



Skin:

The Essential Cover

By Rhona Lewis

Weighing in at about eight pounds, our skin is our largest organ. It acts as a shield that guards the body against extremes of temperature, damaging sunlight, harmful chemicals and infections. It's also full of nerves that keep us in touch with our surroundings. And on top of it all... our skin is a factory that manufactures vitamin D for converting calcium into healthy bones. So we want to take care of it.

Think of skin care and you'll think of sunscreen, moisturizer, anti-acne remedies and a plethora of other potions. But there's a step that comes before the smearing begins — we are what we eat.

Eat Your Way to Healthy Skin

“Since our skin is connected to our liver, the first step in skin care is preventing fats that are harmful to your liver from getting there. So keep away from fried foods and up your use of olive oil, coconut oil and butter,” says Shoshana Harrari, nutritionist and author of *The Seven Healing Fruits of Israel* and *The Garden of Spices*. “The second step is getting to sleep by 10:00 p.m. to allow your liver to go through the cleaning processes that keep you healthy,” she says.

It seems that beauty sleep isn't a just a myth. We know that the brain, largely in response to sunlight, sends neural impulses throughout the body that regulate circadian (daily) rhythms. The news is that the liver also sets its own circadian rhythm timed to regular meals. The liver produces bile to carry away waste and break down fats during digestion. Since bile is needed for food processing, the liver makes more during the day and less at night. “After 10:00 p.m., the liver switches from producing bile to synthesizing chemicals and processing accumulated toxins. You need to be sleeping for the liver to function optimally,” says Mrs. Harrari. The cycle shifts back at around 3:00 a.m., when the liver slows chemical synthesis and readies itself for bile production.

And what about nutrition? “Drink enough water to prevent impurities from being deposited in the skin. And eat a high proportion of vegetables, especially green, leafy ones. Add to that fruits rich in vitamin C, like apples, papaya, pomegranates and berries,” says Mrs. Harrari. Vitamin C is essential to the production of collagen, the protein that helps form connective tissue to keep your skin firm. If you dare, sprout wheat and barley. “Sprouts have 600 to 1200 times the nutritional value of the grain or pulse,” says Mrs. Harrari.

For an overall boost for your skin, dip into hummus. The manganese in chickpeas helps skin cells fight wrinkle-causing free-radical damage. The molybdenum helps detox skin by aiding in the removal of sulfites (a common food preservative that affects the smoothness of your skin). Folate, a B vitamin, helps skin cells repair damage caused by the sun and toxins.*

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Basic Skin Care

Now that we've taken care of our skin from the inside, let's move to the outside. What steps can we take to keep our skin at its best?

Not All Sunscreens Are Created Equal

When choosing a sunscreen, we all look at the SPF — the sun protection factor. But watch out: “While the SPF measures the sunscreen's ability to filter UVB rays, it doesn't tell you about protection from UVA rays. UVB rays are related to sunburn and skin cancer; UVA rays don't cause sunburn, but cause skin aging and are believed to increase the risk of melanoma,” warns New York dermatologist

Dr. Eyal Levit, associate professor of clinical dermatology at Columbia University. “Use a sunscreen that blocks rays physically instead of only chemically. Chemicals begin to degrade the moment you apply them and their protection lasts only a few hours. So look for something whose active ingredient is zinc oxide or titanium dioxide. These ingredients are responsible for a white and pasty look, but today you'll find sunscreens that are tinted, resulting in a more aesthetic appearance,” he advises. For best results, use a water-resistant cream with a broad

spectrum (meaning it protects you from most UVA and UVB rays) that you can see so you know where you've smeared it.

Cover Up

Wear protective clothing. Fabrics are made of tiny fibers woven or knitted together. UV rays pass through the gaps between the fibers. So, ideally, you'll want to wear fabric with a tighter weave. Synthetic fibers such as polyester, spandex, nylon, and acrylic are more protective than bleached cottons. Shiny semi-synthetic fabrics like rayon reflect more UV rays than do matte fabrics like linen. And darker colors tend to absorb more UV than lighter colors. If you're lucky, your garment may sport a UPF label. UPF, a concept originally standardized in Australia in 1996, stands for ultraviolet protection factor, which quantifies how effectively a piece of clothing shields against the sun. The higher the UPF rating, the fewer UV rays reach your skin.



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A Good Beauty Care Routine

Beyond the basics that apply to everyone, women will want to do more to maintain a natural complexion. “Pinpointing your skin type isn’t as easy as it seems,” says Sorah Gottlieb, Lakewood-based licensed aesthetician and certified medical assistant. “Since your face can be a combination of skin types, getting good guidance and products especially designed for your skin type is essential.”

A good maintenance routine consists of a cleanser, usually a toner, moisturizer and then a sunblock. And don’t think about cutting corners by using a moisturizer that contains sunblock. “To be effective, a moisturizer must penetrate into the skin, while a sunblock must stay on the surface,” says Mrs. Gottlieb. “If you use a combination, you most likely aren’t getting the benefit of either.” A moisturizer that contains hyaluronic acid plumps the skin, minimizing the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles. For an evening facial moisturizer, look for a product that includes antioxidants, peptides and vitamins C and A to help repair the skin.

Don’t forget to slough off those dead skin cells for a healthy glow. “Using a granular exfoliator (such as one that contains ground apricot pits) may be tempting, but in the long run, you’ll find that the micro-laceration caused by those angular grains lead to rough, bumpy skin. Remember what happened when you scraped your knee as a child? Repeated scraping and healing can cause the skin on your face to feel like the skin on your knees — thick and rough. Chemical exfoliators that contain glycolic acid (a derivative of sugar cane) or alpha hydroxy acids gently cause a cellular turnover for a luminous complexion,” says Mrs. Gottlieb.

Elastin and collagen production peaks at age 16 and begins to taper off at age 35. These proteins are responsible for maintaining the skin’s elasticity. Since the eye contour and neck are finer than the skin on the rest of your face, you’ll want to give it specific care. “You can tighten the skin and help it to restructure by applying anti-aging creams that contain retinol. Serums also help: they contain ingredients with a microscopic molecular structure so that they can penetrate deeply into the skin,” says Mrs. Gottlieb.

How Much Does It Cost?

There are thousands of anti-aging creams, moisturizers, lotions, serums, exfoliators, and cleansers available. You can spend hundreds of dollars on luxury brands, or just a few dollars at the drugstore. But can inexpensive brands work just as well as the luxury brands? “Yes,” says Dr. Levit, “but it depends on the mechanism of delivery. Can the active ingredient penetrate into your skin? Does your brand contain vitamin C? How quickly is it going to oxidize and lose its potency? Since these questions are hard to answer, use what gives you more than just a moisturizing feeling,” he adds.

“If you need a medication to control an irregular heartbeat, you wouldn’t get a prescription from someone who has never been to medical school. Over-the-counter skin care products are designed to be safe so that they don’t harm the skin, but they don’t do that much good either. You need to invest in good skin — seek out a professional to help you,” says Mrs. Gottlieb.

Problem Areas

The Bane and Blemish of Acne

“There are five types of acne and they all have one thing in common: the anaerobic bacteria that lead to the red, pussy infections hate oxygen and need our oil (sebum) for food,” says Dr. Levit. “The bacteria reproduce in clogged pores and feed on the oil in your skin. When they break down the oil, the break-down products (porphyrins) lead to an allergic reaction in some people. The allergic reaction is the body’s way of pushing out the irritant. Once the irritant is out, the body tries to form a barrier to stop the bacteria from returning to the pores where the food is produced. That barrier is actually a scar. The bacteria, however, find other pores to get to their food supply. Therefore, the most efficient way to combat acne is to reduce the food supply of the bacteria by reducing the amount of oil produced by our skin,” he says.

You can reduce the amount of oil that the body produces by using topical treatment such as vitamin A creams, benzoyl peroxides, and drying soaps

and cleansers. But be careful, because over-drying the skin will damage it and lead to the over-production of oil. "A non-comedogenic moisturizer applied immediately after the drying cleanser will solve the problem," says Dr. Levit. You can also use laser treatment to destroy the bacteria or the oil glands. But the most effective treatment for acne, with a success rate of over 80%, is the use of Accutane (Roaccutane), a synthetic vitamin A derivative.

Since Accutane dramatically reduces the size of the skin's oil glands and reduces the amount of oil these glands produce, the side effects include excessively dry skin and lips. "However, I've found that by taking half of the recommended dosage these side effects are lessened. Since you need to get enough of the medication into your system to offer a cure for the acne, I recommend increasing the treatment duration," says Dr. Levit. Note that Accutane is a serious medication that can cause severe birth defects, and that is something a low dosage will not prevent.

Now that you're rid of the acne, what about the marks? There's a difference between marks and scars. Contrary to popular belief, you don't get marks only from picking at your pimples. Unfortunately, you can be left with a mark even if you didn't touch the pimple. The darker your skin tone, the more likely acne will leave a mark (post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation) that may last for 12 to 18 months. To remove these marks you can use exfoliating agents such as glycolic or, if you still have acne, salicylic acid peels. But these can lead to even worse pigmentary changes. The other option is to use sunblock, bleaching agents and/or laser treatment. Here again, beware that worse pigmentary changes can occur. Your best bet is to use sunblock and be patient.

Then there are the scars. Remember the scars that the skin forms to prevent the bacteria from returning? "Retinoids and superficial peels will help with superficial scars, but bad scarring requires a combination of fillers, lasers and occasionally even scar excisions," says Dr. Levit. "The best fillers, which last for a few years, are the natural ones (hyaluronic acids). The use of silicone is less desirable, since it has potential future side effects and cannot be removed if a problem arises."

Skin Checks and Melanoma

Melanoma is a skin cancer that usually starts in one of the types of cells that make up



Natural Beauty



A mask of French Green Clay (illite) contains healing micronutrients and antioxidants to clean and tighten your skin. "Add a little water, one drop of lavender oil and one drop of frankincense oil to the clay and you'll look 10 years younger," says Shoshana Harrari.

Vitamin D – How much is enough? Your body must have vitamin D to absorb calcium and promote bone growth. Vitamin D treatment may also be helpful in treating or preventing autoimmune diseases, cancer, chronic pain, depression, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, neuromuscular diseases and also the flu. "While we don't know for sure how much vitamin D we need, the chances are that, during winter in temperate climates, you certainly aren't getting enough," says Dr. Levit. "In these cases, a dose of 3000 IU per day, assuming you are absorbing it well through your gut, will offer you the necessary daily dose you need."

**Feed Your Skin, Starve Your Wrinkles, Allison Tannis (Fair Winds Press, 2009).*

the epidermis and other human organs with melanocytes. Tumors are usually brown or black, but they can appear pink, tan, or even white. Get to know the bumps and moles on your body well so that you can spot any changes that could be a sign of something developing. However, even if you know your skin, there are areas (nails, eyes, scalp) that are hard for you to examine, so depending on your skin history, you'll want to schedule a skin check annually or more frequently. "Ten percent of melanomas are amelanotic (pigmentless) and can look like a simple red or white pimple. Since a correct diagnosis can be tricky, if you see something that lasts for more than a month or two, see a dermatologist," says Dr. Levit. "And remember: it's all about team work, with the dermatologist and the patient working together. If you feel something is fishy, listen to your gut and insist on a biopsy." ■