

What Diet is Best for Your Skin?

As boring as it may sound, the diet optimal for overall health is close to optimal for skin health as well. The main reason is that the diet optimal for overall health slows down physiological mechanisms of aging in all tissues, including the skin. While we believe that it's in everyone's best interest to adopt the diet optimal for overall health, we should point out that some aspects of a healthy diet are more important for the skin than others. The key guidelines are outlined below.

Balance and variety

The recommendation to consume a balanced diet is plastered on every corner these days. But what exactly does it mean? By balanced diet, nutritionists usually imply a diet that contains all necessary nutrients within a certain optimal range. This range is usually selected in such a way as to prevent protein malnutrition and vitamin / mineral deficiencies. Thus, in a strict sense, balanced diet is a diet allowing to avoid malnutrition and nutrient deficiencies. And, for many people, especially junk-food lovers, adopting a standard balanced diet would already be a great improvement. Keep in mind, however, that in order to "beat nature" and derive significant anti-aging benefits, one may have to consume some nutrients in greater amounts than those found in a basic balanced diet.

For most people, the simplest and probably the most practically feasible way to adhere to a balanced diet is to follow the recommendations of the Daily Food Guide developed by the US Department of Agriculture. Adults are advised to consume daily:

- 6 to 11 servings of breads and cereals
- 3 to 5 servings of vegetables
- 2 to 4 servings of fruits
- 2 to three servings of meat and meat alternatives (fish, poultry, eggs, dry beans, nuts)
- 2 servings of milk and milk products

To ensure than all essential nutrients are consumed in adequate amounts, it is desirable to consume a wide variety of foods.

Fruits and vegetables

You may have heard it from your grandma, but now it's official! Eating plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables is good for your health. Fruits and vegetables are particularly important for preventing premature skin aging because they contain a wide variety of antioxidants. Many of the pigments responsible for the color of fruits and veggies are -- among other things -- potent antioxidants. These antioxidants help protect skin cells from damage by free radicals which are especially rampant in the skin due to environmental exposure (see also the article about antioxidant nutrients in this section). To ensure that your fruits and veggies have all their antioxidants intact, make sure they are fresh and uncooked (or only minimally cooked) since heat inactivates most antioxidants. Also, some fruits and veggies are significantly richer in antioxidants than others.

Fluids

A well-moisturized skin is somewhat less prone to developing of wrinkles. Drinking plenty of fluids throughout the day ensures proper hydration of the body and helps reduce skin dryness. Experts usually recommend drinking 6-8 glasses of water a day. Coffee and sodas are not a good substitute for water because they contain caffeine, which is a diuretic, i. e., a substance promoting the excretion of water via urine. Also, do not drink too much fluid 2-3 hours before going to bed. This may cause morning puffiness and excessively stretch your skin.

Calories

Except for frying oneself in direct sunlight at noon, the quickest way to get wrinkles is to put on a lot of weight and then lose it. The reason is obvious: when you gain weight, extra fat stretches the skin, then, when you lose weight and body fat goes away, the skin sags and crumples up. The degree of skin sagging after weight loss varies with the person's age (it tends to be worse the older you are), genetics and other factors. Let the desire to retain youthful skin be another incentive for you to watch your calories and avoid weight gain - even if you plan to lose weight later on. Also, keep in mind that gaining and losing weight in cycles may have negative effects not only on the skin but on your overall health as well.

Cooking

The central theme in cooking is heat-treatment of foods. As written in bold print in every college chemistry course, increasing temperature causes exponential increase in the rate of chemical reactions. What does this mean to us, the eaters? Every time a food is heated up, the rate of reactions of degradation and oxidation of nutrients jumps up dramatically. In other words, cooking depletes food of many essential nutrients and antioxidants and increases the content of oxidative by-products (free radicals). As a result, we consume less essential nutrients and more aging-promoting free radicals. True, complete avoidance of cooked foods is no fun. You don't have to stop eating cooked foods altogether to avoid most of the negative effects of excessively cooked foods. For starters, reduce cooking time and avoid deep frying, grilling and cooking in large amounts of oil or fat.