

# Fair play options

## Shedding light on skin whitening

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**d**espite botched whitening jobs like Michael Jackson's, the popularity of skin whitening skyrocketed upon its introduction to the skincare market, and remains one of the most sought after skincare objectives today.

Research by market intelligence company Synovate in 2004 indicates that skin whitening is gaining strength across Asia-Pacific – 38% of women surveyed reported using topical whitening products in 2004, compared to 34% in 2002. Common reasons for using such products: To look younger, cover wrinkles and dark spots, and attract members of the opposite sex.

### Melanin production

Melanocytes are pigment cells located in the lower part of the epidermis – the skin's surface layer. They produce melanin, which causes the skin to darken. When enough melanin is formed, the pigment cells pack together and extend into the surface layer of skin cells, where they become visible and cause skin discolouration.

Fairness of complexion is largely genetically determined, says Dr Wong Su Ni, a consultant dermatologist with the National Skin Centre of Singapore. Other factors also contribute to melanin production, says Dr Thomas Schultz, Nu Skin Enterprises' vice-president of research and development, such as hormonal changes, especially during pregnancy, stress, environmental pollution and ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun.

### Cosmetic vs medical

Cosmetic companies and medical aestheticians take different approaches to whitening. The former focuses on brightening and whitening the entire face, while the latter aims to provide therapy to

affected pigmented areas.

For example, Nu Skin's latest Tri-Phasic White series uses ingredients like creatinine, hexapeptide, carnosine and diacetyl boldine to prevent melanin production and inhibit discolouration. This helps to "brighten the skin for a fresh appearance, remove accumulated dark spots and lighten existing discolouration." On the other hand, the Redefined White product range by Expressions Wellness makes use of natural marine ingredients for radiance and smoothness, and to clear up acne.

According to Dr Wong, aestheticians treat only the pigmented areas. They identify the different pigmentation problems before deciding on the appropriate treatment. Generally, topical

medications are the first line of treatment and they include alpha-hydroxy acids, vitamin C and kojic acid. She adds, "They work either by inhibiting pigment formation in the skin or accelerating the removal of superficial layers of pigment-containing skin. Vitamin C counters sun-induced damage." However, Dr Wong warns that these products may cause skin irritation and thinning. If topical treatments do not work, procedures like intense pulsed light (IPL) and pigment laser are recommended. They are costly but effective, and downtime can take up to a week with the treated areas red and scabbed.

Both cosmetic companies and medical aestheticians emphasise that fairness of complexion requires regular maintenance. Daily use of sunscreen and sunblock is advised as sun exposure accelerates melanin production. Choosing a product with an SPF of at least 15 is recommended.

Dr Wong cautions, "If certain routines have proved effective, a maintenance regime is required or else the pigmentation problem will recur." ♥

## New whitening products!



**Nu Skin Tri-Phasic White**  
For a complete whitening regime, try Nu Skin's Tri-Phasic White System – aimed at minimising melanin production and manifestation. A full set of cleanser, toner, essence, day milk lotion and night cream costs \$436.

### Expressions Wellness Redefined White

The Redefined White facial by Expressions Wellness promises a radiant and bright complexion. Follow up with a 20-minute IPL session to stimulate collagen production and rejuvenate your skin. Each facial session costs \$250 and the IPL, \$500.



**Activa Miracle White**  
After cleansing, massage the Miracle White Deep Cleanse over the face and neck. Rinse with warm water, then apply the Miracle White Adorer which is said to penetrate deeply for a lustrous complexion. Each set costs \$98 and is available at leading pharmacies.

