

# Get the red out

Smart ways to stop splotchiness and even out skin tone

A red nose and rosy cheeks look adorable on that Santa Claus ornament, but it's not a great look for you. And this time of year can make red splotches and breakouts worse. But before you go shopping for a new cover-up, you should learn why you're getting red. You might actually need more than makeup.

"Cold, windy weather can irritate the skin and increase redness by stripping the skin of the protective outer layers," explains New York City dermatologist Judith Hellman, M.D. Also, blood vessels near the skin's surface dilate when the air is frigid, allowing more blood to the surface to warm you up.

But the weather might not be your only problem. You might have rosacea, dermatitis, or acne. If that's the case, you should see a dermatologist before forking over money on drugstore and beauty-counter remedies that promise to banish red, splotchy skin.

"Most over-the-counter products overstate their ability to help," Hellman says. To get to the bottom of your skin issues and find out what can help, read on. (The products here were not tested in our labs.)

## ROSACEA

**What it is** A chronic skin disease that causes facial redness and is estimated



**SPLITCH WATCH**  
Many everyday products can cause inflammation.

to affect more than 14 million people. People with fair skin are especially prone to it. "Rosacea is a result of a blood-vessel abnormality in the facial vessels, which can dilate but not contract back to their normal size," Hellman says. "Hence, the increasing red color and often outright capillaries small and large." Dermatologists are still unsure of what causes it, but "what we do know about people with rosacea is that they

have a lot of free radicals in their skin," says dermatologist Ted Lain, M.D., of Austin, Texas. And research from the University of California at San Diego School of Medicine shows that it could be the overproduction of two interactive inflammatory proteins that results in excessive levels of a third protein that causes rosacea symptoms.

**Symptoms** Flushing and warming in the cheeks, nose, and chin that comes and goes and varies in severity, plus patchy dryness and broken capillaries. Also, thick skin and pustules can crop up, especially around the nose.

**Triggers** "Everyone is different," New York City dermatologist Amy Wechsler, M.D., says, but sun exposure, extreme weather, stress,

**ON THE SPOT** Some major medical conditions, such as lupus, can cause redness, so before you glop on the cover-up, check with a dermatologist to rule out anything serious.



harsh products or scrubs, saunas and steam rooms, exercise, spicy food, hot or alcoholic beverages, and nitrates in products such as cured meats are the most common triggers, causing blood vessels to swell and turn your face red.

**M.D. treatments** Rosacea is incurable, but it can be controlled with oral or topical antibiotics such as Oracea (doxycycline), MetroGel (metronidazole topical), or Finacea (azelaic acid topical). "Beyond that, the only way to alleviate redness is by intervention with lasers like the Pulsed Dye Laser and Fotofacial," Hellman says. Lain explains that laser treatment works "very well because it focuses on the blood vessels and makes them go away so they can't fill with blood." Lasers can also resurface skin. Also try to identify and avoid triggers that cause redness to flare,

darken, and become more persistent.

#### **What to look for at the drugstore**

"Antioxidants mop up the free radicals and act as natural anti-inflammatories," Lain says. And it's essential to use gentle products. Wechsler says, "You don't have to spend a lot of money on a cleanser. It's not on the skin long enough to do anything, but it can do something bad if you're sensitive." Purpose and Cetaphil are gentle cleansers with a pH similar to the skin, according to some of the dermatologists we interviewed. Look for moisturizers with calming ingredients such as feverfew. "It is very soothing to skin and works in reactive skin," says dermatologist Jeannette Graf, M.D., of Great Neck, N.Y.

#### **DERMATITIS (eczema)**

**What it is** Basic irritation or allergic

reaction to a substance. It can occur more easily after the long-term breakdown of the skin's moisture barrier due to harsh weather or contact with harsh ingredients or materials.

**Symptoms** Localized, painful, or itchy red or pink patches; rash or dry, flaking skin.

**Triggers** They include detergents, rough fabrics, metals, perfumes, and chemicals in topical creams. "Fluoride can cause contact dermatitis in the mouth and chin, where it contacts the skin," Hellman says. Figure out your triggers and try to avoid them.

**M.D. treatments** Topical steroid creams are likely to help. Prescription medications Tacrolimus (Protopic) and Pimecrolimus (Eidel) are also proven to help clear up patches and prevent flare-ups. But doctors usually prescribe those medications

## 4 ways calm your skin

**1 Wear sunscreen daily.** "Sunscreen is your power ingredient since the sun makes everything worse," New York City dermatologist Amy Wechsler, M.D., says. Plus, the buildup of sun damage over several years can be hard to distinguish from rosacea since skin will appear redder, she says. Look for a sunscreen with zinc oxide because it is non-irritating.

**2 Load up on antioxidants.** Sun, smoke, pollution, and stress create skin-damaging oxidants and free radicals, and it's a good idea to quench them with antioxidants, Wechsler says. Look on the ingredient labels of skin-care products for antioxidant-stocked green tea extract, alpha-lipoic acid, vitamins B3 and E, and vitamin C ester (the non-irritating form of vitamin C).

**3 Be a minimalist.** "If you have sensitive skin, limit what you're putting on your skin as much as possible to limit the likelihood of irritation," says Lain, who recommends a simple three-step regimen of gentle cleanser, antioxidant moisturizer, and chemical-free sunscreen.

**4 Eat an anti-inflammatory diet.** Load up on foods with omega-3 essential fatty acids to help counteract skin



inflammation, says dermatologist Nicholas Perricone, M.D., author of "Ageless Face, Ageless Mind" (Ballantine Books, 2007). According to Perricone, omega-3 reduces the body's production of inflammatory compounds and blocks the production of arachidonic acid, a cause of inflammation. Foods rich in omega-3s include cold-water fish like salmon, mackerel, trout, anchovies, herring, and sardines; nuts and seeds; and flaxseed oil. Eat lots of fresh fruits and vegetables and stay away from high-glycemic foods (such as starches and sugars like white bread, cookies, and candy), which have been shown to contribute to inflammation.



only if other treatments don't work. Side effects of the prescriptions may include skin irritation and a burning sensation.

#### **What to look for at the drugstore**

A mild hydrocortisone cream or ointment like Cortaid can often help calm down the inflammation and itching. Also, instead of buffing away dead skin with gritty scrubs, keep your moisture barrier intact by using a cleanser or moisturizer that gently exfoliates with lactic acid or urea, Graf says. Always use the gentlest formulas of skin-care products. And look for fragrance-free laundry detergents and cleansers to help prevent outbreaks.

## **ACNE**

**What it is** Pimples and redness.

**Symptoms** Active breakouts, excess oil, and blackheads or whiteheads.

**Triggers** Hormone fluctuations, bacteria, or blocked oil glands.

**M.D. treatments** Antibiotic gels and creams get rid of bacteria, which can make pimples and skin red and inflamed. (An oral drug may be needed.) Retinoid prescription products like Retin-A (or generic tretinoin) are another good option.

#### **What to look for at the drugstore**

Over-the-counter gels, creams, and face washes with the antibacterial benzoyl peroxide are also very likely to help. Dermatologists also recommend looking for salicylic acid in over-the-counter products to combat oil and clear up acne.

## **FLUSHING, BLUSHING**

**What it is** Temporary, situational redness that might also be deemed sensitive skin.

**Symptoms** Hot or stinging, short-lived redness that radiates onto cheeks and sometimes to the neck and chest.

**Triggers** Extreme weather, hot showers, overexertion, or emotions

## **ANTI-REDNESS MAKEUP TRICKS**

There are two main makeup approaches to redness cover-up:

First, you can try green-tinted foundations and concealers. Red and green are optical opposites, so they neutralize each other when mixed in the right proportions, explains makeup artist Carol Wagener of Houston. A bit of green concealer or powder can counteract the red in your skin.

"Any makeup with a green hue will cover red to some extent," Hellman says. She likes Dermablend concealers for severe redness. "It's a thicker and more sticky makeup that can be matched to your actual skin color and has a green-tinted version as well."

Just be aware that skin can appear gray or ashy if you get too heavy-handed with green, so build your application gradually. Use your pinky finger or a small brush. Top it with whatever foundation you ordinarily use. Consider using an allergy-tested, fragrance-free version to prevent skin reactions and more redness.

Second, you can try mineral-based foundations or concealers, many of which can help even out skin tone and may provide sun



**POWER PUFFS**  
Some makeup can do more than cover up flare-ups.

protection, Lain says. They don't completely cover redness, but they might prevent flare-ups in the sun and reduce inflammation.

"Minerals are inert and don't cause any allergy or sensitivity, so it can't hurt to try it," Wechsler says. But products with certain ingredients, like those with high concentrations of the preservative paraben, can irritate sensitive skin. So read the labels. Small amounts of those ingredients are less likely to irritate skin; if the product has them, make sure they're far down on the list.

**BOTTOM LINE** Green-tinted concealers and mineral makeup can help, but you might need to try a few different ones out to find what works best for you. Be sure to check the store's return policies before you buy.

like anger or embarrassment.

**M.D. treatments** "We've been using lasers for years to reduce redness, with new technologies coming out all the time," Hellman says.

**What to look for at the drugstore** Cooling ingredients like aloe or cucumber or a redness reducer in the licorice family. Graf notes that a good choice may be Eucerin's Redness

Relief Daily Perfecting Skin Lotion SPF15, which contains licochalcone, an extract of licorice root. If your skin redness is weather-related, try a protective moisturizing lotion to soothe skin and create a barrier between it and the elements, Hellman says. We like CeraVe Moisturizing Cream. Also be sure to stick with fragrance- and soap-free formulas.