

ETHNIC SKIN: UNIQUE PROPERTIES, CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

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The ability to address the skin care needs of people of different ethnicities has never been more important, as both the United States becomes more diverse and as international companies make products that serve people from more countries around the world. In order to successfully meet these needs, the cosmetic chemist must first understand them. This includes having knowledge of the similarities and the scientifically proven differences in the skin of people of different origins. It also requires insight into the different desires and challenges of people from different cultures, both within the US and around the world. Finally, one must be familiar with the current product offerings in order to know the unmet needs.

This presentation will review the published literature and recent reports on the differences in skin across ethnicities. Structural and functional differences will be discussed. The differences that are of cosmetic relevance will be highlighted.

In addition to covering normal skin, common skin conditions and diseases of significance to people of color will be discussed. Problems with pigmentation provide one of the greatest challenges for people with skin of color. Problems including normal variation in facial pigmentation (especially around the eyes and in the beard region), conditions such as postinflammatory hyper- and hypopigmentation, and diseases such as melasma and vitiligo will be described. A review of the effects of acne in pigmented skin, dry skin, eczema will also be provided, as will a review of the skin challenges associated with facial hair growth. Allergic reactions and sensitive skin will also be discussed. For the conditions, a description of the underlying cause will be given and clinical examples will be shown.

There are many skin care products currently available that address some of the skin care needs of consumers from diverse ethnic backgrounds. However, there are still many unmet needs which translate into opportunities for the cosmetic chemist. Some of the products are developed for and/or marketed specifically to people of color. Other products are mainstream products but are particularly effective or appealing to people of color. This presentation will review existing brands, products and active ingredients. Finally, a needs analysis will be given based on what we know about the skin and what is currently offered. These need-gaps will be presented as challenges to the cosmetic chemist.

At the end of the presentation, the chemist should have a good understanding of ethnic skin, its specific properties, and conditions and diseases that are relevant to its skin care needs. He or she will be aware of products that are currently available, and opportunities for improvements in current offerings.