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What Causes Dark Eye Circles?

Advice by Jennifer Linder, MD, Scottsdale AZ

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Question: *What causes these dark circles under my eyes, and what can I do about them (besides getting more sleep)? I cover them with makeup, but am hoping there's something better.*

Answer: The appearance of dark under-eye circles can be brought on by several factors. First, vascular structures which range in color from blue, to red, to purple, are often more obvious under the eyes because of the thin skin that is associated with this delicate area. Vascular dark circles can be exacerbated by fatigue, dehydration and allergies. Hyperpigmentation may also play a role in some cases of dark circles. These discolorations typically have more of a brown color to them and they are caused by sun exposure and other types of inflammation. The last main cause of dark under-eye circles are shadows. As the face ages it loses volume as a result of loss of underlying bone and fat and this loss of fullness can cause shadowing of the eye area.

While dark circles can be difficult to treat because there are many contributors and because the eyes are often more sensitive than other areas of the face, there are options. Certain ingredients, such as ginseng or vitamin K work to improve circulation which could help to reduce the appearance of dark circles brought on by vascular structures. Outcomes with these products will be variable, however, because of the role of lifestyle in these types of dark circles. Products that contain gentle pigment-reducing ingredients can be very helpful for brown-colored discolorations. I recommend looking for products that contain licorice extract or alpha-arbutin, as these ingredients will be less irritating than those that contain stronger lighteners like hydroquinone. Finally, restoring volume will assist in lessening the effects of shadowing. Topical products that build collagen will help to an extent. Look for products with retinol, L-ascorbic acid or palmitoyl pentapeptide-4. I recommend the PCA SKIN eyeXcellence, as it contains a blend of ginseng for vascular function, licorice for hyperpigmentation concerns and peptides for collagen stimulation. Hyaluronic acid fillers, like Restylane and Juvederm or longterm collagen stimulating fillers like Sculptra are also excellent at restoring volume and loss from under the eye. This use of fillers in this way is off-label and requires careful technique so be sure to find a very experienced injector.

Jennifer Linder, M.D., board-certified dermatologist and Chief Scientific Officer for [PCA SKIN](#)
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