

## The Effects of Sunlight and Age on Skin

### **Principles of care for your skin**

As we get older, the amount of cumulative damage to our skin increases, principally from the effects of sunlight. These effects could be summarised as follows: Firstly, a thickening of the most superficial layer which is known as the keratinised layer with thinning of the deeper dermal layer. Secondly, an increase in the number of pigmented or dark spots in the skin. These are protective mechanisms used by the body as it tries to shield itself from the harmful effects of the sun. Thirdly, the effect of sunlight of the more sinister type, where skin cells are transformed into malignant or cancerous cells which can give rise to basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and malignant melanoma. So, as a general principle, the paler your skin type, the more you need to protect it from excess sunlight.

There are a number of treatments available which aim to cause a radical exfoliation of the skin and these treatments can be divided into two main types: physical and chemical. The physical treatments include microdermabrasion where only the top layer is removed and a course of treatment will involve three to six sessions, a few weeks apart.

The chemical treatments involve peels. These can be very light acid peels which you can apply yourself every evening, to light chemical peels such as with salicylic acid, or phenol, which can be done by beauty therapists and then, to more aggressive chemical peels which are usually done by doctors. The light peels, in a similar way to microdermabrasion, have better results when taken as a course of three or six peels a few weeks apart.

To help patients work out the best treatment for them, I will advise a “recipe” of therapies based on what is said above, and it depends on people’s individual lifestyle and budgets. An example would be a course of microdermabrasion, or peel, followed by the use of light acid creams as a maintenance therapy. With all of these treatments, it is imperative to protect the new skin from excess sunlight and I would recommend sun block of Factor 25 or greater and regular use of moisturising creams. There are several commercial products that patients can choose from. The more active ones are only available from specialist clinics and cannot be purchased over the counter.

For further information please contact the office.