

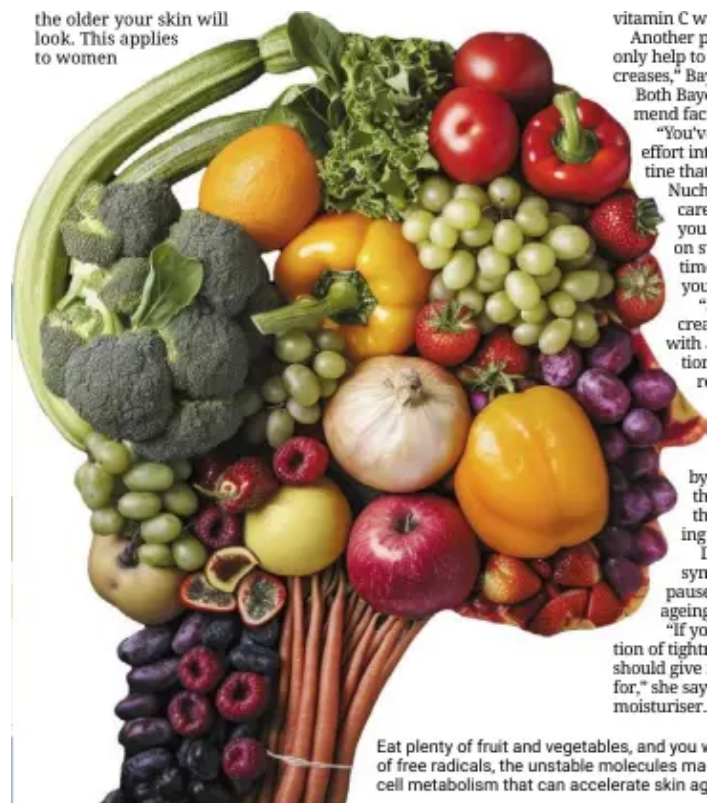
- Skin—care

Combat signs of ageing

Worried about wrinkles? Here are some care tips to slow it down.

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It starts at around the age of 25, when skin begins to show signs of ageing. The lines around the eyes, mouth and forehead write the story of your life on your face.



For those who want to hide this story, there are simple things you can do to limit how easy it is to read.

Little wrinkles on your face that slowly dig in are a sure sign you're getting older.

While most people want to get old – after all, the alternative is early death – they don't want to look old.

So for younger-looking skin, many turn to creams, moisturisers and anti-ageing face masks, and perhaps even injections or cosmetic surgery.

Skin ageing is perfectly normal, of course, and begins in earnest around age 25.

One reason is that skin cells then aren't as active as before, says Dr Christiane Bayerl, director of the Department of Dermatology and Allergology at the Helios Dr Horst Schmidt Clinics in Wiesbaden, Germany.

Consequently, the number of collagen fibres in the dermis, the middle section of your skin, decreases, as does the number of elastin fibres.

Collagen is a fundamental structural protein that provides tensile strength to your skin and helps it retain moisture, and elastin a protein that gives it elasticity.

Your skin becomes drier, less firm, and wrinkles develop

the speed of this process depends on various factors. Your genetic makeup plays a major role, according to Julian Nuchel, a principal investigator in the Faculty of Medicine's Centre for Biochemistry at the University of Cologne.

So a look at your older relatives' skin will give you an idea of what could be in store for you. Your lifestyle, which you can control, also plays a role in how soon you develop facial wrinkles and how deep they become.

"With a healthy lifestyle, some octogenarians still have very good skin, while others already have deep wrinkles," Nuchel says.

"UV protection is the best prophylactic measure," says Bayerl, since ultraviolet (UV) radiation from sunlight stresses the skin and can lead to premature development of wrinkles along with pigmentation marks (age spots).

Over time, too much exposure to UV rays – for example during unprotected sunbathing – can damage skin cells and induce DNA damage.

this not only can cause premature skin ageing, but lead to skin cancer as well.

You can protect yourself by seeking shade or remaining indoors during the hours of most intense sunlight – around midday.

And, of course, by covering your skin with clothing or applying sufficient sunscreen when you're outdoors.

"Especially during the sunniest months of the year," Nuchel says, "the sunscreen should also protect against ultraviolet A (UVA) radiation", the wavelength of light that can penetrate to the deep layers of skin and is a key factor in skin ageing.

He also advises year-round protection, as "the sun emits radiation in winter too".

Smoking is another major risk factor for the skin.

"It affects the blood vessels (constricting those near the skin's surface and thereby reducing blood flow) and tends to make you look sallow," Bayerl says.

Studies show that the longer and more heavily you smoke, the older your skin will look. this applies to women more than men.

Other environmental influences can also adversely affect your complexion, she says.

Nitrogen oxides, especially from diesel-powered vehicles, are a cause of age spots, she says, adding that "studies have shown that people with skin spots are thought to be 10 years older than they actually are."

Not only your appearance suffers when your skin shows signs of ageing, because skin – the body's largest organ – performs important functions.

"It protects the body from germs and prevents the loss of excessive moisture," Nuchel says.

Weakened skin increases the frequency of inflammation and makes it easier for pathogens to enter the body.

"this is why you should keep your skin healthy as long as possible," says Nuchel. "the sooner you start, the better." Along with protection from UV radiation, healthy skin is best served by a healthy lifestyle, which includes a balanced diet and sufficient exercise.

Your diet should have plenty of fruits and vegetables, says Bayerl.

they contain antioxidants, chemical substances that protect the body from free radicals (unstable molecules made during normal cell metabolism), which can accelerate skin ageing.

“It’s also important to ingest collagen,” she says. Foods high in collagen include meat, fish, eggs and dairy products.

Vegans can eat foods that help the body produce collagen, such as legumes, nuts and avocados.

“Vitamins A and C have been scientifically proven to slow skin ageing too,” points out Nuchel.

this goes for these vitamins in food and food supplements, as well as in face creams. “the concentrations matter though,” he says. “A cream with under 10% vitamin C won’t do much good.”

Another pointer: “Face creams only help to smooth fine skin creases,” Bayerl says.

Both Bayerl and Nuchel recommend facial care.

“You’ve got to put some effort into working out a routine that suits you,” says Nuchel, noting that proper care depends not only on your skin type, but also on such factors as the time of year and stage of your life.

“Some anti-ageing creams are available only with a doctor’s prescription,” says Bayerl, who recommends them for menopausal and perimenopausal women in particular. They’re affected by hormonal changes that, among other things, impact skin ageing.

Dry skin – a common symptom of the menopause – can also hasten its ageing.

“If your skin has a sensation of tightness or burning, you should give it what it’s calling for,” she says – namely plenty of moisturiser.