DON'T BE
Banish circles
By RACHEL GRUMMAN

ARE you plagued with dark circles under the eyes that make you look like you’ve pulled an all-nighter for a week straight? If you’re fed up with a scary dependency on concealer, it may be time to speak to a dermatologist.

Dark circles are caused by a variety of culprits. One offender is a cluster of brown spots — sun spots or freckles — on the surface of the skin.

"This comes from years of being in the sun," explained Dr. Neal Schultz, a board-certified dermatologist and author of "It's Not Just About Wrinkles: A Park Avenue Dermatologist's Program for Beautiful Skin in Just Four Minutes a Day" ($24.95, Stewart, Tabori and Chang).

Engorged blood vessels that are purple, blue or red can also make a shadow beneath the delicate skin, causing the area to look dark.

"You start to see blue, deep varicose veins below or off to the side of the eyes in your 30s, 40s and 50s," said Schultz.

Last but not least, there are shadows. "Light comes from above, so anything that sticks out will give that Venetian blind effect," says Schultz. "Try shining a flashlight straight at the shadowy area. If the area brightens up, shadows are the problem."

Shadows can be caused by fine lines and wrinkles or puffiness below the eyes brought on by genetics, fat pockets or swelling from sodium-rich foods or alcohol.

There are a variety of treatments for the different causes of dark circles, including:

- **GLYCOLIC PEELS**
  This natural acid fades brown spots as well as softening fine lines. You can use products at home such as Stallex Glycolic Therapy 8 Creme for Face ($45, stallexskincare.com), which is gentle enough to use daily, or DCL Dermatologic Cosmetic Laboratory Skin Brightening Complexion Treatment ($40, dermstore.com).

  For a more potent and effective version, see a dermatologist for a series of peels, usually three to four peels spaced one to two weeks apart.

- **LASERS**
  For spots that won't budge, lasers help break up the pigment. You could get several treatments of intense pulse light (IPL), which is less invasive, or one treatment with a YAG laser, which needs a week's recovery time.

  Lasers, such as the Coolglide laser, can also help shrink engorged blue blood vessels in one treatment.

  "It's a little painful and there can be swelling for a couple of days," noted Schultz.

  Pink or red veins can be treated with the V-beam, which treats the small spider veins you would find around
your nose. There is no downtime for this type of laser.

For shadows caused by fine lines, multiple treatments with a nonabrasive laser, such as the Fraxel, will help.

To help tighten loose, puffy skin, a penetrating laser, such as a CO2 laser, will contract the area in one treatment. A week of recovery is needed.

**SURGERY**

Stubborn pockets of loose skin under the eye can be surgically removed. Dr. Rob Schwarcz, a leading facial cosmetic and reconstructive surgeon with a practice on the Upper East Side, performs what he calls the O-Sling surgery, named after the eye muscle involved — the orbicularis — to tighten loose under-eye skin by addressing the lax muscle underneath.

"Under local sedation, a small incision is made in the crease of the lower eyelid, within the shadows of the lashes, so it's well-hidden," he explained.

Dr. Schwarcz lifts up the muscle we use to squint, cuts the muscle, makes a flap and then pulls it up and out to support the lower eyelid.

The result? "The eyes look smoother and more refreshed," said Schwarcz. The surgery costs $3,000 and recovery takes about a week.

"My goal is to tailor the surgery to what the patient needs and to keep them looking natural," he said.