



Please note that the information contained in this document is intended as general guidance purposes only.
For more information visit the Acne Support website: www.acnesupport.org.uk

Covering Acne

Skin conditions that change the way our skin looks, such as acne, can have a serious effect on the way we think and feel about ourselves. They can impact upon our confidence, create feelings of social isolation, and lower our sense of wellbeing. Some people find that covering acne and acne scarring helps them to regain their confidence and improves their quality of life.

In this section of Acne Support you will find information about how to cover acne and acne scarring, as well as general skin discolouration, using a type of product known as skin camouflage.

Skin camouflage is a healthcare product that is formulated to mask the appearance of skin conditions. It is intended to replicate the colour of your skin and should not be noticeable when applied correctly.

There are many brands of skin camouflage products available, as well as products that claim to be skin camouflage even when they are not. In the NHS for a product to be classified as skin camouflage and be available on prescription it must have received approval through the government's Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency.

Acne, skin discolouration and acne scarring can affect any of us. Using skin camouflage to cover acne is an option for everyone, regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation and religious or social beliefs.

Below you will find some useful information on how to apply and remove skin camouflage, where and how you can get it, how to resolve some of the common problems that arise when covering acne, and what type of products can be used alongside skin camouflage.

Please note that skin camouflage is not the only type of product that can be used to cover acne and acne scarring. Some may find other products, such as makeup, useful.

This section of Acne Support was created with the help of the British Association of Skin Camouflage.

How do I apply and remove skin camouflage?

It is very important that you have found a colour match for your skin that you are happy with before you start using a skin camouflage product. Please see the 'How do I obtain skin camouflage?' section for details on how to do this.

Applying Skin Camouflage

The first step is to gently cleanse and dry the skin. After that you should apply any acne treatments, moisturisers, sunscreen or any other products that you wish and wait a few moments for your skin to absorb them.

The next step is to apply your skin camouflage. Start by removing the amount of camouflage that you'll need from its container. You may wish to follow the instructions on the product's packaging on how to do this. You can also decant the product directly onto your fingertips or onto a cosmetic sponge if that is the application method you prefer. For hygienic reasons, you should avoid sticking your fingers directly into any tubs. It is also important to remember that a small amount of skin camouflage will cover a large area of skin.

When you are ready, use a gentle, stroking motion to apply the skin camouflage directly to the acne affected area and then blend outwards onto the surrounding skin.

If any discolouration shows through the layer of camouflage then you can apply a little more. Please note, if discolouration is still visible after a couple of layers then it is unlikely that additional layers will help. See our 'Solutions to some common skin camouflage problems' section if this is a problem for you.

Once you have achieved a natural, even look, you may then need to set the camouflage. You can do this using a powder that is the same colour as your skin camouflage and applying it using a powder applicator.

Start by tipping a small amount of powder onto your powder applicator, so that you avoid getting any skin camouflage in the pot. Next, gently dab the powder against the area to which you applied the skin camouflage. Avoid dabbing harshly at your skin as this might create powder clouds, which can irritate your eyes and lungs.

The finished result will be waterproof and should last between eight and sixteen hours. Although, it is worth noting that skin camouflage is not rub proof. Please see your product details for further information.

Removing Skin Camouflage

It is often tempting to wear skin camouflage overnight. However, a build-up of products on the skin can block pores and lead to acne forming or worsening. In addition, skin camouflage products are not rub proof and will tend to smudge and come off on bedding.

To remove your skin camouflage you can use a mild cleansing lotion or soap substitute and gently rub the skin with a cotton pad. You can also use a mild soap and water if you prefer.

How Do I Obtain Skin Camouflage?

There are several ways in which you can get skin camouflage. Below you will find the details of the options available to you. It is important to note that finding a colour match to your skin that you are happy with is a key part of skin camouflage proving effective. You should also be aware that your skin may change colour with the seasons, and that you might need different colour products to match your skin at different times of the year.

NHS Skin Camouflage Clinic

In some areas the NHS provides a skin camouflage clinic service. To access this service you might need to visit your GP who may then refer you. Self-referral is also available in some areas.

At a skin camouflage clinic a trained skin camouflage practitioner will discuss with you your needs and be able to help you in finding a colour match that you are happy with. During your visit to the clinic, the practitioner will teach you how to easily and quickly apply and remove skin camouflage. You will also be taught how to make sure that your camouflage stays in place during wear.

The practitioner will also explore various brands with you. Skin camouflage products are available from a variety of brands in an extensive range of colours. Different brands do have different textures and some may stay on your skin longer than others. This means one product may be better than another for you and your lifestyle.

It is important that the final decision on colour and product texture is your choice, the practitioner is there to serve as a guide and not to make the choice on your behalf.

Once you have decided on a product you may be able to get your supply through a prescription from your GP. The GP will need to know the brand name, the colour code and the size or quantity of the product that you require. Your prescription will then be dispensed in the normal manner from your pharmacist.

You may be able to find out if an NHS skin camouflage clinic is available in your area by contacting the British Association of Skin Camouflage or Changing Faces.

Other Skin Camouflage Clinics

If you cannot access an NHS skin camouflage clinic, then you may be able to see a qualified skin camouflage practitioner through your pharmacy or through a private clinic.

As with a visit to an NHS Skin Camouflage Clinic, the practitioner will discuss with you your needs and help you to find a product that is a colour and texture that you are happy with. When selecting a private practitioner make sure to check that they have been sufficiently trained in a variety of brands. You can tell this by asking what selection of brands they can offer you. A good practitioner will also have ready for inspection their qualifications and insurance cover, should you request to see it.

Once you have chosen a product that you are happy with you will be able to order it from online retailers, telephone retailers and pharmacies. To do this you will need the product's brand name, colour code, size and quantity that you wish to order.

Visit your local pharmacy to find out if they offer a free skin camouflage clinic. Alternatively, you can search online for a private skin camouflage practitioner in your area. Please note that appointments with private practitioners will most likely involve a fee.

Finding Skin Camouflage Without A Practitioner

If you are not able to see a skin camouflage practitioner, then there are some useful things you can do to help your find a colour match by yourself. Please note, seeing a skin camouflage practitioner makes it easier to find a colour and texture that you are happy with.

Most skin camouflage brands provide sample colour packs that you can purchase over the internet or by telephone. Using these packs, you can test colours until you find one that you feel happy with. It is important to remember that you cannot match your skin colour to a product through a screen or using product packaging. When testing a colour, be sure to view it on your skin in natural daylight, as this will give you the best indication as to how it looks.

After you have chosen a product that you are happy with you will need the brand name, colour code and product size to be able to order it online. You can also order skin camouflage products through your pharmacy and over the phone from retailers using the above product information.

Solutions to some common skin camouflage problems

Sometimes people can find themselves facing problems when covering their acne and acne scarring. We have listed some of the more common issues that people experience below, along with suggestions as to how they might be solved.

What can I do if my skin camouflage doesn't stay on my inflamed acne?

Often skin camouflage and makeup products do not stay in place when applied to inflamed acne. If you find that this is a problem for you then a product known as an invisible primer may help keep your skin camouflage from sliding off the acne.

A skin camouflage practitioner will be able to suggest brands of invisible primer and advise you as to where you can purchase them. If seeing a skin camouflage practitioner is not an option then a professional makeup artist or theatrical makeup retailer may be able to advise you.

What can I do if my skin camouflage product is too thick?

Skin camouflage products come in a wide range of textures and consistencies. Some are thick creams whilst others are thin liquids or come in a stick format.

If you have chosen a product that you are happy with in terms of colour but are finding that it is too thick then there are liquid thinners that you can purchase from theatrical makeup suppliers that may help. These liquid thinners are designed to thin any cream without affecting its colour.

Please note that usually there is no need to set your camouflage with powder if you use a thinner.

Why can't I get my skin camouflage to even out my skin texture?

Acne and acne scarring can leave skin with an uneven appearance. It can be tempting to try to make your skin appear level by applying skin camouflage in thick layers. This rarely works and what often happens is that the area you were trying to even out becomes more noticeable.

If you are looking for information on what you can do to remove or reduce uneven skin texture caused by acne scarring then please see the 'Scarring' section of this website.

What can I do if using powder is making my skin look dull?

Applying powder to set your skin camouflage will leave your skin with a matte (not shiny) finish. Some people feel like applying powder makes their skin look dull. If you are finding that this is a problem for you then there are liquid sprays and aerosols available that you can apply on top of your powder to give your skin a natural sheen. These products are often known as fixier sprays and can sometimes be called setting sprays by theatrical makeup suppliers.

Why does my skin look bright white in photographs when I am wearing skin camouflage?

Skin camouflage products that contain a high amount of titanium dioxide or iron oxide can cause your skin to look bright white in photographs when the camera's flash is activated. This is because these ingredients reflect a lot of light. If this is a problem for you then you should find a skin camouflage product where titanium dioxide or iron oxide are not the major ingredients.

What products can I use with skin camouflage?

You can use a wide variety of products both underneath and on top of your skin camouflage.

Products that are often used underneath skin camouflage

Many products are often used beneath skin camouflage without causing a problem. If you are using an acne treatment, moisturiser, invisible primer and/or a sunscreen then you should apply it to your skin before you apply your skin camouflage.

You will need to allow a few minutes for your skin to absorb these products and remove any excess residue as it can prevent the skin camouflage from staying in place.

Products that are often used on top of skin camouflage

Decorative makeup is commonly used on top of skin camouflage and both powder and liquid makeup products are fine to use. Skin camouflage is also frequently used as a foundation, although you can also use a makeup foundation on top of and underneath skin camouflage.

However, you should avoid using makeup products that are similar in colour to the skin discolouration that you have covered using your skin camouflage. Using a makeup that is similar in colour to the discolouration that you have covered can play a trick on your eye and make it seem like the skin discolouration is showing through your camouflage, even when it is not.

For example, if you use a pink-red blusher on your cheeks after you have covered reddish acne then it may appear as though the acne is still visible through the skin camouflage and makeup. This is because you are likely to be very familiar with your own face and your mind will make automatic assumptions as to what it perceives when it sees the pink-red colour.