

BLEACHING CREAMS

PATIENT INFORMATION & INSTRUCTIONS

WHAT ARE BLEACHING CREAMS?

As their name suggests, bleaching creams are topical creams that help to lighten darkened areas of skin. While bleaching creams are typically not a stand-alone treatment, they are an important component of any treatment plan for improving pigmentation.

TYPES OF BLEACHING CREAMS

Bleaching creams are typically broken into three categories:

- **Hydroquinone:**
Hydroquinone is the most widely used and effective bleaching cream. It is a prescription topical that can range from 4%-12%. It works by blocking the pathway of melanin production in the skin. Hydroquinone should typically be used in 2-3 month intervals. Typically this is an easy product to tolerate.
- **Compounded:**
Compounded bleaching creams are prescription strength creams that are mixed by a compounding specialty pharmacy. Examples include Triluma, Bleach-Eze, etc. These creams contain three main ingredients: 1) Hydroquinone, the main lightening component (see above), 2) Tretinoin, this is an exfoliant and lightener. It will help soften skin to allow better penetration of the hydroquinone. 3) Topical steroid (usually hydrocortisone or triamcinolone). The combination of the first two ingredients can be irritating. The steroid component will help calm down inflammation making the cream more manageable. Some compounded creams can contain additional ingredients.
- **Hydroquinone Free & Tranexamic Acid:**
Non-hydroquinone creams are over the counter products that are an important component of all bleaching regimens. When hydroquinone is not used, these can commonly be referred to as “lightening creams” rather than “bleaching creams”. If using a hydroquinone based cream, then a hydroquinone free cream can be used during the “off months” to help avoid rebound pigmentation. Hydroquinone free products can also be a great agent for patients who prefer not to be on hydroquinone. Hydroquinone free lighteners include: Kojic acid, licorice root extract, Arbutin, Azelaic acid, Ascorbic acid, and Tranexamic Acid.

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BLEACHING CREAM INFO & TIPS

- ALWAYS use sunscreen. One bad encounter with the sun can undo months of progress with a bleaching cream. It is very important to always wear sunscreen every day. Pigmentation such as melasma can be triggered by lights in your home, or even the screen of your computer. Always use a broad spectrum sunscreen for better protection and a tinted sunscreen with iron oxide to help with pigmentation related to blue light.
- Keep reasonable expectations. There is a limit to what bleaching creams can accomplish. While bleaching creams can help, treatments such as lasers or chemical peels are required to lighten more stubborn pigment. Bleaching creams are best used in combination with other therapies.
- Bleaching creams are a commitment. Most pigment in the skin can return, especially melasma. This means most bleaching regimens should be maintained overtime. Rebound pigmentation, or returning to baseline pigmentation can occur when stopping a bleaching regimen.
- Apply creams directly to pigmented skin. Most bleaching creams should not be applied to an entire body area such as the face. The creams will work to lighten all skin where applied. Try to “spot treat” only where pigmentation is, or actively occurs.
- Sometimes finding the right strength takes time. If you try a cream recommended by your physician and it does not help, do not get discouraged. We can always switch to higher strength or different creams.
- Breaks from hydroquinone are important. Most serious side effects of hydroquinone are a result of continued daily use over the course of 1+ years. Taking breaks from these products cuts potential side effects significantly. Special note: hydroquinone free creams should be used during “off months” to avoid rebound pigmentation.
- Do not use compounded creams for any period longer than 3 months consecutively. Prolonged use of a topical steroid can cause thinning of the skin and further complications.
- Follow your physician’s instructions.
- Heliocare is a nutritional supplement that can decrease the tendency for repigmentation. It should be taken daily with a repeat dose midday if an individual is extensively sun-sensitive

OTHER RESOURCES

We work hard to publish only best patient education and comprehensive resources. We want to be your trusted source of all skin information. You will find additional educational information by scanning the following QR codes.

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