Every year, when the weather warms up, we celebrate the sun with picnics, backyard BBQs, pool parties, and sunny vacations. Hopefully we use a little (or a lotta) sunscreen along the way. Summer is also the reigning season of the common skin disorder we call melasma. I’m sure you’ve heard of it. It’s that hateful, brown, patchy pigment that creeps onto our upper cheeks, upper lip, forehead, and chin, and has us all running for the Derma Blend. It’s a common condition in women, can attack at any time and be difficult to treat.

The exact cause of melasma remains unknown, but there are multiple factors that are involved in its manifestation. Uncontrolled sunlight exposure is considered the leading trigger for melasma, especially in individuals with a genetic predisposition to this condition, like those of Latin and Asian descents. In general, people with darker skin have higher incidences of melasma. Other triggers include pregnancy, birth control pills and estrogen.

At Gateway Aesthetic, we treat melasma using a daily skin care maintenance program and with periodic laser treatment combined with the Cosmion Mask, if necessary. The daily skin care maintenance routine is as follows:

**Total sun protection:** This involves the daily use of UVA/UVB sun block that is reapplied every 2 to 3 hours, along with a wide brimmed hat that totally shades your face (not a baseball hat and not a visor). If you’re needing recommendations for sunblock, Laroche-Possay Anthelios and Skin Ceuticals Physical Fusion UV Defense are two excellent choices. Both of these products can be found in Apothica, our associated skin care store. You’ll also find a nice selection of wide brimmed hats from the San Diego Hat Company!

**Cleanse once to twice daily with M2 Cleanser:** The M2 Skin Care line uses a potent combination of mandelic and malic acids. Both ingredients are powerful Alpha Hydroxy Acids (AHAs), which are very effective in lightening pigmentation. Algae Extract, an anti-inflammatory, is also added to protect the skin from the common irritation associated with AHAs.

**Topical Antioxidant Therapy:** Daily use of a topical antioxidant
Elise Wilcox, PA-C, specializes in many cosmetic dermatology treatments, including light dermal fillers, laser tattoo removal, and Restylane and Perlane treatments. Before coming to Gateway in 2003, Elise worked for 10 years at the Primary Children’s Medical Center as a medical technologist.

*See Dr. Taylor’s article published in the January 2013 issue of Journal of Drugs in Dermatology.*

 offers significant photoprotective effects, which makes it harder for the skin to over-produce pigment when exposed to UVA/UVB rays. Many topical antioxidants also stimulate collagen production, a bonus! Patient favorites are IS Clinical Super Serum, Skin Ceuticals’ C E Ferulic and Phloretin CF Gel, and Skin Medica’s TNS Essential Serum.

**Moisturize:** Using a daily moisturizer will slow the evaporation of water from the skin, helping to keep the skin hydrated, soft and supple. The best moisturizer is really dependent on your skin type. Many moisturizers, like the M2 Moisturizer, also offer pigment lightening. For those with uber dry skin, I personally recommend the Renewal Facial Cream and the Intensive Nourishing Cream, by Epionce.

**M2 Skin Refinishing Serum, 12% or 20%:** This is one of our most beloved products! Once again, the mandelic and malic acids are great for pigment lightening, exfoliation, and for acne prone skin, too!

For those with dermal melasma or with stubborn hyperpigmented patches, treatment with fractional lasers *(StarLux or Fraxel Re:store Dual)*, combined with the COSMION Mask, has proven to be very effective in lightening the pigment. The StarLux fractional laser uses an array of hundreds of high-precision micro beams to coagulate narrow, deep columns of tissue in the dermis and epidermis, while leaving the most superficial layer of skin unaffected. These columns of coagulation stimulate the body's natural healing response, causing new, healthy tissue to form which reduces the excess pigmentation associated with melasma. The COSMION Mask uses a process called iontophoresis to drive our specially formulated Vitamin C serum deep into the skin, in order to improve the appearance of the uneven pigmentation and other forms of skin damage associated with photoaging. It’s this combination of treatments that is creating buzz among the melasma community and hundreds of happy Gateway Aesthetic patients!

Once again, melasma is not curable, but it is treatable. Keeping your best skin forward requires the daily skin care maintenance program, total sun protection, and occasional laser treatments combined with the COSMION Mask. Good luck!