the discoloration so daily sunscreen and the use of hats is strongly recommended.

Formulations

- 2% hydroquinone is available in over-the-counter formulation such as Ambi and Esoterica.
- 4% hydroquinone is available by prescription (EpiQuin, Lustra, Tri-Luma, etc.).

Dosage

- Most bleaching creams are used twice a day with the exception of Tri-Luma which is used only before bedtime.
- It can be used as spot treatment for focal discolorations or over a larger area for more diffuse evening of tones. It may take a couple months of use to see a significant effect.
- Use for a few months at a time as needed.

Potential Side Effects

- Dryness, irritation, or allergy.
- When used as a spot treatment, it is possible to get a halo of lightening around a sun spot that is being treated. Try to keep medication on the affected area only.
- Unexpected darkening of the skin (ochronosis) can occur due to hydroquinone products. It is extremely rare using concentrations of 4% or lower. Stop and let us know if you think this may be happening.
- The FDA has threatened to take many of these agents off the market as they may increase the risk of cancer in rats when taking high doses by mouth. This has never been proven to be a side effect when used on the skin.
- Not recommended if pregnant or nursing.
- Skin discoloration if used at the same time as a benzoyl peroxide product.