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LIFESTYLE CHOICES THAT AFFECT SKIN HEALTH

creating beauty from the inside out

THERE IS NO DENYING THE DIRECT CORRELATION between lifestyle choices and the overall health of the skin. From a glowing, clear complexion to a dull and dehydrated appearance, the way we treat our body internally shows on the surface of the skin. Lack of sleep, smoking, alcohol consumption, poor diet and insufficient exercise will no doubt have an ill effect on the skin, but when the skin and the body are taken care of properly, the efforts show immensely.

Sleep

The skin repairs, restores and rebalances itself overnight, which is why a solid eight hours of sleep each night is so vitally important. A few nights of missed sleep will leave the skin looking sallow, and the areas beneath the eyes dark and puffy. Prolonged lack of sleep can cause the release of the stress hormone cortisol, which can cause collagen degrada-

tion when produced in excess amounts. Too many sleepless nights can also lead to a decrease in human growth hormone production. This hormone is released during deep REM sleep, and scientists believe human growth hormone plays a part in normal tissue repair and increases skin thickness. On the other hand, too much sleep can be just as harmful to the skin, causing an increase in cellular breakdown.

Although getting enough sleep is imperative for overall cutaneous repair, sleeping positions can also play a role in skin health. Those who sleep on their backs generally avoid developing the fine lines and wrinkles that side and stomach sleepers incur from pressing their face into their pillow for long periods of time. Higher thread count or satin pillowcases tend to be gentler on the skin. When possible, choose white pillowcases, as fabric dyes can cause sensitive skin to react.

BY JENNIFER LINDER, M.D.



Smoking

Smoking is one of the most avoidable causes of disease and death across most societies. It also wreaks the most havoc on the body. The immediate effects that one cigarette has on the skin include vasoconstriction for up to 90 minutes and restriction of oxygen flow to the skin cells. Extended periods of restricted blood and oxygen flow lead to angiogenesis, or the creation of new vessels. This is why many smokers have reddened skin and visible broken blood vessels.

Nicotine, carbon monoxide and hydrogen cyanide are three highly toxic constituents of cigarette smoke that have devastating effects on the skin. Nicotine is known to be a vasoconstrictor resulting in ischemia, or restriction of the nutritional and oxygen-rich blood flow to the tiny vessels in the face. Carbon monoxide limits oxygen transport and metabolism, while hydrogen cyanide inhibits the enzymatic mechanisms required for necessary oxidative metabolism and the transportation of oxygen at the cellular level. This all boils down to a lack of oxygen in the skin, which is an absolute requirement for healthy skin function. The skin will often appear dull and sallow, and in some instances may have a yellowish tinge.

The best and most effective solution is to quit smoking altogether. Patients suffering with smokers' skin should adopt a comprehensive daily care regimen with powerful collagen-building peptides, antioxidant protection and broad spectrum sunscreen. Treatments that infuse the skin with a topical oxygen source and protective antioxidants may also mitigate the negative effects smoking has on the skin.

Alcohol consumption

Alcoholic beverages have a dehydrating effect on the skin and can deplete the necessary water that serves as an internal moisturizer. When the skin is dehydrated, there are many unflattering visible effects. The complexion becomes dull and sallow, pores enlarge, fine lines and wrinkles appear more prominently, especially around the delicate eye area, and cellular turnover slows down due to an increase in keratinocyte cohesion. Alcohol also acts as a vasodilator and can cause permanent damage to the intricate network of capillaries, leading to telangiectasias (spider veins), particularly in those who suffer from rosacea.

Like smoking cigarettes, the most effective way to avoid the potentially damaging effects alcohol has on the skin is to abstain from excessive drinking. The occasional alcoholic beverage is generally fine to consume, but it should always be followed by an eight ounce glass of water to replenish and rehydrate the skin. Since alcohol dehydrates the skin and body, applying a moisturizer containing glycerin, shea butter or niacinamide will help to restore parched skin.

Diet

Diet has an enormous impact on the overall health of the skin and the body. A diet that is low in essential nutrients and minerals will eventually show on the surface of the skin, causing it to appear dull or sallow. Conversely, when one's diet is rich in antioxidants, omega-3 fatty acids, proper water intake and

continues



Eating a well-balanced diet, drinking plenty of water and exercising regularly will nourish cells while also keeping the body functioning the best way it can.

other vital nutrients, the skin will be clear and even. Many of the sensitive skin conditions we aim to treat as skin health professionals can be exacerbated by the foods our patients consume.

Conditions such as acne, eczema and psoriasis can all be triggered by poor dietary choices. Although tying a direct link is difficult, there seems to be evidence that a diet high in refined sugars and carbohydrates, saturated fats and other processed foods can lead to an increase in acne breakouts. Because these refined foods spike insulin levels, sebum production also increases, often overproducing. This uptick in sebum production along with increased keratinization within the follicle can result in a clogged follicle.

Although the exact cause of eczema is still unknown, sufferers may be prone to other allergy-related diseases, such as asthma and hay fever. Food allergies may also play a role in eczema; some studies suggest that nearly two-thirds of those with eczema also have allergies to a variety of foods, including dairy products, eggs, nuts and seeds, soy products and wheat.

For those with psoriasis, the dietary restrictions often advised are quite similar to those of eczema sufferers. Avoiding processed and refined foods is key for some patients, along with other potentially inflammatory foods like eggs, fatty meats and most sources of gluten. Each individual's triggers may vary greatly, but eliminating the most common trigger foods can often reduce the discomfort of psoriasis.

Dietary choices literally show up on the surface of the skin. Eating a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables, lean protein and plenty of water is a simple and healthy way to help keep the skin clear and glowing. Incorporating daily care prod-

ucts that contain powerful antioxidants like L-ascorbic acid, ergothioneine and flax leaf extract, and omitting refined or processed foods improves the way the body functions and is thought to reduce the incidence of acne, eczema and psoriasis.

Exercise

Exercise does more than just improve cardiovascular health; it also improves the functionality of the skin. Physical activity promotes healthy circulation and allows oxygen-rich blood to properly nourish skin cells. Exercise also helps to flush toxins, cellular debris, waste products and free radicals away from healthy functioning cells.

Exercising outdoors can pose harm to the skin if sunscreen is not used. It is absolutely vital to wear a water-resistant sun protection product to protect the skin from harmful UV rays while exercising outside. Of course, it is ideal to avoid outdoor activities between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., which are peak exposure hours, and to reapply sunscreen every two hours. Those who suffer from acne are advised to wear moisture wicking clothing and to shower promptly after a workout to avoid further breakouts due to sweat and debris collecting in the follicles.

Frequent exercise is a lifestyle choice that nearly everyone can add to their daily routine to improve the health of their skin and body. The increased blood flow and improved circulation does wonders for the cardiovascular system, but also improves the functioning of healthy skin cells.

Lifestyle choices impact the skin and body, and can result in either a beautiful, glowing complexion or one that is dull and lifeless. Getting adequate rest, avoiding cigarettes and consuming alcoholic beverages in moderation are all ways to keep the skin looking healthy and young. In addition, eating a well-balanced diet, drinking plenty of water and exercising regularly will nourish cells while also keeping the body functioning the best way it can. Making wise lifestyle choices on top of a customized regimen of well-formulated daily care products and professional treatments is key to keeping the skin healthy and beautiful. ■

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