



## **Skin whitening of more concern to consumers than wrinkles**

Dermatologists believe that skin whitening and brightening have become as much or more of a priority to Australians than anti-wrinkle treatments, and that as our population ages and people of Asian, Indian and Middle Eastern backgrounds continue to immigrate to Australia, the popularity of skin whitening and brightening treatments will soon outstrip wrinkles as Australians' biggest cosmetic concern.

Speaking at the Australasian College of Dermatologists' Annual Scientific Meeting, Dr Phillip Artemi presented evidence that up to one third of women of Asian, Indian and Middle Eastern backgrounds suffer from melasma – a flat pigmentation across their face – due to hormonal factors and sun exposure.

“Studies have also shown that people would prefer to have white skin than wrinkles as they age, if given a choice,” says Dr Artemi.

“As our population ages, sun damage becomes more apparent in baby boomers - by 2030, 20% of Australians will be aged 65 and over – and our nation is made up more and more of migrants from different ethnic backgrounds, dermatologists believe this trend will continue,” says Dr Artemi.

“We've been seeing an increase in demand for skin whiteners, and for too many patients, melasma (pigmentation) is thrown into the 'too hard basket', however there are many treatment options available.”

One of the most popular treatments for melasma is hydroquinone, which is available over the counter in a pharmacy in Australia, despite being banned in Europe and Japan, and the US authorities also considering banning its use other than on prescription.

“Of course, prevention is the best option when it comes to avoiding unwanted pigmentation, so staying out of the sun and always using sunscreen is still the best option,” says Dr Artemi.

“We also need to be aware that this problem affects 10 women for every one man, and that often the cause is a hormonal imbalance, which can be corrected.

“Some cosmetics and medications can also make melasma worse, so it's important to speak to an expert to seek advice.

“Treatment options can involve a prescription and cosmeceuticals, or often a combination of both.”

At their Annual Scientific Meeting, held this week in Darwin, dermatologists explored a number of new treatment options around cosmeceutical and herbal therapies for skin pigmentation.

“Some of the new therapies we’re investigating involve topical applications of soy, liquorice extract, and paper mulberry,” says Dr Artemi.

“While very exciting, these treatments are just in the preliminary stage and we need to explore further how we can break down the active ingredient and apply this in the most effective way to achieve the results we’re after in reducing unwanted skin pigmentation.”

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