



“Get too little iron and your complexion may turn a shade paler, your dark circles a bit more prominent...”

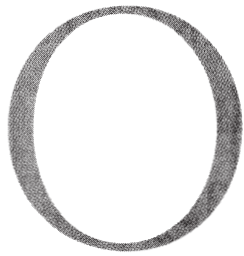
— *Dominic Brandy, MD*

Feed Your Skin

For years dermatologists pooh-poohed the idea that you could eat your way to gorgeous skin. Now they’re eating their words. Evidence shows the right diet can ward off wrinkles, banish breakouts, and get your complexion glowing. Hungry for more? Turn the page.

By Julia Califano

You're sitting in an examination room, and your doctor is asking about your eating habits. Are you watching your fat? Cutting back on red meat? Loading up on luscious fruits and leafy greens? All this might seem normal enough, except for one thing: Your inquisitor is not an internist or a cardiologist. She's your dermatologist.



ONCE UPON A TIME, you'd have been hard-pressed to get a skin doctor to say much about how diet affects the complexion other than, "No, chocolate and pizza do *not* cause pimples." Now, though, evidence is steadily mounting that what you eat, or don't eat, on a daily basis may indeed have a powerful effect on how radiant and smooth your skin looks—both now and years down the line.

While much of the research is still preliminary, some dermatologists are already making nutrition counseling a standard part of their treatment strategies for everything from aging to eczema. And, prodded by alternative practitioners as well as a growing cadre of doctors who insist that a connection makes biological sense, the very mainstream American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) has established a task force to foster more study on the effect of foods and supplements on skin.

We're not talking about the kind of severe vitamin deficiencies that can leave skin cracked and parched, slow to heal, or bruised from scurvy, that scourge of citrus-deprived sailors in centuries past. No, even *slight* shortfalls may take a subtle toll on your complexion, more and more dermatologists believe. "If skin cells don't get adequate vitamins and minerals, the metabolism of the cell gets short-circuited and your skin won't look as good or function as well as it should," says Wilma Bergfeld, director of clinical research in the department of dermatology at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation.

For example, skimp on vitamin A (involved in the formation of new skin cells), and your face may become a tad drier and flakier, Bergfeld says. Give short shrift to vitamin C (necessary for collagen formation), and the result could be skin that's slightly thinner, rougher, and less elastic. Get too little iron (common among women of childbearing age), and your complexion may turn a shade paler, your dark circles a bit more prominent, says Dominic Brandy, a dermatologist who teaches at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

The truth is, if you don't eat the right foods, your skin may even age faster than it should. Here's why: Every day our dermal

cells are bombarded by free radicals generated by sunlight, chemicals, even cells' own metabolic processes. These unstable molecules pierce cell membranes and break down the skin's collagen and elastic fibers, leading to pigment changes, wrinkles, even skin cancer. "Free radicals are now thought to be one of the major contributors to aging skin," says Alan Dattner, a New York-area dermatologist and member of the AAD's task force on nutrition and the evaluation of alternative medicine.

Where does diet come in? Some foods contribute to the creation of those nasty free radicals. Others are packed with powerful substances—mainly antioxidants—capable of disarming them. "If anyone

doubts that diet can make a difference, I tell them to try eating broiled salmon, a salad with lemon and olive oil, and some cantaloupe for dinner three nights in a row," says Nicholas Perricone, an assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Yale University and the author of *The Wrinkle Cure*. "They invariably find that their skin takes on a smoother, rosier look." He attributes the youth boost to the vitamin C in the cantaloupe and lemon and omega-3 fatty acids in the fish.

Some dermatologists now go so far as to perform blood tests to assess a patient's level of free-radical activity, then prescribe customized diets and antioxidant cocktails. But eating your way to more luminous skin doesn't have to be so complicated. Chances are you won't have to overhaul your diet—just tweak it here and there. Best of all, the following nutritional advice will have health benefits for your *whole* body, not just the face you present to the world. Vanity may not be such a bad vice after all.

Produce-ing Results

By now you've heard so much about the health benefits of fruits and veggies that yet another testimonial might just whiz past you. But if you care about your complexion, do yourself a favor and hang out at the farmers' market as well as the cosmetics counter. Fruits and veggies are among the richest, tastiest sources of antioxidants on the planet. The proof is in the produce: After reviewing more than 50 studies, Harvey Arbesman, an assistant professor in the department of social and preventive medicine and dermatology at the University at Buffalo, has concluded that an antioxidant-laden diet may ward off premature aging, milder skin cancers, and precancerous lesions.

How many servings a day should you eat? Arbesman subscribes to the five-a-day rule; Brandy thinks you should strive for—gulp—double that amount. The mix of fruits and veggies is important, too. Arbesman recommends 25,000 international units daily of beta-carotene, which the body converts into vitamin A. You'll get that from a couple of small carrots; other good sources include sweet potatoes, peaches, squash, and broccoli. He also advises 500 milligrams a day of vitamin C,

found in citrus fruits (an orange has 70 mg), berries, papaya, melon, and red bell peppers. And he thinks everyone should be getting plenty of selenium, an antioxidant mineral found in whole grains and mushrooms (tuna, too).

In addition, many experts tout the skin-enhancing benefits of flavonoids, plant chemicals that play a major role in collagen synthesis. You'll find them in vitamin C-rich fruits and vegetables as well as grapes, red wine, and green tea.

Fish and Flax

Dermatologists used to think a high-fat diet was bad for the complexion mostly because excess pounds stretched skin so much that if you lost weight, it would look saggy. Now, though, it seems too much of the wrong kind of fat might also hasten skin cancer. In one study conducted at Baylor College of Med-

icine, skin cancer patients who cut their fat calories to about 20 percent developed fewer precancerous lesions after two years than subjects who continued to chow down on greasy foods.

Researchers believe the harm comes from hormonelike substances called prostaglandins. These play various roles in the body, some good, some bad. The type produced when the body breaks down certain fats is definitely bad, Perricone says, causing free-radical damage that can promote inflammation of cells, which creates more free radicals—and on and on. If you're at risk for skin cancer—if it runs in your family or you've had a lot of sun exposure—scale back on animal fats, hydrogenated fats like those in many margarines, and omega-6 fatty acids (in safflower and sunflower oils). And clean out your cabinets regularly; fats that have gone rancid are more likely to trigger harmful prostaglandins, Arbesman says.

But don't make the mistake of trying to eliminate fat from

Face Cream ABCs: A Topical Vitamin Update

VITAMIN A Now you can reap the antiwrinkle benefits of vitamin A without getting red in the face. Retin-A's recently introduced Micro version, and a new competitor, Avita (both prescription only), release the active ingredient, tretinoin, into the skin slowly so you can use higher strengths with less irritation. Companies have also figured out how to deliver bigger doses of retinol, an over-the-counter form of A that exfoliates dead cells. Find it in L'Oréal's Line Eraser and Lancôme's Re-Surface.

VITAMIN C There's less talk these days about the supposed collagen-building power of C serums and patches. (Studies are equivocal at best.) But research does suggest C may offer some protection from UV rays. "It's clearly beneficial. The texture and whole look of the skin improves," says Debra Jaliman, dermatology instructor at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York. Topical C loses potency quickly, so buy only enough to last three months. Or look for new products, like Murad's Vitamin C Infusion Home Facial Treatment, that include C in powder form that you mix up as needed. (It stays stable longer that way.)

VITAMIN E Most creams contain too little E to do much good, but two new products are a cut above the rest. SkinCeuticals's Primacy C+E packs big doses of the two sun-shielding antioxidants into a lightweight serum. And Olay Total Effects combines vitamins E, B-5, and B-3 (aka "VitaNiacin") in a moisturizer developed especially for aging skin. —LUCINDA CHRISS



New ways to take your vitamins, from left: SkinCeuticals Primacy C+E, Christian Dior Phenomen-A, Retin-A Micro, Skinplicity Vitamin C Booster Two Phase Formula, Philosophy Help Me Retinol Night Treatment, and St. Ives Multi-Vitamin Retinol Anti-Wrinkle Cream.

your diet. Omega-3s, the type found in many fish, promote “good” prostaglandins that actually *inhibit* inflammation and are thought to have rejuvenating effects on the skin. Get what you need by eating salmon, tuna, or sardines at least twice weekly or pouring a tablespoonful of flaxseed oil over salads or steamed veggies a few times a week, Brandy suggests.

Eau for It

“Water not only keeps cells plump; virtually every metabolic reaction that takes place in the skin depends on it,” says Vimlan VanDien, former director of nutrition at Bastyr University in Kenmore, Washington, a leading naturopathic medical institution. Go thirsty too often, and your complexion may grow noticeably drier, more drawn, and less resilient, Bergfeld adds.

Seltzer, juice, and even soup all count toward your eight-glasses-a-day minimum. Coffee, tea, and cola, on the other hand, do not because caffeine is a diuretic, flushing water from your system. (To be blunt, says VanDien, “It makes you pee.”) In fact, for every caffeinated drink you swallow, you need to guzzle an *extra* glass of water in addition to your daily eight, she says.

Another beverage to put on the moderation list: alcohol. Just one or two cocktails or glasses of wine a day can dehydrate tissues and make wrinkles and facial puffiness more pronounced. Alcohol also induces flushing, which can lead to permanently enlarged capillaries in delicate skin.

Supplemental Insurance

Experts agree that foods, not supplements, are best when it comes to keeping your complexion well-nourished, since plants contain hundreds of beneficial compounds that almost certainly work together. Nevertheless, taking a daily multivitamin and mineral supplement makes good skin sense, Bergfeld says.

What’s more, small-scale studies on both humans and animals suggest that supplements of vitamins C and E, two of the most potent radical-busters, have a protective effect against sun-induced skin damage—ultraviolet light being, of course, the main villain behind wrinkles and age spots. You can get enough C from food, but that’s almost impossible for E, which is found in oils and nuts. So Arbesman recommends taking 200 to 400 IU a day, especially if you’re a candidate for skin cancer. But check with your doctor first if you’re using drugs or herbal remedies that thin blood.

Brandy also recommends a daily 50 mg dose of grape-seed extract, a supplement that’s brimming with flavonoids. “It’s one of the most potent antioxidants on the planet,” he says. Let your skin feel the power. **H**

Julia Califano writes often about health and beauty. She lives in Montclair, New Jersey.

Common Skin Problems: The Food Cure

Controlling Breakouts “Acne appears to be a disease of Western civilization,” says Daniel DeLapp, a naturopathic physician who teaches nutrition and dermatology at National College of Naturopathic Medicine in Portland, Oregon. “When populations like the Eskimos, Africans, and Chinese move toward a more Western way of eating, the incidence of acne goes up dramatically.”

FOOD: Dermatologists still insist that chocolate and pizza don’t cause zits in most people. But, they now say, the iodine in a fudge sundae or a slice of anchovy–extra cheese might. The mineral, known to trigger angry red pimples, is abundant in dairy products (iodine cleansers are used on milking machines), fast and salty foods, and shellfish. “Many of my patients find that when they back off these foods, they have far fewer problems,” says Harvey Arbesman, a dermatologist at the University at Buffalo.

SUPPLEMENTS: Another mineral seems to *help* pimples—zinc, a common acne treatment in Scandinavian countries. In one study 85 percent of blemishes cleared up after 12 weeks. Try 45 to 60 milligrams of zinc picolinate a day, DeLapp says.

Studies also suggest that premenstrual breakouts may be eased by downing an extra dose of vitamin B-6. DeLapp recommends 50 mg three times a day during the last two weeks of your cycle.

Relieving Rosacea This chronic skin condition, characterized by facial flushing and stubborn pimples along the forehead and cheeks, usually strikes fair-skinned women, often in the years before menopause. “Anything that causes the blood vessels on the surface of the face to dilate can trigger a flare-up,” says Barney Kenet, dermatologic surgeon at New York Presbyterian Hospital/Cornell Medical Center and author of *How to Wash Your Face*.

FOODS: Avoid alcohol (a vasodilator) and spicy foods as well as anything steaming hot. Also beware of foods containing histamines (compounds that cause the capillaries to dilate), such as sharp cheeses, vinegar, and pickles. If you want to eat these foods anyway, taking an antihistamine can minimize the reaction.

Easing Rashes In some cases chronic conditions like eczema that leave skin superdry, scaly, and itchy may be triggered by a food allergy. To rule out this possibility, consult an allergist.

FOOD: Doctors have found that when eczema and psoriasis patients eat more foods rich in omega-3s, their complexions often become less red and flaky. In some patients even severe dandruff may improve, says Dominic Brandy of the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

SUPPLEMENTS: If you don’t think you could swallow another bite of salmon or flaxseed oil, you can always pop a fish-oil capsule. Brandy’s patients take 500 mg three times a day. —J.C.