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## Under-eye circles — how can I get rid of them? <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

For as long as I can remember, I've had under-eye circles. I know that they are partially due to my allergies. I've read that this can be due to a kidney problem, as well. It seems to get better for a while and then all of a sudden worse. What causes this? And what can I do about it? Wearing makeup to cover them only helps a little. I'm tired of looking like a raccoon!

### Answer

Dear Reader,

But raccoons are so cute! Ok, it's understandable that you don't want to look like one, and there are many possible causes and remedies for this condition. Dark circles under the eyes are fairly common, and are usually temporary and not a serious medical concern. It's true that kidney or thyroid problems can cause baggy or dark under-eye appearance. When these organs don't function properly bags can form under the eyes because of fluid retention or lymph malabsorption. If you did have a kidney problem, chances are you would also be experiencing other symptoms like urinary changes or joint pain. If you're concerned that you might have such a condition, you may want to get checked out by your health care provider. For most people, though, the dark circles are due to much more mundane conditions, like sleeping, nasal congestion, heredity, and aging.

The skin under the eye is extremely thin, and underlying veins and fluids easily show through. When fluid collects under the eyes the area can appear dark and shadowy. There are many reasons for fluid to collect there, one of them, as simple as sleep. Contrary to popular belief, it's not a lack of sleep that gives you raccoon-like eyes; it's actually the act of lying horizontally. When you lie down, gravity can cause fluid to collect under the eyes, which creates swelling (bags) and the appearance of shadows beneath them.

To reduce the chances of gravity-induced circles, you can try sleeping on an extra pillow to prop your head up higher. Or upon waking try applying a cold water compress (the spa-minded can try chilled cucumber slices, a refrigerated gel mask, or cold damp tea bags) to the skin under your

eyes. If the cold-water solutions don't help enough, over-the-counter products may. Look for skin creams containing vitamin C or K, alpha hydroxy acid, or retinal. A combination of vitamin K and retinol may be especially effective as vitamin K can shrink blood vessels while the retinal helps re-build collagen.

Another common cause of under-eye circles is nasal congestion. When your nose is stuffed, veins that usually drain from your eyes into your nose dilate, fill with fluid, and appear darker. Have you had your allergies evaluated by your health care provider? Do you notice that the circles are more apparent when you're allergies are acting up or when you have a cold? If so, congestion is a likely culprit. To reduce this kind of puffiness, try to avoid allergens or take a medication to keep them in check. If a cold is what's causing congestion, do what you can to get better!

Finally, some medicines, particularly blood pressure medications, can cause blood vessels to expand and dilate, creating a visible tint below the eyes. To understand why this condition persists, try to track what else is happening in your body when the condition gets better or worse. If you truly can't figure it out, visiting your health care provider might be a good idea to rule out other possible causes.

Alice!

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