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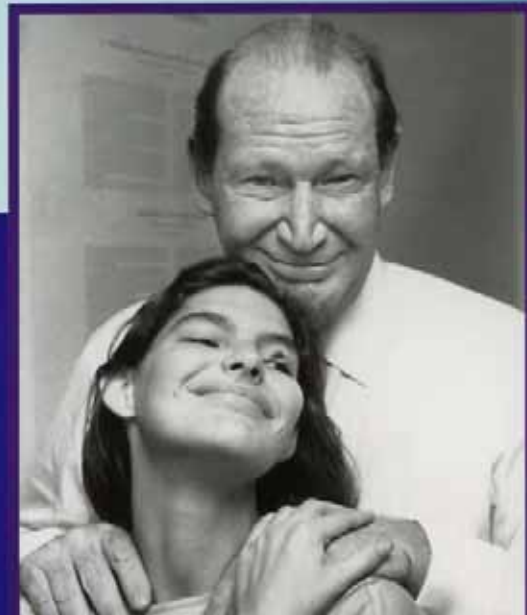
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# the great skin diet

Your skin is like a mirror to your general health – if you're not treating yourself right it shows on the outside. Yet the secret to radiant, youthful skin may be as close as your kitchen, writes **Helen Hawkes**.



## FOOD FOR YOUR FACE

### The Amazing Avocado and Tomato Mask

(suitable for all skin types, except sensitive).

This mask lightens and smooths the complexion. Tomatoes are chock full of vitamins A, B and C, alphahydroxy acids (AHAs) and the potent anti-oxidant lycopene, while avocados are rich in vitamins, good oils and lecithin.

2 teaspoons mashed avocado  
2 teaspoons grated tomato pulp  
2 teaspoons basic mask mix (consists of ½ cup fine oatmeal and ½ cup clay, from chemists and department stores, with 2 tablespoons almond meal; all combined thoroughly).  
From *Feeding Your Skin* by Carla Oates (Penguin Books Australia). >>>

## DRINKS FOR GORGEOUS SKIN

Herbal teas that can help promote beautiful, glowing skin include red clover, calendula, nettle, burdock and peppermint. Try them with a small spoonful of honey.

**A FABULOUS COMPLEXION** is the ultimate beauty accessory and most people are prepared to go to great lengths to get it. From anti-oxidant-rich moisturisers and plumping and de-ageing masks, to cosmetic surgery, such as Botox, laser resurfacing and even facelifts, it seems nothing is too much trouble.

Ultimately, how you age is influenced by your genes and the environment. Yet what if we told you that there is a way to have younger, more beautiful skin that didn't involve any pain or real expense.

Skin experts agree that eating the right foods feeds your skin with ingredients that not only protect it from damage, but also enhance its natural oils, healing ability and collagen network.

"Ageing of your skin has a lot to do with the damage you do on the inside, through poor food and lifestyle choices," says Erica Angyal, a nutritionist and author of *Gorgeous Skin in 30 Days* (Lothian Books).

While you can't control your genes, you do have a lot of control over your environment, says Erica, who is working with the Miss Universe Japan contestants to help them achieve beautiful complexions.

Sydney-based dermatologist Dr Jo-Ann See agrees. "Besides choosing your parents, having a balanced diet, as well as getting serious about sun protection, are important factors in the health and look of your skin," she says.

And a study in the journal of the American College of Nutrition suggests the right food can even prevent skin from wrinkling. "Given the right ingredients ... time is not your greatest enemy," says Erica Angyal.

So what are you waiting for? Here's how to improve your looks fast – from the inside out.

### Eat more "good" fat

"If you're getting fewer than 20 grams of good fats a day [about 2 tablespoons of oil], your skin may not be able to lubricate itself and your body may not absorb enough vitamin A to prevent premature ageing," says Erica.

Of course, we're not talking about the saturated fats in takeaway foods, but the Omega-3 fats you find in flaxseed oil, avocados, macadamias, pumpkin seeds and oily coldwater fish, such as mackerel, herring and tuna, as well as the Omega-9 fats in olive oil, almonds and walnuts. An added bonus for seafood lovers: fish also contains a substance called DMAE (dimethylaminoethanol) that Erica says helps to increase the tone of the skin.

### Learn to love anti-oxidants

"Major baddies, as far as your skin and your health are concerned, are oxidants [free radicals]," says Patrick Holford, author of *New Optimum Nutrition Bible* and *The 30-Day Fatburner Diet* (Piatkus).

"These originate from anything burned, especially fats. So they're in cigarette smoke, fried food, burned meat and exhaust fumes, as well as the air itself, since particles become damaged by the sun's burning rays."

### SPECIAL SKIN PROBLEMS

**Rosacea:** "This condition is extremely sensitive to stress," says nutritionist Erica Angyal. "You need to reduce stress and stay away from extremes in temperatures, as well as red wine, caffeine and spicy foods, which will exacerbate capillaries."

It helps to include fish oils in your diet, as well as bioflavonoids from supplements, or foods such as citrus fruits, to strengthen the capillaries.

The good news for sufferers is that women with rosacea won't age as fast as other women, because there is so much blood supplied to the superficial layer of the skin.

**Pimples:** Get your blood sugar under control by including plenty of low-GI foods in your diet and staying away from high-GI foods, including refined flours and sugars, fried foods, white bread and potatoes. Be aware that if you are young and you smoke, pimples may be a side effect of toxins in your body.

**Sunspots:** "These are due to several factors, including exposure to the sun, sugar in the diet and selenium deficiency," says Erica. "A supplement can't take the place of a great diet, but in Australia, where the soil tends to be selenium deficient, taking a capsule with selenium methionine can help."

**Eczema:** Skin cells contain essential fats, which not only keep skin looking young and flexible, but are also needed to reduce skin inflammation. Omega-3 fats can help to reduce redness and swelling in conditions such as eczema.

Free radicals can damage your skin's DNA, leading to sagging, wrinkles and open pores, as well as your collagen and elastin (the support structure of your skin).

Yet you can fight back. Start by maximising anti-oxidants in your diet.

"Anti-oxidants help fix DNA damage," says Dr See. "An adequate supply of vitamin C, for example, will keep the collagen network of the skin healthy, as well as help you heal."

Fruit and vegetables contain some of the most powerful anti-oxidants available and the more brightly coloured the food the better, says Erica. Her pick of the top anti-oxidant foods include berries, prunes, cherries, citrus fruits, plums, broccoli, red cabbage, asparagus, capsicums, beetroot, spinach, carrots, sweet potatoes, parsley and tomatoes.

Nuts that come out top of the anti-oxidant list include walnuts, pecans, pistachios and hazelnuts. Figs and raisins are also rich in anti-oxidants, as are legumes, such as red kidney beans. Limiting your exposure to strong sunlight, or rubbing on sunscreen when you are heading outside is vital.

Dr See goes further, saying, "Sunscreen doesn't block out all the sun, because we miss areas or don't apply enough," she says. "Wearing a hat and a shirt in sunlight is easier and more effective."

### Add special foods

Sea vegetables help to tone the kidneys, the second most important organ in the body for elimination of toxins, says traditional Chinese medicine practitioner Stefan Hafner, of Vaucluse, Sydney. So more sea vegetables mean clearer skin – you can buy dried seaweeds, such as nori and wakame, at Asian food stores and include them in your meals.

Soy products are loaded with vitamin E, which helps boost new cell growth and keeps skin moist. And if you want to get even more serious about a gorgeous complexion, try micro-filtered whey, which is available at health food stores.

"It boosts cell renewal, new tissue growth and lean muscle mass," says Erica. "It improves skin by increasing levels of glutathione, an age-retarding anti-oxidant extraordinaire, which is believed to improve the quality of collagen in connective tissue and skin. There is also evidence that it may help prevent the cross-linking of collagen that comes with ageing."

Try 20g-30g of whey powder, a teaspoon of flaxseed oil, an apple, a pear or a handful of berries blended with water for a smoothie.



Citrus fruits, such as oranges, contain vitamin C, a powerful anti-oxidant that helps to maintain the skin's network of collagen, essential to keep your complexion soft and supple.

### Strengthen your capillaries

Your capillaries are the pipelines for your skin cells, says Erica. "When they are weak, or not working efficiently, your skin cells don't receive all the oxygen and nutrients they need. This can also lead to inefficient elimination of wastes, stagnation of your tissues and sallow, puffy, prematurely aged or dull skin."

Bioflavonoids in citrus fruits can help protect your capillaries, as well as support collagen production.

### What not to eat

Sugary foods, refined carbohydrates, such as white bread, white pasta, white rice and potatoes, alcohol and caffeine are all a disaster for your complexion. They cause your blood sugar levels to peak too high and the skin to receive excess sugar, author Patrick Holford explains.

"Bacteria in the skin feed off sugar and cause spots," he says. "When the blood sugar level dips too low, the body produces adrenalin. This increases the production of

sebum, an oily secretion in the skin, which, in excess, can block pores."

An excess of sugar in the blood also interferes with the transport of the super anti-oxidant vitamin C (essential for healthy collagen and elastin) and can cause tissue inflammation. If you want beautiful skin, you'll need to eliminate from your diet all forms of refined sugar, from chocolate to jams, as well as white bread, white pasta and rice and potatoes, advises nutritionist Erica Angyal.

You should also keep blood sugar levels steady by choosing carbohydrates with a low-GI rating, such as spinach, capsicum, broccoli, chickpeas, soy beans, lentils, barley, rye, pineapple, grapes, apples, pears, peaches, grapefruit and plums.

For help in creating delicious low-GI recipes, try *The Low GI Diet Cookbook* by Professor Jennie Brand-Miller, Kaye Foster-Powell and Joanna McMillan-Price (Hodder Books Australia).

Alcohol and caffeine can compromise the body's power to detoxify itself.

### OTHER ANTI-AGEING TIPS

Once you're eating the best diet possible for your skin, think about how often your lifestyle affects how you age. Stress, lack of sleep and lack of exercise can all add years to your face and body.

A University of California study showed that women undergoing a divorce have a weaker moisture barrier in their skin than those who are happily married.

Yet no matter whether you are single, married or divorced, a good relaxation method, as well as a commitment to regular sleep and exercise, are essential for glowing skin.

Research shows that people who meditate regularly look younger than those who don't. A study in the *American Psychoneuroendocrinology* journal reports that meditation increases the production of a youth hormone

called DHEA, which drops off as we age. This hormone is vital in maintaining libido, body-fat ratio, energy and memory, and protecting against high levels of the ageing stress hormone cortisol. It also has a powerful impact on how your skin looks and ages.

Besides meditation, relaxation may also involve a hobby, such as reading, beadmaking or some other contemplative form of artistic or creative pursuit.

As for exercise, experiment to find something you like. The choices are endless: Pilates, yoga, dance, step classes, swimming, running, abseiling, bushwalking, tennis and so on. Or what about just walking? You could walk your way to a beautiful skin.

### Consider supplements

Deficiencies of certain vitamins and minerals, such as vitamins A and C, zinc, selenium and essential fatty acids, are detrimental to the skin and if you are not getting an adequate intake in your diet, then supplements may help. Oral supplements, such as Imedeen, are a focused way to help your skin by boosting your vitamin intake.

Other vitamins your skin needs include co-enzyme Q10, a powerful anti-oxidant; alpha lipoic acid, which is an anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory; silica, a mineral which helps keep skin taut; and B vitamins, that help rebuild and repair skin tissue.

However, you should always check with your GP or naturopath first before taking any vitamins or minerals, especially if you are taking any prescription or over-the-counter medication. ■