



BY NEIL ALAN FENSKE, M.D., FACP
Special correspondent

Most women protect their face from the sun and adhere to a comprehensive skin-care program. Often I marvel at how good a woman's facial skin looks, only to be alarmed when I examine the rest of her habitually sun-exposed skin.

Unfortunately, many women neglect to care for the skin on the neck, chest arms and hands, which belies the more youthful appearance of the face. When queried about this disparity, the answers are myriad. Whatever the reason, it is my recommendation that you start paying special attention to these areas and not just your face. The hands in particular can really show your true chronological age.

As we age, the skin of the hands becomes thin and atrophic, loose and inelastic. The dermis (middle layer of skin) becomes thinner due to loss of collagen and other constituents of the skin. In addition, we lose much of the normal fatty tissue that adds bulk and softness to the hands. Consequently, the underlying veins and tendons become more pronounced and unsightly. Now, add to this the effects of unprotected long-term sun exposure and you will see aged skin with superimposed irregular pigmentation, unsightly discrete brown spots (lentigines) and/or rough red scaly spots that are precancerous actinic keratoses.

So what can you do? You can't prevent the normal aging process, but you can prevent further sun damage. You should immediately commence with an aggressive sun

My hands look much older than my face; what can I do?

protection program. I recommend using a "broad spectrum" sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30. For additional protection, add an antioxidant to the skin before applying your sunscreen! Lastly, see your dermatologist and have any precancerous lesions treated, and ask about hand rejuvenation strategies that might turn back the clock.

There are many topical creams that can help. Examples are products containing retinoids, vitamin C, hyaluronic acid and hydroquinones, to name but few. Visible improvement can take a long time, so be patient. Nonetheless, these agents, by themselves, may not provide you the desired improvement. You may need more aggressive treatments, including Intense Pulse Light (IPL) and lasers. Intense Pulse Light, in particular, can help with discoloration and fine lines, but it usually requires a series of treatments.

Resistant dark spots may respond to lasers specially designed for this purpose. Fat transplanted from your own body has been used to fill the void created by your age-related loss of fat. Unfortunately, the results are many times unpredictable. A new and innovative treatment is the use of filler materials to "plump up" the atrophic skin. The most popular agent used is Radiesse, a product containing calcium hydroxyapatite. Injecting this agent right below the skin, where the fat used to be, results in immediate fullness and, over time, it stimulates new collagen formation. Keep in mind this is an "off label" use of the product.

Don't let your hands tip off your age. Treat them as well as your face. Talk to your dermatologist about strategies to rejuvenate your hands. We can make a difference.



Thinkstock

Neil Alan Fenske is professor and chair of the Department of Dermatology and Cutaneous Surgery at USF Health