- Skin

PREVENTION

IN FOCUS



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SKIN

Our body's largest organ is constantly at work to protect us and keep us healthy. On top of being beautiful, the skin has a lot of nerve(s)! That means we can feel and experience all that life has to offer. **Let's take a closer look.**

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The Skin You LIVE IN

BY MARISA COHEN

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT WHAT THE HUMAN BODY WOULD BE LIKE WITHOUT SKIN (we know—ick—but bear with us): All our organs, muscles, and bones would be exposed, completely vulnerable to the ravages of the environment. Instead, we are covered from head to toe with a powerful shield that not only protects us but also does other pretty amazing things.

Along with your hair, nails, and sweat glands, your skin is part of your integumentary system, the protective outer layer of the body. "The skin has many vital functions, but one of the most important is preventing the loss of water from the body to stave off dehydration," says UPMC dermatologist Laura Ferris, M.D., Ph.D., a professor at the University of Pittsburgh Clinical and Translational Science Institute.

Rather than just being the equiva-

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lent of a giant tarp wrapped around our skeleton, however, the skin is actually the body's largest organ (an average of 22 square feet, weighing about eight pounds!), with multiple intricate processes occurring inside its cells. "The skin has its own active and complex immune system that prevents you from becoming infected with bacteria and viruses we come in contact with every day," Dr. Ferris says. Other important functions this multitalented organ performs: protecting you from deeper injury, regulating body temperature, being your first line of defense against environmental toxins and the sun's ultraviolet rays, and warning you when danger lurks (those little hairs that stand up when you're anxious or afraid are controlled by tiny muscles in the skin).

And let's not forget that the skin has a critical role in human connection: Think about how you feel when your partner grazes your cheek with a kiss or when a baby—or a kitten—nuzzles against your arms as you hold them.

What is skin made of?

Though it's thick and rough on some parts of your body (such as the bottoms of your feet) and thinner and more delicate on others (like the areas under your eyes), all skin is made up of water, protein, fats, and minerals. "Skin cells are not just like bricks in a wall," Dr. Ferris explains. "They're busy creating the protein keratin along with natural moisturizing factors to make sure we maintain a proper fluid balance and antimicrobial peptides, which are the first line of defense against infection."

The three primary layers of skin, from the inside out, are:

HYPODERMIS: The deepest layer, also known as the subcutaneous tissue, is made of fat that cushions the muscles and bones, protecting them from injury, and keeps you warm on a cold night. It also contains connective tissue that attaches the skin layers to the muscles and bones.

DERMIS: This middle layer makes up 90% of the skin's thickness. There's a lot going on here—it's where you'll find the connective tissues collagen and elastin, which allow skin to be stretchy and resilient; hair follicles; blood vessels; lymphatic vessels; and sweat glands. There are also the important sebaceous glands, which produce an oily substance called sebum that keeps skin soft and provides a layer of waterproofing.

EPIDERMIS: The outermost layer of your skin protects against sun and rain, prevents bacteria and germs from entering your bloodstream, and

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contains melanin, which is responsible for your skin's color. No blood supply is routed to this layer; it's made up mostly of keratin cells, which are constantly being shed and replenished. These cells, the keratinocytes, grow at the deepest layer of the epidermis, called the basal layer, and gradually push their way outward toward the topmost layer, called the stratum corneum, where they flake off or get abraded when you scratch an itch or your clothing rubs against them. (Dr. Ferris points out that when you're cleaning your home, much of the dust sucked into your vacuum comes from your own skin.) It takes about four weeks for new cells to make their way to the top, which means you get a fresh new outer layer of skin every month.

Take care of the skin that takes care of you

Over time, of course, your skin changes: You accumulate sun damage, scars, and wrinkles and lose collagen and subcutaneous fat, which are responsible for the plump, rosy cheeks of a child, explains Dr. Ferris. But taking care of your skin can help keep it strong. The most important way to do this is by protecting it against the sun's damaging UV rays, says Dr. Ferris, who advises wearing sunscreen or sun-protective clothing whenever you're outside. You'll want to moisturize regularly to lock in hydration, and quit smoking and vaping if you haven't already: Nicotine and other chemicals in traditional and electronic cigarettes can make skin age faster.



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Common SKIN CONCERNS, solved

BY MARYGRACE TAYLOR



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EVEN WHEN YOU DO ALL THE RIGHT THINGS TO KEEP YOUR SKIN HEALTHY, rashes, bumps, and redness happen. These are your body's way of telling you something is going on.

ECZEMA

WHAT IT IS:
Eczema is an umbrella term for a group of conditions that cause dry, itchy skin. The most common is atopic dermatitis (AD), an inflammatory skin disease caused by an overactive immune system response. AD usually starts in childhood, and while some people outgrow it, for others it can stick around.

WHY IT HAPPENS:
AD occurs when the skin's protective barrier doesn't function properly, which may be due to genetics or environmental factors. "When the skin's natural barrier is disrupted there is increased moisture loss, which can contribute to dryness and inflammation," says Marisa Garshick, M.D., a board-certified dermatologist in New York City.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR: Intensely dry, itchy patches that may appear red, hard, or thickened. Eczema can show up anywhere,

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but "it often develops inside the elbows, behind the knees, or on the face," says Dr. Garshick.

HOW TO DEAL: "Moisturize twice per day with a thick cream or ointment, which will trap moisture," Dr. Garshick says. Your dermatologist might recommend an anti-inflammatory cream to combat itching and irritation. Avoiding triggers helps too: Harsh soaps, fragrances, and scratchy fabrics are common culprits.

PSORIASIS

WHAT IT IS: A chronic autoimmune disease that causes a buildup of skin cells, leading to rough, red, scaly patches of skin. "In psoriasis, skin cells turn over in three to four days compared with normal skin cells, which typically turn over in four weeks," explains Hubert Chodkiewicz, M.D., a board-certified dermatologist in Austin.

WHY IT HAPPENS: Experts think psoriasis stems from an overactive immune system, which promotes inflammation. This causes skin cells to reproduce faster, before old ones have been shed. The buildup leads to patches of rough skin, or plaques.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR: Thick, red, scaly skin patches with silvery streaks, usually on the elbows, knees, scalp, torso, or palms or the soles of the feet. The patches often itch and may bleed when scratched, says Dr. Chodkiewicz. Some people with psoriasis also have thick or pitted nails.

HOW TO DEAL: There's no cure, but topical creams, injectable meds (like biologics), and light therapy can soothe symptoms. Regular moisturizing also helps. Try to avoid triggers like stress, infections, dry skin, cold weather, certain meds (like lithium and prednisone), skin injuries or sunburn, smoking, and alcohol.

SKIN CANCER

One in five Americans will get skin cancer, which typically stems from years of UV damage. "Most sun damage is done in our youth, and its consequences are not seen until later in adulthood, even with better sun protection as an adult," says Dr. Chodkiewicz.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR: Monthly self-checks can help you spot suspicious moles or growths, Dr. Chodkiewicz says. Use mirrors to examine hard-to-see areas. "Anything that is growing, changing, crusting, or not healing needs to be seen by a dermatologist," he adds. If you find something new or unusual, take a zoomed-in picture with your phone so you can track changes over time and also call your doctor.

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REDUCE YOUR RISK: You can't undo past sunburns or sessions in the tanning bed. But you can protect your skin from future damage: Wear sunscreen daily, and seek shade between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

ROSACEA

WHAT IT IS: Rosacea is a chronic inflammatory skin condition that causes red or pink cheeks, pimple-like bumps, and skin sensitivity. Nearly anyone's face can develop rosacea, but it's more common in women and those with fair skin.

WHY IT HAPPENS: Genes play a role—you're around four times as likely to develop rosacea if it runs in your family. "Studies have also shown that rosacea may be caused by the body's response to certain bacteria or mites that live near the hair follicles, irritating the skin," says board-certified dermatologist Nianda Reid, M.D.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR: Red or pink patches on the cheeks, nose, chin, and forehead that may feel warm or tingly. Red, inflamed bumps that burn or sting are also common, Dr. Reid notes. Your symptoms will likely come and go, often flaring up when triggered by things like sun exposure, hot weather, stress, alcohol, and spicy foods. Rosacea can make your eyes feel red, itchy, sore, or watery too.

HOW TO DEAL: Choose gentle skincare products, as rosacea-prone skin tends to be sensitive. Prescription ointments and gels can also help calm flares, and if your symptoms are more severe your doctor might recommend oral medications or laser therapy.

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Let's Talk About WRINKLES

BY STEPHANIE DOLGOFF



I HAVE A VIDEO ON MY PHONE OF ONE OF MY CHILDREN at age 9 mewling, "Oh! Oh no! *Wrinkles!*" while pulling the lush, peachy skin of their jaw and neck taut. Willow was lampooning me looking in the mirror and had me dead to rights.

I've kept that video handy these last 12 years because it is hilarious, but also as a reminder: Caring more than fleetingly about my wrinkles (and gray hair and menobod) feels out of sync with my values. If you asked me back then (or now, at 57) what is important to me, it would be helping people close to me feel loved, being kind, and advocating for those whom the world treats unfairly. Up there too would be pushing back against the absurd beauty standards bearing down on all of us.

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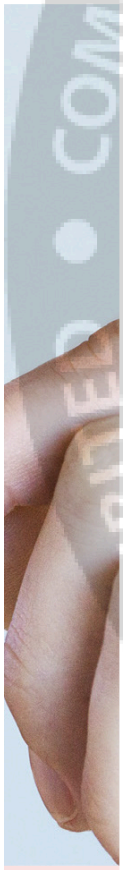

When my kids were small, I wanted them to be critical consumers of media, so I sat them down and showed them a celebrity magazine. I explained that breasts do not typically sit on women's collarbones; bodies aren't supposed to shrink to "Half Their Size!"; and everyone's face changes over time and that's normal and beautiful. I meant every word.

And yet. *And yet!*

I *do* sigh at the lines shooting off my lips in an oblong corona. I *do* wonder if I could somehow MacGyver my jowls up and back with packing tape. So far my neck has done an excellent job holding up the brain that has (mostly) steered me wisely for decades. But couldn't it keep doing that without looking so, well, ropy and crepey...and seriously, what's up with those horizontal lines?

Like most of us, I have used potions and lotions to plump and smooth my skin. I have also occasionally shelled out to have a syringeful of magic pumped into my wrinkles. But these are no match for the effects of a lifetime of smiling, laughing, wincing, and drinking through straws. And I know it doesn't matter—the people who love me will still love me, regardless of my lines.

So here I sit both caring and not wanting to care, with really good reasons to care while thinking it's wrong that I should *have* to care, that the world should be a place where older women who actually look older are revered rather than ignored or mocked. I want to be seen and seen as relevant, not least because ageism in hiring is very real. Appearing younger is about cash money, not only my feelings.

"But why," an alien from another planet or a man might ask, "would you crave respect from a culture that drives women to stick needles in their foreheads or have the skin of their faces literally sliced and pulled as taut as a barracks bedsheet?" If this culture doesn't value you or the other brilliant, capable, supportive, wrinkly women your age without whom you'd be miserable, can't you simply disregard its opinion of your appearance?

The answer is no, not entirely. There is no Culture B. We each must find our own ratio of caring to not caring, of doing what we are comfortable with to appear younger versus telling critics that if they don't like what they see, they don't have to look.

I am grateful that with each line on my forehead has come more compassion for all who feel vain or silly for worrying about worry lines. Our wrinkles aren't as uncomfortable as our cognitive dissonance—the state of living in a way that does not align with what we believe. Maybe a scientist will invent a night cream to smooth out the cognitive dissonance. Until then, there's the hope that maybe the kids who make fun of us for caring about the lines we see in the mirror will grow up not giving a second thought to theirs.

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IN FOCUS

Craft your perfect SKINCARE ROUTINE

BY SHANNEN ZITZ

DOES THE ORDER IN WHICH YOU APPLY SKINCARE REALLY MATTER?

As it turns out, yes. Applying products in the wrong sequence can diminish efficacy and therefore results, because of either the texture or the ingredients. You might be using all the latest and greatest formulas, but if you're not using them correctly, you're defeating the purpose.

Revamp your routine

When it comes to layering lotions, serums, and treatments, "the general rule, just as with your clothes, is to go from lighter to heavier," says Mona Gohara, M.D., an associate



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clinical professor of dermatology at Yale School of Medicine. Thinner products like toners and serums can't penetrate through thicker products like moisturizers and oils, which help seal in what you've already done and keep skin healthy.

1. Cleanser

Step one, day and night, should always be cleansing. In the morning, "use a gentle cleanser to get rid of the oil your face has accumulated overnight," explains Karan Lal, D.O., F.A.A.D., a double board-certified dermatologist in Scottsdale, AZ. Non-foaming or oil-based cleansers are great products to use at any time.

2. Toner

Toner might not be necessary for your routine, but using the right one can help target specific concerns like dullness and dryness and can serve as a way to prepare your skin to absorb the rest of your products. Toners often are thin and have a watery texture, meaning you'll want to apply one right after cleansing, before thicker or heavier products like serums or creams.

3. Treatment or medication

If you use any sort of treatment or prescription topical medication for a specific skin concern like acne or rosacea, you want to apply it early in your routine for increased absorption. Things like topical antibiotics and anti-inflammatory creams are "the good stuff," Dr. Lal explains. "We want those to get absorbed properly." However, it's always best to listen to your dermatologist regarding when to apply medicated treatments.

4. Retinol

Retinols should be applied during your evening skincare routine only, as sunlight will degrade most formulas and these products make skin more sensitive to the sun, explains Dr. Lal. Like other treatments or medicated products, these should be applied as early as possible in your routine so your skin can soak up all their benefits.

5. Serum

Face serums are thinner than moisturizers and thicker than toners, so make sure you sandwich yours between those two. Serums can be used both morning and night, but some formulas are best suited for one or the other. For instance, vitamin C should be applied during the day to help sunscreen protect your skin from UV rays, while reparative serums (like retinol and exfoliating serums) are best used at night, when skin repairs itself.

6. Eye cream

Eye creams tend to be more lightweight than allover face creams,

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and they often contain ingredients meant to target specific concerns, so definitely apply these before a face moisturizer. Apply lighter, hydrating formulas during the day and reserve targeted treatments (like those with retinol and thicker creams) for the evening.

7. Moisturizer

Moisturizer, whatever your skin type, is an essential step for achieving healthy skin. Applying the right face moisturizer will help lock in hydration and moisture and support the skin barrier. This step also serves as a way to seal in other products like toners, treatments, and serums.

8. Sunscreen

Applying sunscreen daily "really isn't negotiable," Dr. Gohara says. No matter what your skin tone or type and whether you're spending time indoors or outside, put on sunscreen every single morning to protect your skin from harmful UV rays. This step should always be last in your routine so as not to dilute the SPF. While you're at it, make sure you're using the best SPF for your needs—specifically SPF 30 or higher, dermatologists advise. When it comes to sunscreen ingredients, there are two types: chemical and physical. Most sunscreens are chemical, and these reduce the amount of UV radiation skin absorbs but take time to do their magic. Physical sunscreens, like those that contain zinc oxide or titanium dioxide, start working immediately by deflecting UV rays as they sit on the surface of the skin.

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POWERHOUSE INGREDIENTS

It might seem as if there's a lot to remember, but when it comes to skincare, less is often more. "Just keep it simple," says Dr. Lal. "The goals are to make sure you're cleansing and hydrating your skin and protecting it from the sun. That's all you really need." But if you're looking to step up your skincare routine, consider incorporating serums, creams, and treatments containing proven ingredients like these:

HYALURONIC ACID

A powerful humectant (meaning that it attracts water), hyaluronic acid is often used in hydrating serums and moisturizers. The ingredient can benefit all types of skin, reducing dryness in those prone to it and supporting a healthy skin barrier. Plus, it plays well with other ingredients and can be used morning and night, making it an easy addition to any routine.

RETINOL

In terms of anti-aging skincare, retinol is the gold standard ingredient, as it has been proven to prevent and address visible signs of aging by enhancing skin cell turnover and stimulating collagen production. It's part of the retinoid family, but while retinoids are prescription-only and can often be too strong to start with, retinol is sold over the counter and is gentler on the skin. Both improve wrinkles, discoloration, textural irregularities, and acne. But all retinoids make skin sensitive to the sun, so apply them at night and never skip sunscreen in the morning.

VITAMIN C

Vitamin C is a powerful antioxidant that helps protect skin from environmental stressors and addresses a variety of skin concerns. Like all antioxidants, vitamin C works by neutralizing the free radicals that damage cells. Through this process it can bring radiance to skin, even out skin tone and combat hyperpigmentation, increase collagen production, and even help protect skin from UV rays. Try applying it in the morning to give your sunscreen a boost.

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IN FOCUS



Beauty TOOLS and TECH

THERE'S TECHNOLOGY THESE DAYS FOR JUST ABOUT EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE, skincare included. You can find devices designed to smooth, firm, or plump skin and to be used by experts or even at home. But do they work? Are they worth a spot in your beauty routine?

Dermaplaning

If you don't like the look and feel of peach fuzz on your face, dermaplaning may be a solution. The procedure, traditionally done by professionals, involves removing hair and cells from the outermost layer of skin on the face using a sharp blade. Yes, it's pretty much shaving your face.

When done properly and safely, the procedure reveals smoother, brighter skin, says Rachel Nazarian, M.D., F.A.A.D., a board-certified dermatologist in New York City. It may also help with the absorption of topical skincare products and the application of makeup.

But be careful: "The best way to have

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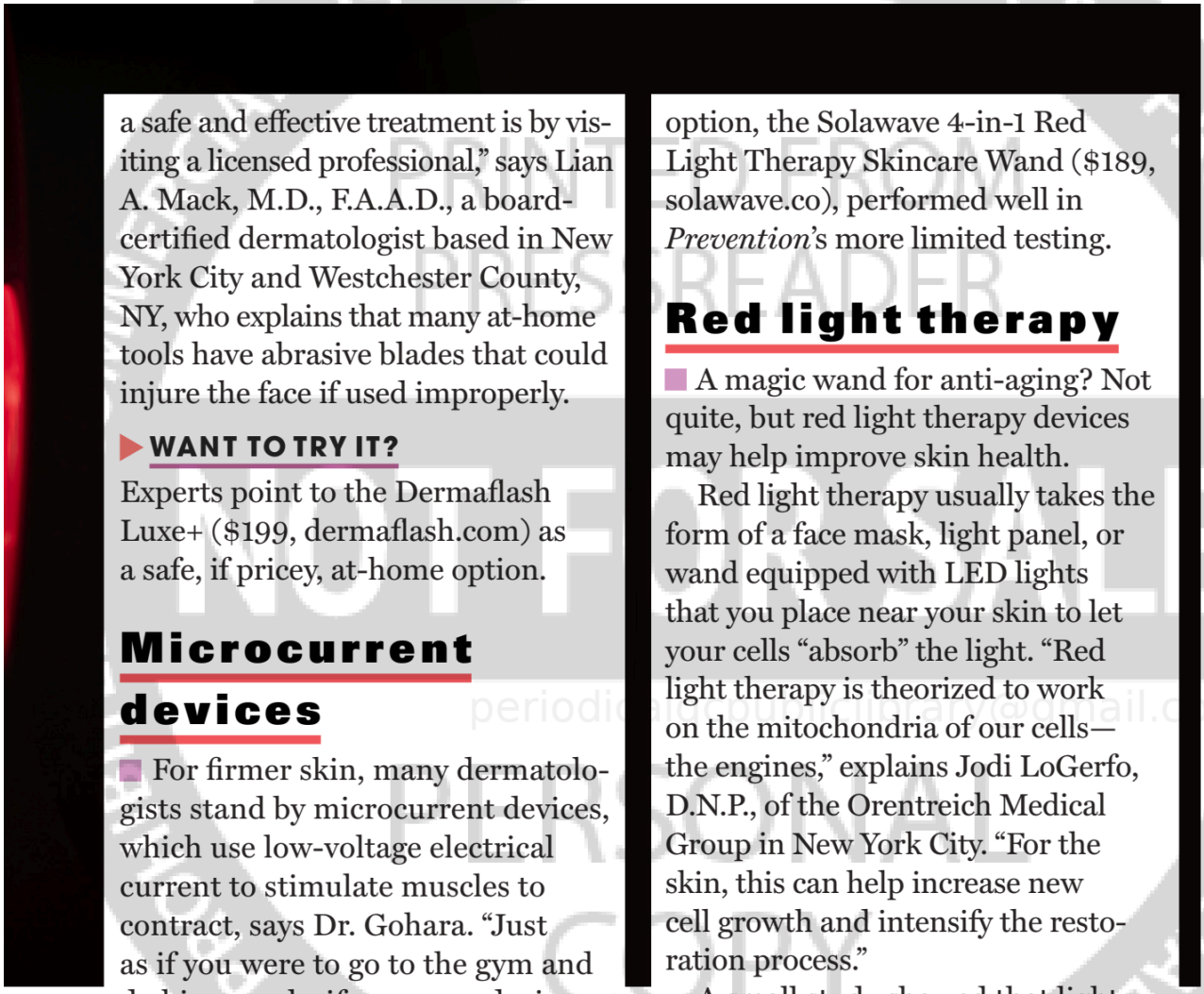

a safe and effective treatment is by visiting a licensed professional," says Lian A. Mack, M.D., F.A.A.D., a board-certified dermatologist based in New York City and Westchester County, NY, who explains that many at-home tools have abrasive blades that could injure the face if used improperly.

WANT TO TRY IT?

Experts point to the Dermaflash Luxe+ ($199, dermaflash.com) as a safe, if pricey, at-home option.

Microcurrent devices

For firmer skin, many dermatologists stand by microcurrent devices, which use low-voltage electrical current to stimulate muscles to contract, says Dr. Gohara. "Just as if you were to go to the gym and do bicep curls, if you use a device that creates contractions in the muscles, the muscles are going to become more defined."

WANT TO TRY IT?

Dr. Lal and Dr. Gohara both recommend NuFace Trinity+ Smart Advanced Facial Toning Device ($395, mynuface.com). This popular microcurrent device was tested by the Good Housekeeping Beauty Lab. One tester noted: "My skin seems a little firmer and definitely more radiant and smoother." A less expensive option, the Solawave 4-in-1 Red Light Therapy Skincare Wand ($189, solawave.co), performed well in *Prevention*'s more limited testing.

Red light therapy

A magic wand for anti-aging? Not quite, but red light therapy devices may help improve skin health.

Red light therapy usually takes the form of a face mask, light panel, or wand equipped with LED lights that you place near your skin to let your cells "absorb" the light. "Red light therapy is theorized to work on the mitochondria of our cells—the engines," explains Jodi LoGerfo, D.N.P., of the Orentreich Medical Group in New York City. "For the skin, this can help increase new cell growth and intensify the restoration process."

A small study showed that light therapy led to improved skin complexion, reduction of skin roughness and wrinkles, and increased collagen density. However, more extensive research needs to be conducted.

WANT TO TRY IT?

The Priori Skincare Unveiled LED Mask ($442, prioriskincare.com) is recommended by Diane Madfes, M.D., F.A.A.D., a board-certified dermatologist.

—Reporting by Christie Calucchia, Hannah Jeon, and Shannen Zitz

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EAT for better skin

BY ALYSSA JUNG

YOU CAN HAVE A PERFECTLY CURATED SKINCARE LINEUP and still feel as if you're missing a piece of the healthy-skin puzzle. **Try adding this step to your regimen:** eating more skin-friendly foods. Certain vitamins and minerals can impact skin quality factors like collagen production for clearer, brighter skin that makes you glow with confidence. This smoothie is a great place to start your culinary skin journey. It's packed with protein and vitamins A and C, making for a triple threat to acne, as well as antioxidants that contribute to collagen production and combat dry skin. You'll also get some vitamin B_6, which helps regulate sebum production to prevent skin from becoming too dry or too oily, and potassium to promote overall hydration.

IS IT WORTH TAKING COLLAGEN?

The jury is still out on whether collagen supplements benefit skin health and appearance, says Brittany Werner, M.S., R.D.N., director of coaching at Working Against Gravity, an online nutrition-coaching program. It can't hurt to try, but be sure you choose the right product. Keep these tips in mind:

▶ Select third-party-tested products. Phrases like "third-party certified" and "quality tested" signal that the item has undergone independent testing for quality, purity, and accuracy of ingredient content, Werner says.

▶ Look for "collagen peptides" or "hydrolyzed collagen" on the label. "Our bodies cannot absorb collagen in its whole form; to enter our bloodstream, it must be broken down into peptides to be absorbed through the gut," explains Werner. Hydrolyzed collagen undergoes a process that breaks it down.

▶ Pay attention to the source. Collagen can be derived from cows (bovine), fish (marine), or pigs (porcine). "Bovine is one type of collagen that's been shown to possibly be beneficial

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PINEAPPLE-CUCUMBER SMOOTHIES

TOTAL **5 MIN.**
SERVES **2**

- **¼ cup unsweetened almond milk**
- **½ cup plain Greek yogurt**
- **1 Tbsp fresh lemon juice**
- **1 Persian cucumber, chopped, plus thin slices for serving**
- **1 banana, cut into pieces, then frozen**
- **1 cup frozen pineapple chunks**
- **1 cup baby spinach**

In blender, combine all ingredients and blend until smooth. If desired, press sliced cucumbers against side of each glass before pouring in smoothie.

PER SERVING *About 178 cal, 4 g fat (1.5 g sat), 8 mg chol, 62 mg sodium, 31 g carb, 4 g fiber, 12.5 g sugar (0 g added sugar), 8 g pro*



MIKE GARTEN.

for hair, skin, and joint health, while marine collagen is considered a more sustainable option and may potentially be better absorbed by the body," Werner adds.

▶ Scan the entire ingredient list. "Look for products that are free from unnecessary additives, fillers, preservatives, sweeteners, and flavorings," says Werner.

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