

Skin health

Healthy youthful skin is at the top of many wish lists, leading to a boom in the skincare industry. If you feel like you have lost your 'glow' or simply wish to maintain your good complexion, then read on for some top food and lifestyle tips to get you glowing inside and out.

Is good skin in our genes?

The majority of us are born with healthy, supple skin. However, as we age, our skin becomes less able to cope with everyday wear and tear. The great news is that although good skin is partly due to your genes, there is lots we can do to make our skin look better.

Causes of wrinkles dryness and dehydrated skin include: smoking, too much exposure to the sun and sun beds, too much alcohol intake, a poor diet, lack of sleep, too much stress, your genes!

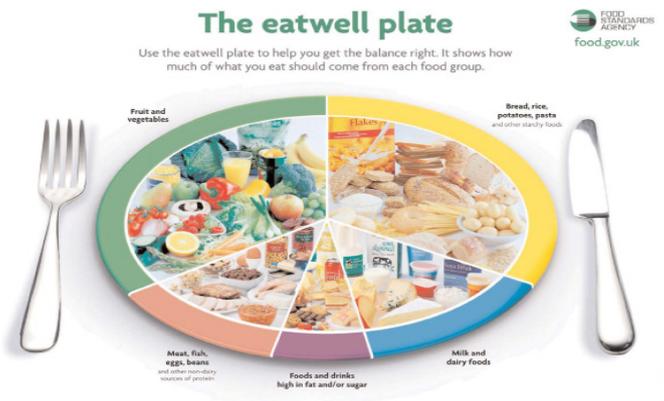
Feeding your skin from the inside

It may be reassuring to know that no foods should be completely avoided and there are also no special foods that have to be eaten for a healthy glow. Certain vitamins and minerals have an important role to play in skin health such as vitamin A, vitamin C, riboflavin, niacin, pyridoxine, vitamin E, zinc and selenium. If you don't get enough of these it could cause medically recognised skin problems. However, the good news is that a varied diet provides all of these nutrients and there are three proven steps you can take to reduce skin damage:

1 Variety is key

The most important food tip is to choose a wide range of foods. This is essential. No one food or

food group can supply all the nutrients that our skin and bodies need. The evidence from lots of studies shows that following healthy eating guidelines should give us all the vital nutrients for skin health and anti-ageing. What is more, a healthy balanced diet provides a rich supply of antioxidants which are thought to help protect and repair our skin from pollutants that could cause it damage. Enjoying a healthy balanced diet including at least 5-a-day of a variety of fruits and vegetables; means choosing a variety of foods from each food group in the right proportions. The 'Eatwell plate' is a great place to start for information on food balance and portion sizes.



2 Don't forget to drink plenty

It is very important for healthy skin, to drink plenty of fluids: six to eight glasses a day in the UK climate and maybe more during the summer months. This can include: water, tea and juice. Plenty of fluid makes sure we stay hydrated and helps to clear the body of toxins.

3 If you drink alcohol, enjoy sensibly

Too much alcohol can cause dehydration (as well as the underlying damage to the liver, blood pressure and heart). Dehydrated skin is more likely to develop wrinkles as it stops being so elastic. Experts recommend sticking to 2-3 units a day if you are a woman and 3-4 units a day if you are a man, aiming to have at least two alcohol-free days each week. A unit is ½ pint of normal strength beer, a small glass (100ml) of wine or a pub measure of spirits (25ml).

What about chocolate?

There is good news for the chocolate lovers – chocolate does not cause you to have bad skin, and dark chocolate even provides more of those antioxidants that may give it more protection. But remember, chocolate is high in fat and sugar so should only be eaten in moderation.

There is no strong evidence to show that chocolate causes acne.

What about supplementation?

Food and drink will always be the best way to give our skin and our bodies the nutrients it needs. While certain nutrients are important for skin health it doesn't mean more is better. If you are following a varied and balanced diet there is no need for any supplementation. However, if you are concerned that you may not be getting all your essential nutrients from your food you should speak to your GP and see if you need referring to a dietitian.

Feeding your skin from the outside

Protect yourself from the sun

It is very important to protect your skin from sun damage. Ultraviolet light – invisible but powerful rays of the sun – can damage skin, causing wrinkles, dry, rough skin, and more seriously non-cancerous (benign) and cancerous (malignant) skin tumours. Never allow your skin to burn and use sunscreen with a sun protection factor of at least 15. Take extra care with children and babies as their skin is at even more risk from burning.

Moisturisers and 'anti-ageing creams'

Many skincare products claim to have powers to prevent or reverse the effects of ageing skin. In truth, very few of them have any quality scientific evidence to back up their claims. There is no evidence to show that applying antioxidants directly to the skin has any benefit. There are benefits of moisturising though as it protects your skin from the environment and stops it drying out. A cheap moisturiser can work just as well as an expensive one.

Other essential tips

Don't smoke

Research shows that smoking speeds up the normal ageing process of skin, contributing to wrinkles. Skin changes from smoking can be seen in young adults who have been smoking for as little as ten years.

Make time for relaxation and sleep

Research has shown that too much stress can affect our skin health. In our fast-moving lives, making regular time for relaxation is something we can often forget to do. Plenty of sleep is needed to help prevent your skin looking older and tired.

Be active

A good exercise routine including activity that gets the heart racing such as dancing, running or fast walking will improve blood flow to the surface of the skin and will give you a rosy glow.

Summary

So why not start today? Get proactive in preventing wrinkles and get a healthy glow. As an additional bonus eating a balanced diet will mean you not only look healthy but are healthy!

Further information:

Food Fact Sheets on other topics including Vitamin D, Alcohol, Healthy Eating and Fruit and Veg – how to get 5-a-day are available at www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts

The Eatwell Plate www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/eatwell-plate.aspx

For further information about protecting yourself from the sun visit: www.cancerresearchuk.org and www.britishskinfoundation.org.uk

For help with stopping smoking call the NHS Smoking Helpline **0800 169 0169**.

This Food Factsheet is a public service of The British Dietetic Association (BDA) intended for information only. It is not a substitute for proper medical diagnosis or dietary advice given by a dietitian. If you need to see a dietitian, visit your GP for a referral or: www.freelancedietitians.org for a private dietitian. To check your dietitian is registered check www.hpc-uk.org

This Food Fact Sheet and others are available to download free of charge at www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts

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The information sources used to develop this fact sheet are available at www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts

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