

O INVESTIGATES:

Can You Nourish Your Skin from the Inside Out?

FIFTY MILLION DOLLARS. That's how much Americans spent last year on "nutri-cosmetics"—drinks, pills, even candies that claim to clear breakouts, smooth wrinkles, or fade blotches. But dermatologists and nutritionists aren't convinced that these increasingly popular products are wise investments. "Certain supplements, like fish oil, may improve the quality of your skin, but there's no FDA oversight of them, so it's hard to know how much of the nutrient is actually being absorbed by your body and is affecting your complexion," says Jessica Wu, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the University of Southern California. A diet packed with lean proteins, whole grains, and fruits and vegetables, however, is likely to have a positive effect on your face. "Improving your eating habits isn't going to eliminate wrinkles or sagging, but research shows it will improve the tone and texture of your skin," says Mary Lupo, MD, clinical professor of dermatology at Tulane University School of Medicine. Consider this grocery list:



Tomatoes. Loaded with lycopene, cooked tomatoes (in juice or sauce) can protect skin against sunburn. Try to consume about one cup a week, paired with a healthy fat (like olive oil or avocado), which will help your body absorb the lycopene.



Nuts and fish. "Research suggests that their high concentrations of omega-3 fatty acids can hydrate the skin and lessen the appearance of deep wrinkles," says nutritionist Dawn Jackson Blatner, who recommends eating 12 ounces of fish (such as

salmon or cod) every week, or one ounce of walnuts a day. You should notice a change in your skin in about six weeks.



Kiwis, blueberries, sweet potatoes. These are just a few of the brightly colored foods that are rich in antioxidant vitamins C and E; when taken orally, they can help protect against UV damage. A study published last year found that a diet high in vitamin C was associated with less skin dryness and wrinkling. Blatner recommends eating two and a half cups of fruit and two cups of vegetables every day.



Red meat, white kidney beans, yogurt, and oysters. They're all high in zinc, which is essential for collagen formation. You need, for example, three ounces of beef, one cup of yogurt, and half a cup of white kidney beans, or just one incredibly zinc-heavy oyster, daily, says nutritionist Lisa Drayer, author of *The Beauty Diet*.



Green leafy vegetables, such as spinach and Swiss chard. A recent study found that people with a history of squamous cell carcinoma who ate about two servings of these greens weekly reduced their risk of subsequent skin cancers. Researchers credit the vegetables' high concentration of the organic pigments lutein and zeaxanthin. They also contain vitamin K, which has been shown to strengthen blood vessels and may help prevent varicose veins.



Dark chocolate. Its high flavonol content can minimize skin roughness and has been shown to improve circulation to give skin a healthy glow, says Drayer, who recommends looking for chocolate that is at least 60 percent natural cacao (not "Dutch-processed," which no

longer contains its natural flavonols). Treat yourself to an ounce a day.



Green tea. It's one of the most powerful antioxidants around, says Leslie Baumann, MD, director of the Cosmetic Medicine and Research Institute at the University of Miami, who drinks three cups a day to fight the free radical damage and inflammation that can contribute to skin aging. —J.B.



SUPPLEMENTS WITH SUBSTANCE

While experts agree that a well-rounded diet is the most dependable—not to mention all-around healthiest—route to better skin, there are a number of supplements with good science behind them.

Biotin: Studies have shown that 2.5 milligrams of daily biotin supplements can help strengthen brittle nails, says Noah Scheinfeld, MD, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Columbia University. (Try Appearex, \$32 for a 12-week supply.)

Heliocare: A Harvard study showed that these capsules, which contain a fern-derived antioxidant extract, help to prevent sunburn and collagen damage. Take two capsules one hour before prolonged sun exposure (\$63 for 60 capsules).

Omega-3 fatty acids: If you don't think you're managing to get enough of these proven skin smoothers in your diet, consider fish oil capsules. Baumann recommends 1,000 milligrams of fish oil supplements (like Nordic Naturals Omega-3 Purified Fish Oil, \$16 for 60 capsules) daily. —J.B.