

The top five nutrients for healthy skin

The skin is one of the most powerful indicators of health. Wrinkles, dry or oily skin, acne, and inflammation all are signs of poor internal health, often brought on by consuming unhealthful foods and avoiding skin-healthy nutrients. To treat skin problems, most people turn to mainstream topical cosmetics, including lotions, soaps, scrubs, toners, and creams. However, treating outer blemishes with expensive, chemical-laden beauty products does little to address the root cause of the problem: poor nutrition and exposure to toxins in dietary and personal care products.

"Your skin is the fingerprint of what is going on inside your body, and all skin conditions, from psoriasis to acne to aging, are the manifestations of your body's internal needs, including its nutritional needs," says Dr. Georgiana Donadio, founder of the National Institute of Whole Health.

Recent research has shown that the skin reacts particularly well to certain vitamins, minerals and antioxidants that nourish the skin, making it appear youthful and healthy. The following nutrients are among the very best to consume for healthy, young-looking skin:

Silica: Silica is a trace mineral that strengthens the body's connective tissues - muscles, tendons, hair, ligaments, nails, cartilage, and bone - and is vital for healthy skin. Silica deficiency can result in reduced skin elasticity and can hamper the body's ability to heal wounds. Food sources of silica include leeks, green beans, garbanzo beans, strawberries, cucumber, mango, celery, asparagus and rhubarb. In its natural form, silica is found in the horsetail herb. Silica is also available as a concentrated liquid supplement from Eidon Ionic Minerals (www.eidon.com)

Zinc: The mineral zinc is an important component of healthy skin, especially for acne sufferers. In fact, acne itself may be a symptom of zinc deficiency. Zinc acts by controlling the production of oil in the skin, and may also help control some of the hormones that create acne. Zinc is also required for proper immune system function, as well as for the maintenance of vision, taste, and smell. Zinc consumption is also strongly linked to a reduction of prostate cancer.

Foods rich in zinc include fresh oysters, pumpkin seeds, ginger, pecans, Brazil nuts, oats, and eggs. Zinc can be purchased in supplement form, in both liquid concentrates and tablets.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids: Dry, inflamed skin or skin that suffers from the frequent appearance of whiteheads or blackheads can benefit from supplementing with essential fatty acids (EFAs), especially omega-3s. EFAs are responsible for skin repair, moisture content, and overall flexibility, but because the body cannot produce its own EFAs, they must be obtained through the diet.

The typical American diet is overabundant in omega-6 fatty acids found in baked goods and grains, and lacking in omega-3s, found in cold-water fish such as salmon and mackerel, as well as flaxseeds and safflower oil. Simply balancing the intake of omega-3s with omega-6s can result in smoother, younger-looking skin. EFAs are also available in supplement form - such as fish oil capsules or evening primrose oil - and are effective at treating a wide range of disorders,

from depression and cancer to arthritis and heart disease. Good sources of omega-3 oils include chia seeds, flax seeds and, for non-vegetarians, wild-harvested fish oils. A reputable supplier of fish oils is Nordic Naturals (www.NordicNaturals.com)

Selenium: Selenium is an antioxidant mineral responsible for tissue elasticity. It also acts to prevent cell damage by free radicals and is well known to be correlated with a reduction of breast cancer risk. It may play an important role in preventing skin cancer, as it can protect the skin from damage from excessive ultraviolet light.

Dietary sources of selenium include wheat germ, seafood such as tuna and salmon, garlic, Brazil nuts, eggs, brown rice, and whole-wheat bread. Brazil nuts are perhaps the best source, and eating just 3-4 Brazil nuts per day provides adequate selenium intake for most people. A good source of raw brazil nuts is www.RawFood.com

Vitamins C, E and A: *Vitamin C* is highly effective at reducing free radical damage, such as that caused by overexposure to the sun or pollution. Free radicals consume collagen and elastin - the fibers that support skin structure - and can cause wrinkles and other signs of premature aging. Vitamin C is especially effective at protecting the skin from overexposure to the sun when combined with vitamin E. Foods high in vitamin C include acerola (a cherry-like fruit), red and green bell peppers, guava, kale, parsley, collard greens, turnips, and broccoli.

Wherever possible, consumers are advised to get their vitamin C from a whole food source, and not to confuse synthetic vitamin C (ascorbic acid) with the real thing from plants (which is full spectrum vitamin C that goes way beyond ascorbic acid). A good source of whole food vitamins is Botani (<http://www.alohabay.com/botani/index.html>)

In terms of topical applications of vitamin C for your skin, there's nothing on the market that even comes close to a product called *Camu C Serum* manufactured by the Amazon Herb Company (http://amazondreams.amazonherb.net/Lluvia_CamuSerum.aspx), which is made from Camu Camu berries -- the highest natural source of full-spectrum vitamin C.

Vitamin E is another powerful antioxidant that reduces the effects of sun exposure on the skin. When combined with vitamin A, vitamin E is especially effective at preventing certain skin cancers. Vitamin E also reduces the appearance of wrinkles, and, when applied topically, soothes dry or rough skin. Food sources of vitamin E include wheat germ oil, sunflower seeds, safflower and sunflower oils, almonds, spinach, peaches, prunes, tomatoes, cabbage, asparagus, and avocados.

Avoid synthetic vitamin E supplements, as they have been shown to actually harm health. Only consume *natural* vitamin E from a reputable source such as the Life Extension Foundation (www.LEF.org)

Vitamin A promotes proper repair and maintenance of the skin, and deficiencies can result in a dry, flaky complexion. Topical vitamin A treatments are often used to treat acne and other skin ailments. Foods high in vitamin A include liver, chili peppers, dandelion, carrots, apricots, collard greens, kale, sweet potatoes, spinach, and cantaloupe.

It's best to consume vitamin A from natural food sources rather than supplementing it, as vitamin A can be harmful if taken in excessive amounts in supplement form (vitamin A is a fat-soluble vitamin). You may also wish to consider taking beta carotene, which is a precursor to vitamin A and has none of the overdose concerns of vitamin A.

Avoid toxic skin care products

Proper nutrition is vital for the maintenance of youthful, smooth, healthy skin. Though lotions, washes, and creams can sometimes help treat certain skin ailments, most skin problems stem from an internal nutritional deficiency easily remedied by altering the diet to include specific nutrients. Before you spend a fortune on expensive skin care products, try addressing the problem from the inside out.

Also, beware of the toxic chemicals used in nearly all popular skin care products, including many of the expensive brands sold in department stores. Most products contain liver-damaging and cancer-causing petroleum derivatives that pass right through the skin and enter your bloodstream, causing DNA damage that ultimately compromises the health of your entire body. Use skin care products that are truly natural and contain absolutely no parabens, petroleum products or any ingredient you cannot pronounce.

There are many quality skin care product companies to choose from. I currently recommend Pangea Organics (www.PangeaOrganics.com) and the Lluvia line from the Amazon Herb Company (<http://amazondreams.amazonherb.net>), which are made from rainforest botanicals and contain no artificial or chemical ingredients whatsoever.