

Food Fact Sheet: 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 best 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 its best and keep skin young-looking for as long as possible.

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 these nutrients and there are proven steps you can take to help reduce skin damage.

1. Variety is key

The most important food tip is to choose a wide range of foods. 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 will ensure 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 Guide' is a great place to start for information on food balance.



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 or if you are very active. Water, low-fat milk and sugarfree drinks including tea and coffee all count. Fruit juice and smoothies also count towards your fluid consumption, although they are a source of free sugars and so you should limit consumption to no more than a combined total of 150ml per day.

Causes of wrinkles, dryness and dehydrated skin

- smoking
- too much exposure to the sun and sun beds (especially on fair skin)
- too much alcohol intake
- a poor diet
- lack of sleep
- too much stress
- your genes!

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. No-one can say that drinking alcohol is absolutely safe, but if you do drink, try to stick within these guidelines below:

- Men and women are advised not to regularly drink more than 14 units a week.
- Spread your drinking over three days or more if you drink as much as 14 units a week.

For further help on alcohol advice see the BDA's Alcohol Food Fact Sheet.

What about chocolate?

There is good news for the chocolate lovers – there is no strong evidence to show that chocolate causes acne. Dark chocolate even provides more of those antioxidants that may help give skin protection. However chocolate is high in fat and sugar so should only be eaten in moderation.

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 step to protect your skin from sun damage. Ultraviolet light (invisible but powerful rays of the sun) damage the collagen and elastin in your skin which keep skin smooth and supple. Too much sun can cause wrinkles, dry, rough skin, and more seriously can cause noncancerous (benign) and cancerous (malignant) skin tumours. Never allow your skin to burn and use sun cream 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 aging 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.

Other essential tips

Don't smoke

Research shows that smoking speeds up the normal ageing process of skin. Toxins in smoke stop the skin from producing as much collagen contributing to wrinkles.

Make time for relaxation and sleep

Research has shown that too much stress can affect our skin health. In our fast moving pace of life, 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 skin's surface and will give your skin a rosy glow.

Summary

Start today – get proactive in helping to prevent wrinkles and getting your healthy glow by eating a balanced diet, avoiding smoking and alcohol, and staying active.

