

Dr.Mohan Thomas - Cosmetic Surgeon

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Dark secrets

Under-eye circles are not just a cosmetic drawback. They speak volumes about your overall lifestyle and health. Dr Mohan Thomas tells you how to get rid of them

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Most people attribute dark circles to a typical set of reasons — late nights, long hours on the computer and lack of sleep. However, that's not always it. Those dark bags under your eyes can be caused due to numerous other reasons. Keep a look out for these symptoms and take preventive action.

Causes

Persistent eye rubbing

Dark under-eye circles develop when red blood cells escape from the capillaries and wander into the surrounding skin. Enzymes in your body break down the red blood cells. When the haemoglobin is broken down, its remaining components have a dark blue-black colour, just like a bruise, leading to dark circles. Hence, your dark under-eye circles are nothing but ramifications of leaky capillaries.



Dark under-eye circles are also apparent because the skin around the eyes is very thin and delicate, and the capillaries are much closer to the surface of the skin. Many people's skin is not only thinner around the eyes, but also more translucent. The combination of these factors makes the discoloration more apparent.

Cold

When dealing with a cold or a sinus infection, the pressure on the blood vessels (under the eyes) increases, causing dark circles due to the same reasons mentioned above. However, these dark circles are mostly temporary and disappear with time.

Wrong eye gear

Wearing heavy or ill-fitting glasses? They can put an added pressure on the veins and capillaries, causing the 'bruise factor' that can lead to dark circles.

Allergies

Allergies may be the most common cause of skin discoloration under the eyes. If allergies are the root cause of your problem, you simply need to treat them or remove the allergen.

Paleness of skin

Lack of sleep causes the skin to become paler (thus increasing the appearance of darkness under the eyes), and it also reduces the circulation of blood under the eyes. You've got to reduce your stress, sleep more and take the proper vitamins and minerals.

Dehydration

Not drinking enough water is the highway to dark circles.

Genetics

Sometimes, under-eye dark circles run in family, and you may develop the dark patch despite a healthy lifestyle. At best you can try and minimise the effect by taking care of your self and drinking plenty of water. But chances are the discoloration will remain.

Treatment

The tannin in tea bags has been shown to reduce swelling and discoloration, and cucumber slices have long been used to reduce puffiness and refresh the appearance of skin around the eyes. This is one place where going herbal doesn't make a difference. They aren't as effective as the regular tea bags.

Research has shown that skin creams containing Vitamin A and retinol reduce puffiness and discoloration significantly in many patients. De-pigmenting creams can be combined to give a better result. Long-term daily use seems to have the greatest effect.

Drink enough water. Drink at least ten glasses of water everyday. There is no stressing this enough. If you do not drink at least eight glasses of water everyday, you are not providing your body with as much water as it requires for flushing out toxins. Do not wait until you are thirsty before drinking up. By the time your body cries 'I'm thirsty!', you are already severely dehydrated.

Wear sunscreen with a minimum of SPF 30 under the eyes to prevent skin weakening caused by sun damage. Be careful not to consume too much dietary salt.

Vitamin C, vitamin D and B6 helps to strengthen blood vessel walls. Anti-oxidant foods such as cranberries, blueberries, bilberries, tea (green and black), black currant, onions, legumes, and parsley would help.

Drinking alcohol, caffeine, coffee, and soda can leave you dehydrated and aggravate the chances of developing dark circles. These should be cut down or eliminated from the diet. Certain nutrient deficiencies may be responsible for your

regularly appearing eye shadows, and it is important to eat a balanced and healthy diet, especially if you have a serious case of recurring dark circles around your eyes.

Nutrients such as iron and vitamin C are commonly found deficient in people with fast paced or stressful lifestyle, and most commonly associated with dark circles relating to nutrient deficiency. Taking proper care to introduce enough iron and vitamin C into your diet can go a long way in helping with the appearance and development of dark bags around our eyes. If everyday nutrition doesn't seem enough, opt for a regular dose of multivitamins to meet the requirement.

(Mohan Thomas is a senior cosmetic surgeon based in Mumbai.)

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