

# facts about FRECKLES

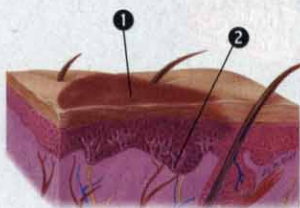
## Why you get these pigmentation spots – and how to minimize them

By Jody Buffalo

Months of sun exposure can bring out a smattering of freckles on some complexions – why we spoke to David E. Bank, M.D., a Mt. Kisco, N.Y., dermatologist, about what causes freckles and how to prevent them.

### THE BASIC FACTS

**Freckles** are spots of increased pigment, produced by cells called **melanocytes**, which make melanin (the substance that gives skin its color). Freckles become darker when the production of melanin increases, triggered by exposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) light. Unlike moles, freckles are flat and rarely larger than the size of a pea. And while moles may appear anywhere on the skin, freckles are ordinarily limited to sun-exposed areas.



### FRECKLED SKIN

1. freckle
2. melanocytes

### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Here are some facts about how freckles develop:

- **You've been exposed to sunlight.** Freckles fade on their own when sun exposure is reduced or eliminated.
- **You're fair-skinned.** Since there is less overall melanin in fair skin to absorb UV light, pigment cells produce melanin at an increased rate. Similarly, freckles are influenced by genetic factors.
- **Your hormones are fluctuating.** Estrogen overstimulates pigment-producing cells, causing them to generate excess color when exposed to sunlight.

### SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

You can minimize freckles, but they will return if skin is again exposed to the sun. Beauty Rx:

- 1. Always wear a broad-spectrum sunscreen.** Look for products that contain zinc oxide, titanium dioxide or Parsol 1789; each of these ingredients blocks both the sun's UVA and UVB rays. Try Olay Complete Defense Daily UV Moisturizer SPF 30 (\$13.49; at drugstores).
- 2. Apply a bleaching cream.** Over-the-counter products usually contain the lightening agents kojic acid or hydroquinone. Or try the new Bright Plus line from Clarins (\$30-\$55; [clarins.com](http://clarins.com)), which uses raspberry and grapefruit extracts to help fade spots. If you need something stronger, a doctor can prescribe Tri-Luma ([triluma.com](http://triluma.com)), a cream that contains 4 percent hydroquinone.
- 3. See a dermatologist to discuss laser treatments.** The laser energy is absorbed by melanin, causing the freckle to briefly darken and then slough off after a week or two. Usually only one treatment (approximately \$500) is needed.

Got fair skin? Chances are you have freckles too.



**WHAT WORKS** "The good news is that, unlike moles, freckles have no cancerous potential," explains David E. Bank, M.D., a dermatologist in Mt. Kisco, N.Y., and author of *Beautiful Skin: Every Woman's Guide to Looking Her Best at Any Age* (Adams Media Corp., 2000). "But since these pigmentation spots

form as a result of exposure to the sun's ultraviolet light, the development of freckles means you've already incurred some degree of sun damage." Bank says he turns to lasers to zap freckles, adding: "The only caveat is that you cannot have [laser treatment] done with any kind of tan, since the lasers are looking for darker pigmentation – and will target the tanned skin as well as the freckles, causing damage to the skin. Also, since the freckles darken before sloughing off, you don't want to have a laser treatment before an important event."