

Fade those

Are sun spots and blotchy skin making you look old? We've got the solution

by Anjana Gosai

WHEN your holiday tan is less golden hue and more splodges of dark patches, you might be suffering from the latest beauty obsession — hyperpigmentation.

Skin specialists claim that uneven skin tones can add as many years to your face as having fine lines and wrinkles.

And according to research by beauty brand Clinique, 43 per cent of women in the UK are concerned about pigmentation, while celebrity sufferers include Kirstie Allsopp and Louise Redknapp.

The term hyperpigmentation covers everything from sun spots, liver spots and dark freckles to larger areas of discolouration, caused by excess melanin production.

The sun is not the only culprit for pesky pigmentation and, in order to treat it, you must first identify the cause.

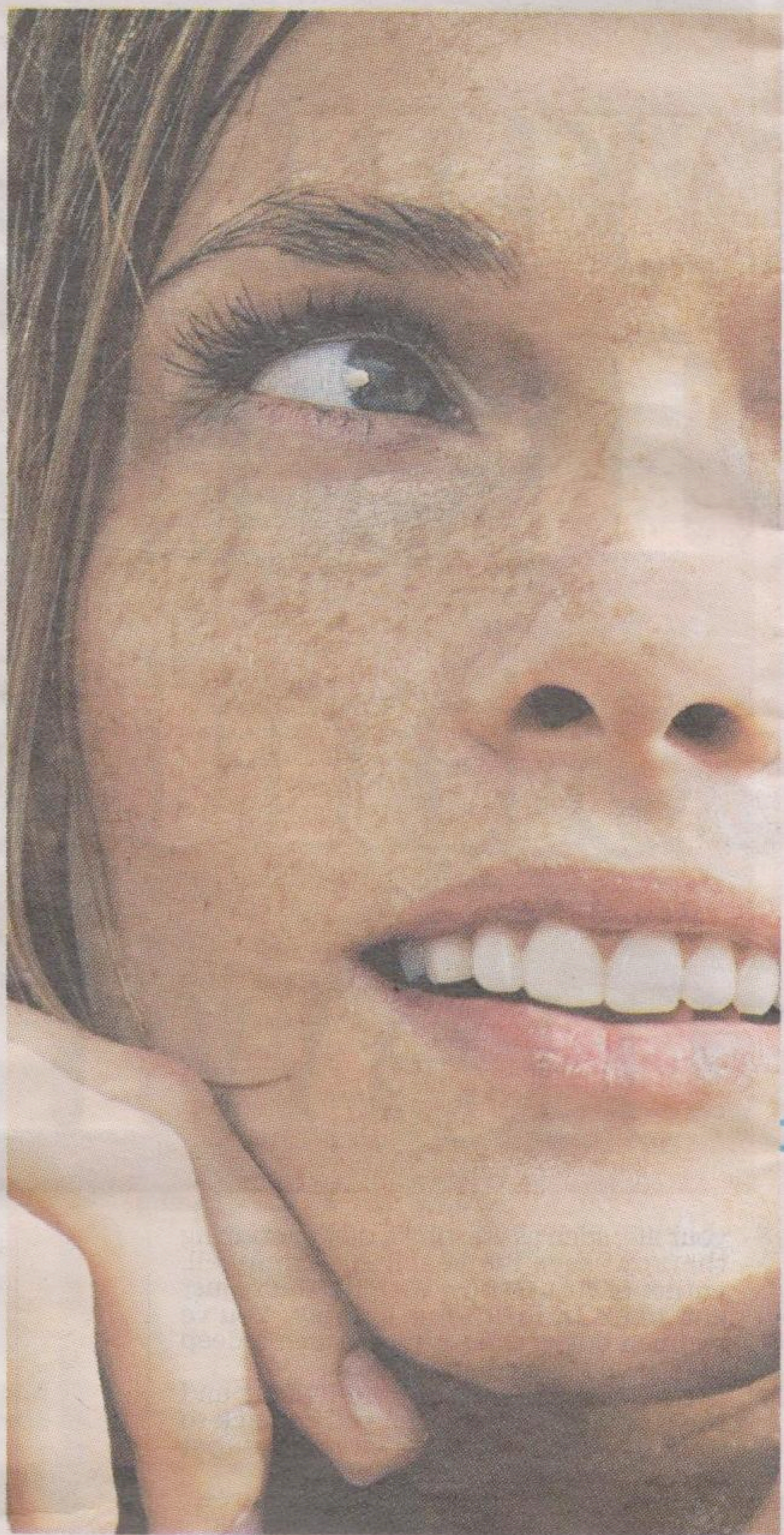
Larger patches of pigmentation — known as melasma — can be brought on by oestrogen fluctuations, such as those we experience during the menopause, pregnancy or while on the pill.

Then there's 'post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation'. If you've ever injured your skin — be it a graze, a spot or a burn — and then gone out in the sun, you may have noticed a darkening of the new skin area. This is because the trauma triggers melanin production. Those with darker skins are more vulnerable to this form of pigmentation, as their melanocytes are more active.

Most common of all are 'sun spots' — which are darker and more irregular in appearance than the freckles that you may be born with. These appear on the face, décolletage, forearms and hands after too much exposure to the sun.

A few of these here and there might sound harmless, but experts are now realising just how ageing these can be.

'An evenly-coloured, pigmentation-free complexion is very important for maintaining a youthful look,' says dermatologist Dr Stefanie Williams. 'Blotchy skin doesn't reflect light as well, making the complexion look dull — but a unified skintone wipes years off our appearance.' These dark



patches are tricky to conceal using make-up, but there is plenty we can do to minimise their appearance.

For a speedy solution, the answer might lie in the latest laser treatments, which are less painful than in the past and work by penetrating the skin's layers to zap pigmentation selectively in as little as two or three sessions.

FOR THOSE afflicted by stubborn sun spots, the new Clear + Brilliant laser (from £200, clearandbrilliant.com) is a good option.

During a 20-minute procedure, a laser hand-piece is glided over the face, where it creates millions of tiny holes in the skin, which heal to reveal a fresh new layer of