

Melasma is a frustrating disorder most common in young women in their 20s and 30s. It affects an estimated six million women in the U.S. alone (according to [Medicinenet.com](http://www.Medicinenet.com)), and usually appears as a discoloration on the upper lip, cheeks and forehead. Patients may feel as though there is dirt on their face they can't wash off—much like a mustache.

Hormones must be involved in the onset of melasma, because there is a 10:1 female to male predominance, and women typically notice it shortly after starting oral contraceptives or becoming pregnant. Melasma is not painful and does not itch. Rather, it's an aesthetic concern due to sun exposure that often arises around spring or early summer.

Many patients are distressed by its appearance and request treatment—and rightfully so. Fortunately, there are a host of treatments available. While no single approach is uniformly effective, a moisturizer with sunscreen is recommended regardless of which treatment you choose.

The most common treatment is a **bleaching agent** containing hydroquinone that blocks pigment production. Numerous prescriptions contain 4 percent hydroquinone, which work over a few months. Dermatologists (like Dr. Goldman!) have the ability to compound their own formulations in their offices as strong as 6 percent for tough cases.

Hydroquinone use has become controversial in recent years, however, and is banned in Europe and the state of Texas due to irritation and potential cancer risks. Other beneficial ingredients with similar results are azelaic acid, kojic acid and arbutin. Lasers and intense pulse light sources (IPLs) are typically ineffective and can have significant side effects.

Another possible solution is a new product called [Elure](#) that has won numerous awards from *Allure* and *Essence* magazine. It was even featured on the Dr. Oz show. Elure contains a patented natural enzyme formulation called Melanozyme, which works at the source and actually breaks down excessive pigment. A gentle cream is typically applied at night, and results can be seen in as little as a month. Elure can reveal a visibly lighter, more radiant and exceptionally luminous skin tone and is only available in a physician's office (though it does not require a prescription).