**What Is Melasma and How Can It Be Controlled?**

Melasma describes a skin condition that affects millions of people around the globe. While it can affect both men and women, it is primarily seen in women. In fact, according to a report published by the American Academy of Dermatology, only 10 percent of individuals who develop this skin condition are men. Melasma can also be referred to as a 'mask of pregnancy' when it develops on pregnant women.  
  
What Is It?  
  
When a person is suffering from this condition, they have patches of brown or grayish-brown skin. The patches are darker than a person’s natural skin color. It is most common for people to experience melasma on their face. It is most prominent on a person’s forehead, along the bridge of their nose, on their cheeks, on their upper lip or on their chin.  
  
Melasma affects the face in a symmetrical way. This means that the markings on the left side of your face will be mirrored by similar markings on the right side of your face.  
  
Although this skin condition primarily manifests itself on a person’s face, it can also develop on a person’s forearms and their neck. It is not a painful condition and does not produce any physical harm. However, an individual battling with melasma may feel self-conscious about their appearance, and this in turn may lead to them limiting the interactions they have with others.  
  
What Causes It?  
  
Researchers are still studying the causes of melasma and as of yet have not identified all of the environmental or genetic factors that lead to a person having this skin condition. However, they do note that individuals who have darker skin are at a higher risk of developing this skin condition than those with lighter skin.  
  
They have also seen a link between fluctuations in estrogen and progesterone levels or that changes in sensitivity to these hormones can lead to a melasma outbreak. This explains why a decent percentage of pregnant women, as well as those using oral contraceptives or hormone therapy, develop this skin condition. Researchers are currently examining the correlation that seems to exist between increased levels of stress, thyroid disease and melasma.   
  
Sun exposure, especially exposure to UV rays, can affect the cells in the body that control pigmentation. Excessive sun exposure can lead to an outbreak of melasma.  
  
How to Prevent It  
  
Since sun exposure is a major factor in the development of the skin condition, avoiding unnecessary sun exposure by doing things like wearing a wide brim hat in the sun, frequently applying sunscreen when outdoors (every two hours) and staying indoors during the highest hours of peak sunshine are key to preventing this condition. Additionally, avoiding manual hair removal techniques, such as waxing and plucking, is important since these activities exacerbate the condition.  
  
How to Treat It   
  
There are facial ointments that our physician can prescribe to lighten the skin in the affected area. Additionally, using gentle facial cleaners, Retinoids, lightening agents, growth factors and moisturizers may be effective ways of lightening up the dark patches and restoring a person’s face to an even color.  
  
Melasma can be difficult to live with. It can affect your self-esteem and the way that you view yourself. Thankfully, there are treatments available at HautSpa Medica that have been shown to improve or completely remove the condition, allowing you to live your life in a confident manner. Contact us today to schedule a consultation at our office in Newport Beach.