

Skin Deep

Wink (if You Dare) at All Those Remedies for Eye Bags

COCOA butter you might expect, or maybe a little aloe. But caffeine? At the mention of bags under the eyes, Jill Davis, manager of the Clinique counter at Macy's in Corte Madera, Calif., lined up five products that promise to minimize them. One, called All About Eyes, lists caffeine among its active ingredients. "Caffeine helps depuff," Ms. Davis said. Another, called Re-

pairwear, boasts "a unique peptide complex." "I'm not exactly sure what they're made from, but they get into the Langerhans cells under the skin and plump them up," said Ms. Davis, a tall young woman dressed in a white lab coat, which allowed her to talk about things like Langerhans cells with breezy confidence. It's easy to be skeptical. But cosmetics makers are understandably trying every possible remedy for a problem that, though it has existed as long as humans have known insomnia, sun damage, aging and hangovers, is apparently more mortifying than ever. Some 220 eye creams and lotions were introduced in 2004, nearly three times as many as the previous year, according to the Mintel International Group, which tracks the cosmetics industry. Cosmetic surgeons, who themselves have been doing an increasingly brisk business in eye-bag repair, recently have devised new strategies to eliminate the bag yet avoid creating a hollowed-out look.

Preventive Measures



People tend to worry about droopy eye bags after seeing them in the mirror. But it might pay to worry sooner, because dermatologists say they can be prevented. The expert's advice:

- Sleep is not all that causes eye bags to look puffy in the morning. Dehydration and gravity are also to blame. Drink a tall glass of water before hitting the pillow, and you may wake up looking even more youthful. Sleep two pillows and you may look even better: fluid will be less likely to pool under the eyes. (Morning swelling is usually temporary, and like all swelling it subsides faster under cool compresses. Cucumber slices are moist and just the right size.)

- Sun exposure hastens the sagging and wrinkling and even the darkening of skin under the eyes. Prevent the damage by diligently applying a cream or lotion with an SPF of at least 15. Broad-brimmed hats and big-framed sunglasses give extra protection.

- Choose a moisturizer that contains antioxidants (vitamin C or E, for instance). These can block damage from unstable oxygen molecules, and many dermatologists recommend them.

- Avoid rubbing your eyes. "Rubbing any skin makes it darker, so rubbing your eyes makes dark circles worse," said Dr. Doris J. Day, a New York dermatologist.

- Do not smoke. Smoking narrows capillaries, robbing skin of oxygen, and interferes with the production of collagen.

"The trouble with big bags under the eyes isn't just that they make you look older," said Dr. Joseph Eviatar, who directs Chelsea Eye & Cosmetic Surgery Associates in Manhattan. "They can also make you look tired, or sleepy, or sad. I have patients come to me and say: 'At work people are always telling me I look tired. People think I'm not up to the job because I look exhausted.'"

Which remedies work? The answer, dermatologists say, depends on how much work there is to do. Morning puffiness comes from water retention. Fluid collects under the eyes, especially when a person is horizontal, said Dr. Vic Narurkar, of San Francisco, who is president-elect of the American Society of Cosmetic Dermatology. Allergies also cause the bags to hold fluid, as does a bout of crying. (The salt in tears irritates the skin.) Dehydration, from simple thirst or from excess alcohol the night before, worsens the effect by making the eye-bag skin look like crepe paper.

More lasting bags take shape as the delicate skin under the eyes ages and accumulates sun damage. It grows thinner, loses its pli-



A LITTLE LIFT Before and after: a 35-year-old patient of Dr. Joseph Eviatar's.

ability and falls into a pouchlike shape. Over the years, too, the cushion of fat tucked cozily under each eye, called the orbital fat pad, protrudes as the muscle that holds it in place weakens. And the cheeks lose collagen, a protein that makes skin firm, so that a trough appears under the bags, accentuating their pouchiness. In those unlucky enough also to have inherited a tendency to have very pronounced bags (why is no one searching for those genes?) they may come to look less like part of the face and more like checked baggage.

Dark circles under the eyes further highlight the bags. One cause, excess pigment in the skin, is an inherited trait. But more often aging is the culprit. As the skin thins, the bluish cast of blood vessels below shows through. The simplest eye-bag treatments are those aimed at morning puffiness. Cool compresses can reduce swelling. Cucumber slices are moist and just the right size. The makeup artist Marvin Westmore, the founder of the Westmore Academy of Cosmetic Arts in Burbank, Calif.,

recommends cotton pads soaked in witch hazel, an astringent.

"Squeeze the excess witch hazel out, tilt your head back, close your eyes, and put the cotton pad on your lower eyelids for a few minutes," he said.

Dr. Dee Anna Glaser, vice chairwoman of dermatology at St. Louis University, says moisturizers are even better because they diminish fine wrinkles. Any face cream will do, she said, but sensitive skin calls for

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formulations meant for the eye area. "Eye moisturizers typically have fewer additives, so they're less likely to cause irritation," Dr. Glaser said. What about all those "super restorative total eye concentrates" and patented "anti-aging eye serums" that claim to reduce puffiness, tighten draping skin and lighten dark circles? Ask most dermatologists, and you're likely to hear them take a deep breath before

carefully choosing their words. "These kinds of products probably have very limited utility for bags under the eyes," said Dr. Glaser, who last year reviewed anti-aging products for the journal *Facial Plastic Surgery Clinics of North America*. Many of these so-called cosmetics are laced with substances that have sparked genuine research interest for their potential to stimulate collagen production and thus smooth fine lines and crow's feet: things like retinols, kinetin (a synthetic growth hormone derived from plants), peptides and coenzyme Q. Others contain vitamins C and E, antioxidants that theoretically prevent further damage to skin. The trouble is, it is difficult to know if the substances in any given product are able to penetrate the skin.

Dr. Peter Fodor of Los Angeles, who is president of the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, said: "Some cosmetic products contain collagen. Well, it's pretty hard to drive collagen into the skin." Even

if it were possible to erase wrinkles with creams, the bags themselves would remain. And that explains why people turn to surgery. The traditional treatment has been blepharoplasty, in which the surgeon removes the fat pad under the eye and sometimes the "redundant" skin as well.

But now dermatologists talk about a paradigm shift in eye-bag treatment. (These happen with exciting frequency in the fertile beauty sciences.) Instead of aggressively removing fat, many doctors now favor filling in the area between lower lid and cheek by injecting fat or collagen, reducing the pouchy look from below. This can take less than an hour, and the cost ranges from \$368 (for collagen) to \$1,226 (for fat), according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons. Surgeons' fees for a blepharoplasty are about \$2,500, which doesn't include the price of the operating room and anesthesia. Another trend is the growing use of lasers, which are said to be able to shrink the fat pads