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## SKIN CARE

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# Battle big skin problems with camouflage

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If there's any single merit to makeup, it's the ability it has to mask imperfection. A blemish quickly disappears under a smear of concealer, while a freckled complexion can become alabaster-perfect with a veil of foundation. However, some skin irregularities need better coverage than cosmetic counter selections can afford. For scarring, redness or discoloration, using regular makeup to cover up problems is like using a sheer curtain to block out light. That's where something called camouflage or corrective makeup comes in. It's a specialized type of cosmetic increasingly found in dermatologists' offices as a psychological component in the treatment of skin problems.

Drs. Suzanne and Madelaine Gagnon run a camouflage clinic out of their Laval dermatology practice, called Dermatologie Face Au Temps. "It's camouflage vs. maquillage," Madelaine explained. "What we offer is more in the way of a clinic than a salon. After all, we wouldn't be doing someone's makeup for their wedding day."

Their waiting room is set up discreetly, so that a single door leads to both the examining room and to the camouflage clinic. That certainly makes makeup a much more comfortable concept for men.

The difference between camouflage and other makeup, explained Suzanne, is in the purpose and results. "There's aesthetic makeup, then there's stage makeup, and then there's what we call camouflage or paramedical makeup.

Aesthetic makeup is for someone with good skin. Stage makeup is thicker, with a heavier powder base that makes it good for indoor use only since it looks unnatural outside. And camouflage makeup is meant to hide skin problems, skin diseases and some side-effects of surgery, she said.

One of the primary reasons for opening the clinic was to complement their laser treatments, she explained. Laser work typically results in skin redness that can last several weeks or even months, or in a condition called purpura (skin marked by little purple bruise spots where blood vessels have broken).

Other reasons for camouflage include surgical scars, bruising after a face-lift or blepharoplasty, plus other irregularities that can't be remedied fully by cosmetic procedures, Suzanne said. For example, laser treatment can only do so much for rosacea.

Dr. Neil Shear, a dermatologist at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre in Toronto who heads up the CosMedic Clinic, reported that about 40 per cent of patients visit the camouflage clinic because they suffer from rosacea. As for the rest, he said, "a survey we did showed that the two most common problems were pigmentation (too much in areas, or too little) and redness.

"Besides those (problems), we have covered untreatable skin cancers, scars, skin changes from diabetes, and acne, among a long list," Shear said.

The camouflage makeup itself is specially designed to provide heavy but natural coverage that can be customized to match any skin colour.

"The trick is to come up with 'normal' skin tones, so that someone doesn't look like they're wearing makeup, and to have exactly the right colour for each patient so that they don't have to mix up a new batch every day," Shear said. For acne, rosacea and other irritable conditions, formulations are non-sensitizing, non-allergenic and very comfortable.

While a heavy-textured makeup sounds awful, it goes on quite differently than one would expect, Madelaine explained. "While it's more opaque than regular cosmetic formulations and has a thicker texture, it melts once it's on your hands and exposed to body temperature," she said. The colour matching is done by using special-wavelength lights that replicate outdoor lighting.

### HANDS CAN BE HARD TO MATCH

Some conditions are tougher to conceal, as are certain parts of the body, Shear said. "The face is generally easy to work on. The neck can be difficult, and hands are often hard to get the right match. Skin conditions that are bumpy can be tricky, but clients are usually - 85 per cent of the time, from our own study - very pleased with the results."

The cost is reasonable for anyone who has ever spent any time cursing a mirror and canceling social engagements because of how their skin looks.

The Gagnons offer an evaluation session plus customized colour mixing and an application lesson for \$50. Products are sold separately: \$19 for a concealer and \$21 for foundation, for a year's supply. If the skin problem is due to a work-related injury or car accident, your insurance plan may cover the cost.

"Fact is, there are a lot of wonderful treatments out there for improving skin's appearance," Madelaine said. "But there are things that you can't treat, so covering them is an option."