

PRINTED FROM  
PRESSREADER

NOT FOR SALE  
**DON'T LET**

**STRESS**

**WRECK YOUR**

**SKIN**

The mirror isn't playing tricks on you: Your complexion can suffer during times of high anxiety. Dermatologists and GH experts explain the signs and how you can get quick and long-term relief.

by CELIA SHATZMAN

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025 **GH** 13

PRINTED FROM  
PRESSREADER

Getty Images.

BEAUTY LAB / STRESS



## THE STRESS-SKIN CONNECTION

**A**nyone who has had a rash pop up before a work presentation or woken up with dark circles after a sleepless night knows that mental health and mood affect the complexion. "The skin is a visible reflection of what's going on internally," says Alexis Stephens, M.D., a dermatologist and skin of color expert in Boca Raton, FL. "When

we're stressed, our bodies release hormones like cortisol and adrenaline that can disrupt skin function, skin barrier integrity and even our microbiome." This dysregulation can show up in several ways (see column at right). "We're only beginning to scratch the surface of how connected skin and emotional well-being are," Dr. Stephens says.

### Q: Can skincare help me relax?

**A:** A recent survey from Clinique found a strong link between emotional well-being and skincare. In "Skin Is the Window to the Mind: A Survey in Psychodermatology," 69% of participants said a skincare routine was connected to emotional wellness. "The act of doing a skincare routine that only takes a few minutes gives a person a sense of control," Dr. Wechsler says. "If you start your day with a routine, you have a better chance of taking care of yourself in other ways." Dr. Stephens agrees: "The study confirmed that applying skincare is a stronger mood booster than applying makeup or even drinking coffee."

### VITAL SIGNS

## CLUES THAT YOUR COMPLEXION IS SUFFERING

These are the most common ways in which stress manifests itself in skin, according to dermatologists.

### 1

#### Breakouts

"Because of an increase in cortisol levels, stress causes inflammation," says Amy Wechsler, M.D., a dermatologist and psychiatrist in New York City and the author of *The Mind-Body Connection*. Higher cortisol can also stimulate oil glands to produce more sebum, which, along with inflammation, allows acne-promoting bacteria to thrive.

### 2

#### Dark Circles

"Stress can disrupt sleep and slow circulation, both of which can contribute to under-eye darkness," Dr. Stephens says. "Poor lymphatic drainage can also lead to puffiness and make dark circles more prominent."

### 3

#### Sensitivity

"You can develop temporarily sensitive skin during periods of stress, because cortisol increases moisture loss," causing irritation, Dr. Wechsler explains. Inflammatory responses triggered by stress can also worsen conditions like eczema and rosacea. "Stress will bring out whatever you're predisposed to," Dr. Wechsler says.

### 4

#### Signs of Aging

"Chronic stress promotes oxidative stress and weakens the skin barrier," Dr. Stephens says. "Over time, this leads to collagen breakdown, decreased elasticity and more pronounced lines and wrinkles — it's like pressing fast-forward on the aging process."

# FACE SAVERS

"I've had patients come in and tell me, 'I did not have this wrinkle three weeks ago,'" Dr. Wechsler says. "I ask, 'What's going on in your life?' We figure it out, and when the stress goes away, their skin heals." Try these methods to calm your skin (and your senses) fast—and in the long run.

Beauty sleep is real—skipping on rest can leave your skin looking dull, dry and puffy.



## Coddle Your Complexion

Quell inflammation by using products for sensitive skin, Dr. Wechsler advises. Look for calming ingredients like niacinamide and centella asiatica (a.k.a. cica) and hydrating formulas, says Dr. Stephens, to help replenish a compromised skin barrier.



## Move Your Body

Exercise lowers cortisol and also boosts circulation, helping deliver oxygen and nutrients to skin. "It can be whatever you like the most—even dancing or walking," says Dr. Wechsler.



## Prioritize Rest

There's a reason it's called "beauty sleep": "During sleep, skin undergoes critical repair processes," Dr. Stephens says. "Lack of sleep ups cortisol, slows cell turnover and reduces circulation, leading to dullness, dehydration and puffiness."



## Quiet Your Mind...

"Meditation has been shown to lower cortisol levels and promote parasympathetic nervous system activity, calming your body down from the inside out," Dr. Stephens says. "Stress reduction translates to less inflammation and better skin barrier function."



## ...and Mind Your Habits

A poor diet, smoking and high alcohol consumption can worsen stress—and skin. "Avoid caffeine late in the day, limit screens and stay hydrated," says Dr. Stephens. "Consistent sleep, movement and mindfulness make a big difference."

## INNOVATIONS

# CALMING SKINCARE

Products in a new category called "neurocosmetics" aim to reduce stress and also improve mood via specific attributes and use techniques. "There's growing evidence that sensory experience impacts the nervous system," Dr. Stephens says. "While more clinical studies are needed, neurocosmetics have potential, especially if they combine effective ingredients with thoughtfully chosen textures and scents, which together can engage the brain in a way that promotes relaxation and comfort." Below, the hallmarks of neurocosmetics.

### Soothing Scents

"Aromas like lavender, chamomile and neroli can activate areas in the brain linked to relaxation," Dr. Stephens explains. "This can help reduce stress-induced inflammation."

### Tactile Textures

"Smooth, silky or cushiony skincare formulas can create a sense of calm through tactile stimulation," Dr. Stephens says. "The brain associates certain textures with safety and comfort, which can help regulate stress responses."

### Relaxing Rituals

Massage techniques and skincare application tools like jade rollers and gua sha have stress-relief power too. "Facial massage temporarily improves circulation and lowers cortisol levels," Dr. Wechsler says.

Diana Vyshniakova/Adobe Stock Photo.