

What Causes Dark Circles?



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Everyone hates dark circles under their eyes. They make you look tired, exhausted, and ill. In certain kinds of overhead lights, the circles look worse due to the 'shadowing effect'. Concealers are often used to hide these dark circles. Have you ever wondered why do we get dark circles? And more importantly, why is it more obvious in Indians?



There are numerous natural reasons why the skin around the eyes has a darker shade. In addition, there are some additional conditions that can lead to further darkening. Often more than one reason is at play.

The primary reason for dark-circle around the eyes is the thickness of the skin. Did you

know, that eyelid skin is the thinnest in the body? Moreover, it does not have fat immediately under it, but has a very vascular muscle (orbicularis oculi). This allows fine blood vessels (capillaries) and eyelid muscle fibers to be almost 'seen through', thereby giving a reddish-blue color it due to underlying vessels and muscle. Compare it to the lighter color of the cheek skin for example, which is much thicker, and has fat underneath it. Reduced sleep can lead to dilatation of these vessels, thereby increasing the 'shade' of under-eye darkening.

Sometimes, the lower-eyelid contour can make it appear 'darker'. For example, if you have lower-eyelid fat bags or a hollow, the dark shadows will be more obvious. There can be excessive pigment (Melanin) in the skin under the eyes, which may increase due to eye allergy, a hormonal influence on pigment cells, or a reaction to a topical cream or medication. Moreover, Indian skin is overall more pigmented, making these contrasts even more striking than our western counterparts.

How do we minimize dark circles? The natural reasons why eyelid skin looks darker cannot be eliminated, but some home remedies can help. Good hydration thickens the eyelid skin, thereby making it less 'transparent', and cold compresses help reduce the caliber of the blood vessels that are seen through the thin skin. So the age-old ritual of placing cucumber slices over closed eyes

indeed addresses the dark circles scientifically! Keep drinking water throughout the day. If you are a busy bee, there are several useful apps that can remind you to drink water! A minimum of 8 hours of sleep would ensure that the under-eye skin looks healthy.

Next, we need to target excessive pigment in the skin. The first step is to address any obvious precipitating cause if it can be identified, for example eye allergy, or an uncorrected/changed spectacle correction. A simple consultation with your eye doctor would help eliminate these possibilities. Certain under-eye creams can reduce the pigment production within the skin cells, and can effectively reduce these dark areas. Hydroquinone is the best when it comes to skin lightening creams. Most commercially available fairness creams contain a small proportion of these. It is recommended to use them only under the direct supervision of your dermatologist or oculoplastic surgeon.

Lastly, the dark circles caused by the hollows and fat bags under your eyes. These contour changes increase the dark circles by creating a shadowing effect. Make-up and concealer is unlikely to hide these type of dark circles. It requires removal of the eyelid bags, or filling of the hollow with Fillers. Consulting your eye-plastic surgeon would be very helpful in this regard.

In summary, good hydration (plenty of water), treatment of any eye allergy, skin lightening creams, and effective treatment of under-eye contour changes (bags and hollows) can reduce your dark circles significantly. Remember, improvement is the key word, not perfection!