

# nutritional beauty

by Carol Plotkin, MS, RD

A growing consumer trend is to eat well for naturally glowing skin, strong shiny hair, and inner holistic radiance. We clearly are what we eat, and this mantra applies to more than just health.

Nutritional products have long been used topically to promote beauty. Honey masks, olive oil hair conditioning, and oatmeal baths can trace their roots back to ancient times. Retinol, a vitamin A derivative, and alpha-hydroxy have been shown to improve sun-damage or wrinkles when applied to the skin. Many cosmetics contain antioxidant vitamins, minerals, and plant chemicals. Most recently, vitamin K has been discovered to lighten dark circles under the eyes.

The idea of promoting beauty can also be applied from the inside out. A top nutrient in this category is water. Without proper hydration, skin can seem dull and less supple. The antioxidant vitamins C and E, beta-carotene, and essential fatty acids are next in line. Antioxidants neutralize compounds that damage the body, including skin. It is no lie that eating your fruits and vegetables can make you more beautiful. A recent study looking at the amount of vitamin C women consumed in their diet showed that those who ate the least amount of vitamin C from food had the most wrinkled appearance. Vitamin C is important for the synthesis of collagen, a protein that helps maintain skin elasticity.

The next big beauty secret according to some estheticians is controlling inflammation from the inside out, not just reacting to a skin problem. Barry Sears, PhD, president and founder of Zone Labs, Inc., contends that "inflammation links to all chronic disease, skin degeneration, and the aging process. To stop inflammation, balance protein and carbohydrate ratio at each meal." Omega-3 fatty acids found in cold-water fish such as salmon, walnuts, and flax seed exhibit anti-inflammatory properties. An increased intake of linoleic acid, and omega-6 fatty acid found in nuts, whole grains, most vegetable oils, eggs, and poultry, is also associated with more youthful-looking skin in research studies. Conversely, high intakes of saturated fat and refined carbohydrates, abundant in the typical American diet, are associated with a more wrinkled appearance.

Companies looking to capitalize on this trend are introducing products containing antioxidants, omega-3 fatty acids, and phytochemicals. Will they make you more beautiful? Perhaps, if you already eat in a healthful manner, but drinking a special concoction won't help if you are eating doughnuts for breakfast, sub sandwiches for lunch, and pizza for dinner. And if you smoke, all



bets are of. The aging effect of smoking undoes any good that a healthy diet or special supplement provides.

Research shows that what matters more than eating a particular food or nutrient to prevent aging is to follow an overall healthy diet. People eat foods in combinations, not one at a time. It is the interplay of nutrients together that seems to provide the greatest anti-aging benefit. Here's one more reason to eat your fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and seeds. They can make you look marvelous.

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