

Camouflaging Melasma Dyspigmentation

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Camouflage cosmetics are an important part of treating the melasma patient. Not only do they provide additional photoprotection, they also restore the patient's self-confidence while dermatologic treatment is under way.

Dyspigmentation of the face caused by melasma is a cosmetic challenge. The difficulty lies in blending the various brown tones associated with the condition. Topical prescription medications intended to lighten the darkened skin usually take a minimum of 3 months to produce clinically acceptable results, necessitating the need for camouflage techniques in the interim. These camouflage techniques can simply be incorporated by the patient into a daily grooming routine once the basic principles have been mastered. Persons who can train patients in the use of these techniques include paramedical camouflage artists, aestheticians, dermatologists, plastic surgeons, and cosmetic consultants. Their successful use of camouflage cosmetics requires a well-formulated quality product applied with the skill of a stage makeup technician and the artistic abilities of a painter.

Camouflaging Principles

Camouflaging principles are adapted from stage makeup techniques. Pigmentation defects can be camouflaged either by applying an opaque cosmetic that allows none of the abnormal underlying skin tones to be seen or by applying a foundation of a complementary color. For example, skin areas that are lighter than the natural skin color can be camouflaged with a darker brown cosmetic, while darker areas can be minimized by applying facial foundations of a lighter hue.¹

Camouflage Cosmetics

There are many companies in the United States and Europe that manufacture cosmetics specifically designed

for camouflaging purposes. A good camouflage artist will usually purchase color palettes from at least 2 different companies to facilitate mixing of cosmetic shades to match a patient's skin tone.²

Makeup bases and facial foundations are the primary cosmetics designed to camouflage underlying dyspigmentation. Facial foundations are available as hard grease paints, soft grease paints, pancake makeup, and liquid makeup.

Hard grease paints come in stick form and consist of pigments in an anhydrous, waxy base. Application requires great skill and is more time consuming than with other makeup bases. Hard grease paints are extremely long wearing but are mainly reserved for theatrical uses.

Soft grease paints come in a jar, tin, or squeeze tube. They have a creamy texture owing to the incorporation of low-viscosity oils in addition to waxes in the anhydrous preparation. They usually contain a high proportion of titanium dioxide to provide superior coverage.³ Soft grease paints are designed to completely cover all underlying skin and form an opaque cover. They tend to have a high shine and do not survive body heat; thus, some type of setting powder is required to prolong wear. The setting powder is applied directly over the grease paint to prevent the cosmetic from being rubbed off.

Pancake makeup is packaged in flat, round containers and is removed from the compact by stroking with a wet sponge. The product is composed of talc, kaolin, zinc oxide, precipitated chalk, titanium dioxide, and iron oxide.⁴ Pancake makeup dries quickly and has a matte, or dull, finish. Unfortunately, body warmth and perspiration cause it to come off easily, but it is easily retouched, if necessary.

Liquid camouflage makeups are similar to those marketed for general use; however, increased amounts of titanium dioxide provide superior coverage while still allowing visualization of some of the underlying skin. Liquid camouflage makeup usually contains a higher concentration of oils to allow full color development and improved wearability. It is probably the most popular cosmetic for camouflaging melasma dyspigmentation.

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Application Techniques

The camouflage facial foundations that best cover melasma dyspigmentation are the creamy soft grease paints that are squeezed from a tube or scooped from a jar or tin with a spatula and applied to the back of the hand for warming and blending. Soft grease paints are the easiest to use of the camouflaging products since they exhibit a long play time (ie, time before the cosmetic dries), good blending characteristics, minimal application skill, excellent coverage, and adequate wearability for most people. However, they do require a special application technique.

Initially, a makeup base that is closest to the patient's natural skin color must be selected. Blending usually is necessary, but no more than 3 colors should be combined to avoid producing a final color quality that is muddy. In patients with an underlying pigmentation problem, skin dyspigmentation counts as 1 color. Thus, the melasma patient should never mix more than 2 cream foundation colors to achieve an attractive final color match.

Once the closest foundation color has been selected, it may be necessary to blend in yellow if the individual has a sallow complexion, or red if the patient has a ruddy complexion. All facial tones should be represented in the final foundation blend if an acceptable color match is to be obtained. Blending is usually done by applying a small amount of the makeup to the back of the hand, which provides a good surface for blending and can be easily held up to the face to evaluate the color match. Blending makeup on the back of the hand also warms the product, allowing for easier mixing and application.

The final foundation color mix is then dabbed from the central face outward to approximately 0.25 in into the hairline and is blended over the ears and beneath the chin. It is necessary to feather the cosmetic where application ends to achieve a more natural appearance. The importance of dabbing cannot be overemphasized, since rubbing will remove the makeup as it is applied. The cosmetic should actually be pressed into the skin and allowed to dry for 5 minutes.

Once the makeup has dried, the cosmetic must be set with an unpigmented, finely ground, talc-based powder to prevent smudging, improve wearability, provide waterproof characteristics, and impart a matte finish. Camouflage makeup is designed to be worn with this powder and does not function properly without it. The powder should be pressed, not dusted, on top of the foundation.

Finally, a reddish powdered rouge is dusted over the central face (ie, central forehead, nose, and chin) and the upper cheeks to mimic the natural color variations of the face and to prevent a flat, masklike appearance,

which can result from covering facial landmarks. Other colored facial cosmetics (ie, eye shadow, eyeliner, mascara) are usually necessary to give an attractive final appearance.⁵

Camouflage cosmetics should be worn only when needed and should be thoroughly removed at bedtime.⁶ Because of the waterproof nature of these products, removal requires more than washing with soap and water. Most cosmetic companies provide an oily cleanser for removal and recommend subsequent cleansing of the skin with soap and water. If the patient has mild melasma and does not require an opaque cosmetic, a traditional facial foundation can be used and applied in 3 consecutive layers, allowing 5 minutes of drying time after each application.

Adverse Reactions to Camouflage Cosmetics

Camouflage cosmetics are typically used by patients without difficulty. A specially trained paramedical camouflage artist or aesthetician instructs the patient on blending and applying the makeup. Two to 3 hour-long sessions are enough to resolve most of the problems encountered with the cosmetic, but sometimes difficulties arise.

Most camouflage foundations contain a high concentration of oils, which may (rarely) cause comedone formation in predisposed individuals. Evaluating ingredient lists for the absence or presence of comedogenic oils is not of much practical value; rather, the foundation should be use-tested by the patient. This is accomplished by applying a small amount of the cosmetic to the upper lateral cheek daily for a 2- to 4-week period, followed by dermatologic evaluation.

Allergic contact dermatitis to camouflage makeup is rare since formulations are generally fragrance free and have a low preservative concentration. It is possible, however, for both allergic and irritant contact dermatitis to occur in people using camouflage cosmetics. These products can be open or closed patch-tested "as is."

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