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WHAT YOU NEED NOW
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Out of the darkness

The newest treatments for shadowy undereyes offer fast, effective ways to help you see the light.

By BETH JANES

PROTECTIVE EYEWEAR

Sunscreen may be your best defense against dark rings.

➔ NO AREA SEEMS TO GET AS MUCH ATTENTION—

or have as many beauty products devoted exclusively to it—as the eyes. It makes sense: The eyes are said to be the first feature people notice, and the skin around them is also sensitive and thin, making it vulnerable to a host of vexing issues.

But there's one problem in particular that most of us struggle with at some point: dark circles. "They're among the most common cosmetic complaints," says Heather Woolery-Lloyd, M.D., a dermatologist in Miami. And that's regardless of age. Here's a look into the three main causes of dark circles—and what you can do about them now.

Shadows

What looks like dark skin may actually be a shadow cast from puffiness caused by lack of sleep, eating too much sodium and processed food, drinking too much alcohol, or allergies.

"Systemic changes are often noticeable around the eyes first," says Paul Jarrod Frank, M.D., a cosmetic dermatologist in New York City. A healthy diet and adequate hydration and sleep can help de-puff eyes, as can a cold compress. But if you're already treating yourself well, try taking a daily antihistamine like Claritin or Zyrtec for two weeks as a test, says Elizabeth Tanzi, M.D., a dermatologist in Washington, D.C. If

puffiness and dark shadows still don't improve, the problem may be hereditary or age related. Over time, "fat pads under the eyes can shift to where they cast a shadow," Dr. Tanzi says. In that case, a surgical procedure called a blepharoplasty to reposition or remove the fat pad is the most effective option. The good news: It's a relatively common and straightforward procedure with little downtime and no scarring. Sometimes, however, you may simply have been born with deeper eye sockets and less fat underneath. Injecting the area with a hyaluronic acid filler, such as Restylane or Juvéderm, will help reduce the hollowness—and the shadow. ➔

Hyperpigmentation

Even if allergies don't make you puffy, they can bring on dark circles by triggering the production of excess pigment under eyes. "It actually has a name: an allergic shiner," says Jeremy Brauer, M.D., a clinical associate professor of dermatology at NYU Langone Medical Center in New York. "Repetitive rubbing and itching can cause irritation or inflammation that results in postinflammatory hyperpigmentation (PIH), seen as dark patches." Try to avoid rubbing your eyes, and use gentle products like mineral-based sunscreens and fragrance-free, nonirritating eye products. Hydrating eye creams with lighteners like kojic acid, licorice extract, niacinamide, and vitamin C can improve mild hyperpigmentation, but for more stubborn cases, lasers may be advised. Try **Specific Beauty Lighten & Brighten Eye Cream** (\$45, specificbeauty.com) with vitamin C and niacinamide.

Thin skin

Thin skin allows blood vessels and veins to show through, producing bluish or dark circles, Dr. Brauer says. These circles are often hereditary, but aging and sun exposure can make things worse by thinning skin even more and weakening blood vessels. If you'll be out in the sun, don a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses and dab on a gentle, hydrating eye cream with titanium- or zinc oxide-based (i.e., extra-mild) sun protection, such as **SkinCeuticals Physical Eye UV Defense SPF 50** (\$30, skinceuticals.com). Otherwise, opt for moisturizing creams or serums with caffeine (known to constrict blood vessels) or vitamin K (which strengthens vessel walls). Ingredients that help hydrate and shore up skin are also smart choices. If skin isn't sensitive, try a product with retinol to stimulate collagen production, which may help thicken skin. **Dr. Dennis Gross Skincare Ferulic + Retinol Triple Correction Eye Serum** (\$68, drdennissgross.com) contains caffeine, retinol, and lightening licorice extract. Niacinamide and peptides, like those in **Olay Regenerist Micro-Sculpting Eye Swirl** (\$27, drugstores), also help brighten. ★

TWO MORE EYE SORES

Crow's-feet

TOPICAL You'd be surprised what a few weeks of a thick, rich eye cream can do. But if you want to bring out the big guns, opt for a heavy-duty hydrator that adds skin-smoothing retinol or Rx retinoic acid (such as **Rx Renova** or **RoC Retinol Correxion Eye Cream**, \$20, at drugstores).

PROFESSIONAL

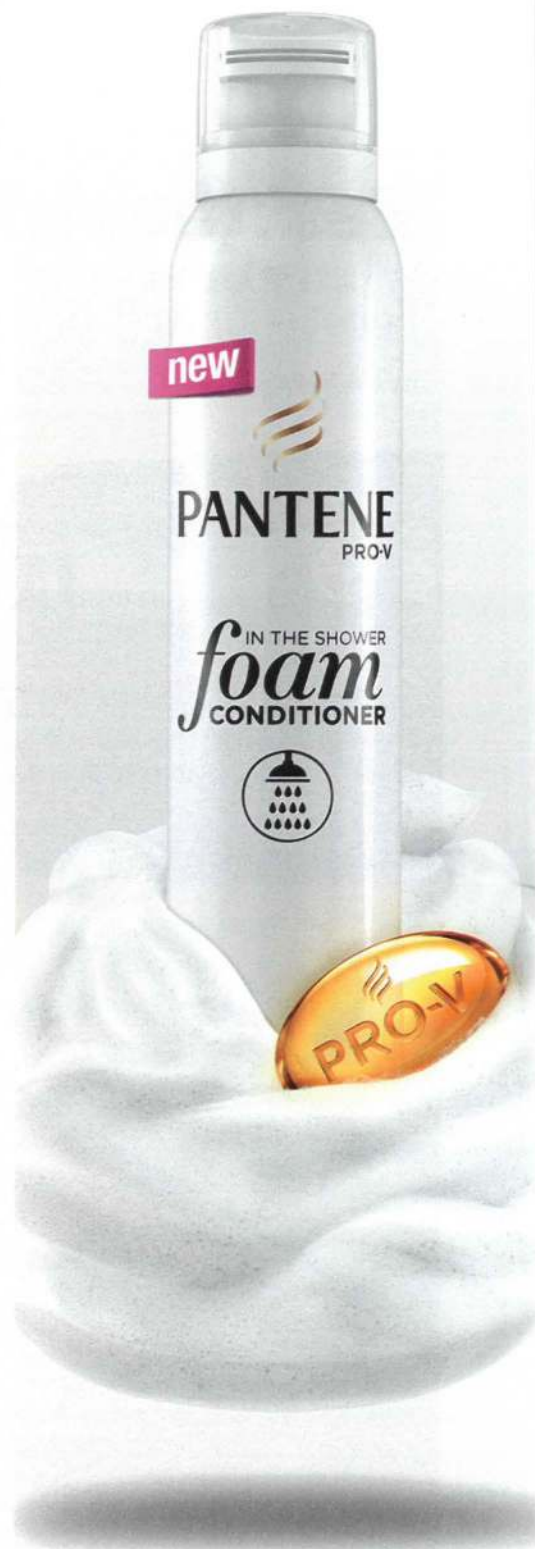
"A botulinum toxin, such as Xeomin, is ideal to help minimize the muscle movement that accentuates these fine lines," Dr. Brauer says. The average price is around \$375.

Crepey skin

TOPICAL "Look for a cream with hydrating shea butter, ceramides—or peptides, which are gentle enough for this sensitive area," Dr. Tanzi says. Try **CeraVe Eye Repair Cream** with ceramides (\$11, drugstores) or **StriVectin Intensive Eye Concentrate for Wrinkles** with peptides (\$69, strivectin.com).

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Dr. Frank uses fractional lasers to tighten crepey skin even on eyelids.



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