

# Healthwatch

Edited by **FAY BURSTIN**



The worldwide cosmetics industry, worth \$260 billion a year, boasts more than 10,000 anti-ageing beauty products, of which 90 per cent of the cost is in the packaging and marketing.

## Facing up to instinct

Fay Burstin

**L**IPSTICK, mascara and blusher are a daily ritual for most women but new findings suggest they may be a waste of time.

Cosmetics interfere with basic mating instincts between men and women, according to new research by scientists at St Andrew's University in Scotland.

Make-up masks a woman's natural feminine glow which, through evolution, has been a man's signal that she's fertile.

Study leader Miriam Law Smith found make-up could improve a less attractive woman's appearance, confusing the instincts of the man into thinking she was more fertile than she actually was.

But on a good-looking woman, make-up did nothing to improve her



**Spot the hormone level:** composite faces of the 10 women with highest (left) and 10 with lowest (right) levels of estrogen. Picture: www.perceptionlab.com

chances of attracting a partner and she would be just as successful relying on natural beauty.

The team of psychologists photographed 56 female students aged 18-25 over four weeks while monitoring their

levels of the hormones estrogen and progesterone, the key indicators of female fertility.

Using a computer to morph faces into two composite photographs of women with high and low fertility, they then

asked a panel of both men and women to rate how attractive she was.

The high-hormone composite was universally preferred, proving the link between beauty and fertility.

They then showed the



**Defying nature:** surgery has helped Demi Moore snap up a much younger Ashton Kutcher.

panel the true faces of the volunteers.

Among the unmade-up women, those with higher levels of estrogen were significantly more likely to be rated attractive, feminine and healthy.

But among those wearing make-up, the pattern was lost and results far more random, suggesting cosmetics acted as a leveller.

The study, published in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society*, found the use of make-up may compensate for or mask cues indicating low hormone levels.

"Women are effectively advertising their general fertility with their faces," Ms Law Smith said.

"Our findings could explain why men universally seem to prefer feminine women's faces.

"In evolutionary terms, it makes sense for men to favour feminine fertile women — those that did would have had more babies."

Nutritionist Erica Angyal, author of *Gorgeous Skin in 30 Days* (Lothian Book, \$29.95) said as skin was the largest organ and the only one we could see with the naked eye, it was a great indicator of internal health.

And estrogen, the key female sex hormone, had many effects on

skin beauty including plumping up their skin for a softer complexion.

But it's not just make-up that's messing up nature's love gifts.

"These days plastic surgery is increasingly manipulating estrogen's natural signals because it's all about creating the illusion of youth and fertility," Ms Angyal said.

And studies by anthropologists revealed sex hormones were responsible for men and women's different skin colour.

"When women ovulate, their skin colour lightens and when they're on the Pill or pregnant, their skin tends to darken, indicating they're not fertile."

From an evolutionary perspective, fair skin was also an important sign of health.

"Pale skin made it easier to detect signs of disease such as anaemia, jaundice and infection, signs of sexual interest and arousal such as blushing and flushing, and signs of ageing," she said.

"Yet most women around the world apply blush, lipstick, foundations and powder every day, concealing important, natural indicators of health and fertility."



### Tired truth

US and Italian researchers have found evidence suggesting chronic fatigue syndrome is a real and legitimate neurological condition. They identified 16 proteins in the spinal cord fluid of CFS patients but not in healthy individuals. Five of the proteins were in all CFS patients, suggesting a type of biosignature which could be used to diagnose it.

### Healthy beer

**BEER** may finally be considered a health food after American scientists found a compound in hops that inhibits enzymes that cause cancer.

**Xanthohumol**, an antioxidant that can reduce bad cholesterol, was found to help the body detoxify carcinogens and inhibit tumour growth. Most beers are low in hops but scientists are working on a formula with enhanced levels.

### New study

DEAKIN University psychology researchers need volunteers for a study of social skills and parental concerns among typically developing, high functioning autism and Down syndrome adolescents aged 10-18. Adolescents and their parents/guardians are needed for anonymous questionnaires. Call Archana Kaur on 0433 528 235 or email [archana@deakin.edu.au](mailto:archana@deakin.edu.au)



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### SAVING FACE

Some of skin expert Erica Angyal's top tips to beautiful skin without cosmetics:

- 1 Eat at least five serves of fresh fruit and vegetables a day
- 2 Eat fish at least three times a week
- 3 Choose good fats such as olive oil, avocadoes and nuts
- 4 Minimise sugar, refined carbohydrates, processed food, fried food
- 5 Include a daily protein serve intake such as fish, eggs, poultry and soy
- 6 Drink at least eight glasses of water a day
- 7 Cut back on caffeine and alcohol
- 8 Get at least 40 minutes exercise a day, five times a week
- 9 Get just enough sun for Vitamin D needs but avoid sunbaking
- 10 Quit smoking

