

Aging Skin

As our bodies age fine lines, wrinkles, dark spots and sometimes hollowed areas around the eyes and cheeks begin to appear. You may also experience a noticeable loss of firmness on the hands and neck. And while you cannot stop or even slow down the aging process, there are some things you can do to help prevent signs of premature aging. Good skin care — including sun protection, gentle cleansing, and quitting smoking can keep your skin healthy and glowing for years to come.

Q. What causes the skin to age?

A. Over time, the skin loses its underlying layers of fat, and the production of collagen and elastin fibers slows. As a result, the skin loses its fullness. There are two distinct types of aging — aging caused by the genes we inherit, and aging caused by environmental factors, such as exposure to the sun's rays or smoking.

Q: How much damage does sun exposure cause?

A. Just a few minutes of sun exposure each day can cause noticeable changes to the skin over time. The term "photoaging" is used to describe this sun-related skin damage. Photoaging occurs over a period of years. With repeated exposure to the sun, the skin loses the ability to repair itself, and the damage accumulates.

Q. What are liver spots?

A. Liver spots — also called age spots and solar lentigines — actually have nothing at all to do with the liver, and they are not an indication of liver disease. They are flat gray, brown or black spots that usually appear on the face, hands, shoulders and arms — those areas most exposed to the sun. For cosmetic reasons, age spots can be lightened with skin-bleaching products or removed. However, avoiding the sun and using sunscreen can help avoid these dark skin spots.

Q. Older people often complain of itching skin. What causes this?

A. Aging and sun damage reduce the capacity of the skin to moisturize itself — so the skin becomes dry. Dry skin is one of the major causes of itchiness in aging skin. Severe itching as well as itching that does not respond to moisturizing should be evaluated by a dermatologist.

Q. What treatments are available to rejuvenate aging skin?

A: There are a variety of treatments available to improve damaged skin. Injectable fillers, Botox, and Fraxel are suitable for people with busy lifestyles who do not want the inconvenience of downtime. Dermabrasion, laser resurfacing, chemical peeling, microdermabrasion, and some topical treatments can restore skin, giving it a smoother and refreshed appearance.

If you want to diminish the signs of aging or have developed a condition that does not go away, call Dermatology Associates of the Lowcountry (843) 689-5259 (Hilton Head) or (843) 705-0840 (Bluffton / Okatie) to schedule a consultation. Remember, any abnormality of the skin should be looked at by a dermatologist.