

Good Skincare Practice – Top tips for healthy skin

Our skin is the largest organ in the body and requires nourishment from the inside as well as from the outside. The state of our skin can say a lot about the state of our health and make-up can fix immediate problems but only up to a point! The rest has to come from our own efforts sadly, and largely dictated by our individual constitutions determined by our physiology and genetics.

Feeding the skin (internal nourishment)

- Diet & nutritional status
- Lifestyle practices
- Skin products (dispelling common myths)
- Skin hygiene & skincare regimes
- Current concerns with sun-tanning

Diet & nutritional status

To make sure that the skin remains healthy, it is vital to make sure that the diet is good and there is good circulation to the skin surface. Important nutrients include the following:

Nutrient	Comment	Food sources
Protein-rich foods	Cells require protein for growth and repair. The top layer of the skin (epidermis) is effectively dead but the layer just below it is constantly growing and repairing and determines the appearance of the skin at a later stage.	Fish, chicken, eggs, wholegrains, pulses, lean meats,
Antioxidant combo (vitamins A, C and E)	Prevents free radical damage to cells and tissues including the skin. Free radicals are produced through the normal course of metabolism, sometimes to protect the body against viral or bacterial attack. With good nutrition and a healthy immune system, the damage caused by free radicals is prevented or limited. However, though poor diet & lifestyle and a toxic environment, damage caused by free radicals become significant, causing disease (eg. cancer, heart disease) and this accumulates with age.	Citrus fruits, red berries, carrots, wholegrains, green leafy vegetables, broccoli, cabbage, nuts & seeds
B vitamins	These help in the body's metabolic processes, which in turn makes sure that the skin stays smooth and supple. Dry, itchy skin is a common sign of vitamin B deficiency so diet needs to be examined carefully.	Red meat, poultry, fish, eggs, bananas, wholegrains, marmite, brewer's yeast, peanut butter
Essential fatty acids (omega 3 essential fatty acids)	Vital for skin health and appearance. Prevents drying up and promotes proper waterproofing of the skin so that it is not at risk of infection or other skin problems. Good for inflammatory skin conditions as well as dry skin conditions and provides some of the fatty material in the oily secretions of the skin that keep it smooth, supple and waterproof.	Fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, trout, tuna, sardines), walnuts, pumpkin seeds, flaxseeds, flaxseed oil and hemp seed oil
Vitamin E (externally)	An important antioxidant (see above). Good at healing scars and preventing signs of skin ageing.	Fatty fish, wheatgerm, seeds, avocado, almond,

		sesame oil & green leafy vegetables
Whole food diet	This refers to a diet where no processing has taken place and food is cooked or prepared in its whole form. Mainly fresh ingredients and raw foods that have not been chemically or genetically altered. Whole foods have no additives and preservatives in them. They limit the damage of toxic overload and any potential allergy or reaction to artificial colours or ingredients that could trigger an inflammatory skin reaction or similar.	Nutritionally better for general all round health as it limits the toxic triggers that are the cause of many health problems
Water	Lack of water can leave the skin looking dry, dehydrated and dull in complexion. Water is needed to boost the health of skin cells, helping it shed old cells, keeping it clean and maintaining a healthy glow from skin cells that are moist, plump and hydrated.	Pure water is best, try filtering it first or drink mineral water. Daily quantity should be about 2 litres daily and more for active people
Sulphur	Essential for the production of collagen (component in the skin that makes it resilient) and also helps in healing so particularly good for wounds, acne, inflammatory skin lesions and burns. Vital ingredient in many commercial skin supplement preparations eg. MSM which is taken more for arthritis & other inflammatory joint conditions.	Vegetables (legumes), eggs, fish, onions, garlic
Selenium	An antioxidant – prevents free radical damage	fish, shellfish, red meat, grains, eggs, chicken and garlic. Vegetables can also be a good source if grown in selenium-rich soils.
Prebiotics & Probiotics	Probiotics replenish or top up with friendly bacteria since gut function is vital to good health. A poor digestive system impairs the body in its ability to detoxify harmful substances and toxic build up is reflected in the skin. Prebiotics is the general term given to the raw materials that feed the growth of the friendly bacteria because they won't flourish to healthy numbers if the food supply is low. These food materials are invariably indigestible foods that come from carbohydrate fibres called oligosaccharides. Because we can't digest them, they stay in the gut and stimulate the growth of our friendly bacteria.	High fibre foods, wholegrains, miso, yoghurt, beans, lentils, fruits & vegetables. Good sources of prebiotics include fruits, legumes (eg. pulses, beans, nuts) and wholegrains (eg. wheat, oats, barley, rice)
Herbal skin savers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chamomile (externally and internally) for anti-inflammatory action. Soothes and calms irritated skin • Lemon balm, passion flower (tea) – to combat stress which can cause outbreaks in the skin • Comfrey (externally) to heal any skin outbreaks, soothe and reduce inflammation • Aloe vera – great skin moisturiser, heals and soothes irritated or inflamed skin • Centella – good for repairing skin • Witch hazel – an effective astringent so will reduce inflammation and redness 	Can be individually prepared or combined for a specific purpose. Advice needs to be sought before taking anything internally

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calendula – good for wound healing • Rosewater – natural cleanser and toner. It also stimulates the skin by increasing blood flow to the surface 	
--	---	--

Foods to avoid or limit

Food(s)	Comment
Caffeine	Too much stimulants adds to the toxic burden on the system. If the body cannot eliminate these efficiently, it will show in the skin. Best to limit coffee and tea although in moderation, they have other health benefits.
Alcohol	Has a drying effect on the body and depletes vital oils and water from the skin. Makes the skin look dry and flaky. Take in moderation and drink plenty of water to counterbalance the effects of alcohol.
OTC medicines or prescription drugs	If at all possible, avoid resorting to OTC medicines or prescription drugs as a first resort. It is always best to regard them as a last resort or in cases of emergency as far a possible. Try more natural remedies first and explore the reasons and cause of the problem in the first instance.
Fast foods	Full of unhealthy fats and additives that burden the system. Toxic overload will show in the skin which can become prone to outbreaks of spots & pimples, dry, flaky skin and red patches of inflamed skin.
Foods high in refined sugars	Increased levels of blood sugar will increase the risk of infection not only internally but also in the skin. It will aggravate any existing skin disorder or problem so limit or cut out all foods high in refined sugar.
Processed foods & pre-prepared foods	In a similar manner to fast foods, these foods are packed with artificial additives and preservatives which make it harder for the body to process them. There is a risk that the system will become overloaded with toxins. This will at some point be reflected in the skin which will look sallow, dry and lacking in shine or glow.

As far as alcohol and chocolate is concern, I am definitely of the view that a ‘little of what you fancy does you good’!

Good skincare practices (external nourishment)

Lifestyle practices

- Exercise – necessary to improve blood flow to the skin surface. This will ensure that the nutrients for the skin reach the cells and encourage good repair and growth of new cells.
- Smoking – this promotes premature ageing of the skin as the chemicals in cigarettes destroy the connective tissue components in the skin. Loss of elasticity, resilience and premature wrinkle formation are all classic hallmarks of cigarette smoking.
- Alcohol – has a dehydrating effect on all the cells in the body, including the skin. Excessive alcohol makes the skin look dry and lacklustre.
- Diet (see above)

Skin products

- Cleansers – can range from lotions, gels and wipes to simply using soap. Absolutely vital in skin regimes as the dirt and grime need to be removed at the end of the day. This is more important in a climate of increased pollution and if living in busy cities. It is best to stick to a cleansing routine or product that is compatible with skin type and

texture rather than trying out new products for the sake of fashion or marketing claims of a 'new and improved' product.

- Moisturisers – absolute must, particularly for older skins. This replenishes the skin of moisture that is slowly depleted from the skin throughout the day. Important to invest in good products that have a sunscreen factor. Lotion is better for the day and a night cream is essential for night time moisturising. Older skins require more care than younger skins although with levels of pollution and environmental toxins aplenty, one is never too young to start a rigorous skin care regime. Again, it is best to stick to something that is tried and tested and is compatible with your skin. By far the best moisturiser is a combination of good diet, lifestyle and an effective skincare regime.
- Exfoliating rubs & treatments – these are designed to remove dead skin cells from the uppermost layer of skin. Normally they slough off at a steady rate but sometimes, they can slow down (many factors affect this) and build up on the skin surface. This gives the skin a dull and lacklustre appearance so exfoliating with a product or simply massaging it with a flannel (face) or a loofah mitt (body) will assist the process. Good moisturising afterwards is essential to prevent the skin from drying out
- Anti-wrinkle creams – there are many claims made by manufacturers of creams, lotions and gels all of which promote the notion of being able to defy the ageing process. Many of these products are ridiculously expensive and very often unnecessary as no amount of anti-wrinkle remedy will counteract the long-term effects of poor diet, smoking, excessive alcohol intake and sun damage. More fundamental factors beyond the environment such as genetic inheritance have an overriding influence in some people. Time and money is better invested in a more natural approach to healthy skin which incorporates some lifestyle changes and good nutrition as a foundation for limiting the worst effects of ageing.
- Cellulite-busting creams – again, more commercial and marketing hype than actual effectiveness. A more radical examination of society's view on body image and what is considered beautiful and healthy is required. Healthy skin and a healthy body requires discipline, hard work and a dedicated approach to proper nutrition and exercise. No amount of marketing gimmick is going to alter that.

Skin hygiene & skincare regimes

- Cleansing – removes dirt and grime that has built up during the day and must be removed before bedtime
- Moisturising – replenishes important moisture that has been lost throughout the day. Some products also encourage repair and growth of new skin cells
- Exfoliating – removes old skin cells from the surface of the skin which can sometimes remain in the uppermost layer and give the complexion and dull and lacklustre appearance
- Massaging – encourages blood flow to the skin surface so that important nutrients can reach the skin surface. Also encourages repair of damaged skin cells and some massages (eg. lymphatic drainage) actively encourage the removal of toxins and lactic acid build up with has other health benefits in addition to improving the health of the skin

- Cellulite – the term given to the manner in which fat is deposited under the surface of the skin. Characteristic dimpled and ‘orange peel’ effect is more common in women and in those who have a poor diet, poor skin circulation and those who do not take enough exercise, although this is not always the case. Cellulite is age-related being more common in the older woman. Worst excesses can be offset through regular exercise, limiting caffeine and fast foods and regular massage and skin brushing to promote circulation to the skin
- Nourishing (food) – eating the right foods is vital to healthy skin. See above for recommendations
- Sun exposure – excessive exposure to strong sunlight, particularly without adequate sun protection is disastrous for the skin especially fair skins which are prone to sunburn. The risks for cancer increase in previously sunburnt skins so avoiding this is a sensible precautionary measure.
- Cold weather, wind and rain can also wreak havoc on the skin. Adequate protection with good moisturising properties as well as sun protection (even on grey, dull days, UV damage is still possible).

Current concerns with sun-tanning (sun protection tips)

- Spray tanning – this is a synthetic tan sprayed onto the skin (in a protected environment) and which can last up to a few weeks. This prevents the need to go out and sunbathe with long exposure to sunlight increasing the risk of skin damage and other potential risks. A favourite of many celebrities.
- Suntans – suntans per se can look very natural and give a healthy glow to the skin. Exposure to natural sunlight for short bursts every day is a great boost to mood, energy and vitality, particularly if work requirements mean long hours spent indoors. However, many people becomes obsessed with having an all-year tan and this encourages long exposure to sunlight, sometime longer than is advisable or necessary to the point that irreversible damage is done to the skin. If a suntan is a must, it is best to invest in proper, sensible precautions and effective sun protection, although overexposure to sunlight is never going to be beneficial to the skin.
- Skin cancers – there are various skin cancers which are becoming increasingly common. There can be a variety of reasons for this increase including climate change (sunlight is stronger), poor education on the risks of overexposure and inadequate sun protection, genetic risk (inherited factors), smoking, those with fair skins & red hair and those who have a tendency to burn. There are various skin cancers from basal cell skin cancer to squamous cell skin cancer. The most aggressive type though is malignant melanoma although they are less common. It is imperative that all moles on the skin are monitored very carefully (see below).
- Suncreams & sun protection – the most common type of sun protection is to use a sun screen which is found in all sun creams and sun lotions. There are sun protection factors (SPFs) in all these products which is effectively the chemical screen which offers protection from UV light (UVA and UVB light). SPFs can range from 10 to 60. Equally, avoiding the sun between 11am to 3pm (or 10am to 4pm in hotter climates), covering up with suitable clothing, wearing appropriate sunglasses and a wide-brimmed hat is just as important in protecting the skin. Sun creams rub off in water and with time so re-application is essential. After-sun care is also vital, so soothing lotions such as aloe vera gel, lavender gel or a combination chamomile & aloe vera

gel will prevent the effects of sunburn and subsequent damage to the skin. Children require extra protection as their skins are very delicate and are easily prone to damage. Sun damage or sun burn at an early age can predispose to cancer in adulthood.

- Monitoring all moles on the skin closely is a prerequisite when sunbathing. Abnormal changes can be a precursor to malignant change. Most skin moles are normal and harmless. However, sometimes they can change in size, shape, colour and manner which can also be harmless. Keeping a close eye on changes is necessary so look out for the following changes and if in doubt, see a doctor:

1. it has changed in appearance
2. it has recently grown or changed shape
3. it has changed colour, varying in shade
4. it has an uneven edge
5. it has become raised or inflamed with a red edge
6. it has started to bleed, ooze or crust
7. it has become bigger than the other moles
8. just looks unusual

It is vital to remember that a certain amount of natural sunlight is vital for our health and well-being. Not only is it an essential ingredient for making vitamin D (without which we cannot absorb calcium, another essential mineral), natural sunlight has a host of other benefits on mood, general well-being and health.

Skin through the decades

- 20s – skin may be relatively wrinkle free but this is the decade in which to establish a good skin care regime and to work out the products for cleansing and moisturising. It is also the decade in which to implement dietary and lifestyle practices that are good for the skin.
- 30s – from 30 years onwards, the skin starts to lose tone and muscle mass which can be easily detected in neglected skins. There has to be a greater emphasis on exercise, diet and moisturising as skin can look dry and lacking in shine.
- 40s – the skin has started to thin and an accumulation of environmental toxins, exposure to sunlight and loss of protective function can all be tell-tale signs of age. Moisturisers need to contain chemicals that fight free radicals as the skin becomes drier and tighter with loss of barrier protection against the elements.
- 50s and over – skin shows visible signs of ageing with wrinkles, age spots, brown pigmentation spots and evidence of sun damage. For women, hormonal changes with the menopause also make the skin thinner and drier through lack of oestrogen. Effective moisturising with SPF is essential as is nutrition, particularly antioxidants and intake of sufficient essential fatty acids to combat the effects of an aged skin.

