

WE ALL KNOW THE OLD DICTUM "YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT," AND THAT A BALANCED

Just what



DIET WILL AFFECT THE TONE, TEXTURE, AND MOISTURE LEVELS OF YOUR SKIN. BUT IS

the doctor



POPPING A MULTIVITAMIN TABLET THE ONLY ANSWER? KIKI EVANS LOOKS INTO WHETHER



ordered

THE LATEST TOPICAL VITAMIN AND NUTRIENT CREAMS ARE ANOTHER SOLUTION.

Antioxidant vitamins (A, C, and E) have long been known to protect the body from aging, and possibly even from cancer, by absorbing damaging oxygen fragments (free radicals) that are produced in the skin by harmful UV radiation. Now, more evidence suggests that the benefits of antioxidants are even greater: They can help keep skin supple and reduce sun damage. So basically, our skin needs them. But how much, and in what form?

"A and C are the most beneficial vitamins to your skin, and are something everyone over the age of twenty should be including in their skincare routine," says David J. Goldberg, MD, director of Skin Laser and Surgery Specialists of

New York and New Jersey and a faculty member at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City. "Overall, they serve as support systems for your body's collagen production and help to undo skin damage, like wrinkles and brown spots, which are caused by ultraviolet radiation."

"You need vitamin C to stimulate cell regeneration and produce healthy collagen—which is what makes young skin plump and pink—so your skin looks and acts younger," adds Elizabeth Somer, MA, RD. "Collagen is the 'glue' that holds skin together—without enough vitamin C, collagen is poorly formed, resulting in the skin losing elasticity and dryness."

A PILL OR A POTION?

Even if you eat a healthy diet *and* take supplements, it might not be enough, because the skin quickly uses up its supplies of vitamins upon exposure to sunlight, according to Nicholas Perricone, MD, a research dermatologist and assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Yale University Medical School. "We know that if you take vitamin C orally, even in huge doses, the best you can do is increase your levels by 80 percent. A small amount of sun will deplete those levels," he explains. Enter topical applications. There is considerable new data





indicating their benefits. "What we are finding now is that if we apply vitamin C directly to the skin, we can get levels 40 to 60 times

higher than if we take it orally," continues Dr. Perricone. "Think about it—when you take a pill, it gets diluted and distributed throughout your body, yet a cream goes right to the area you want to protect."

HOW MUCH, HOW OFTEN?

"It's all new science, and we're not sure yet how much we really need," cautions Dr. Perricone. The enormous range of vitamin C products on the market today make it that much more confusing. Which is better, the high-tech, pricey serum with fancy glass eye droppers that have just 7 percent of vitamin C, or the mass-market home facial treatments that provide a whopping 30 percent?

Dr. Perricone, who has developed his own line of products, N.V. Perricone, MD Cosmeceuticals, prefers erring on the side of caution and recommends using high levels to ensure maximum benefit. But while manufacturers are offering higher and higher percentages of vitamin C, more is not necessarily better. "The key is not the concentration of vitamin C in the product but how much is actually being absorbed by your skin," says Meagan McLellan, president and CEO of Cellex-C International. Stability, too, appears to be a concern. Vitamin C is notoriously unstable and will not remain active indefinitely, so look for the expiration date on the bottle. "Any product without an expiration date is likely to be overstabilized and will probably be ineffective," warns McLellan. "You might as well be using cold cream."

The source of the vitamin C also makes a difference. "Most products contain L-ascorbic acid, which is acidic and irritates the skin," says Dr. Perricone. "It's also water soluble, so it doesn't penetrate the skin as well." Dr. Perricone and others prefer to use vitamin C Ester (the chemical name is ascorbyl palmitate). "I believe this is superior for a whole host of reasons, as it goes from being water soluble to being fat soluble, and can penetrate the skin. And it's a stable form of vitamin C," he says.

Another favorite ingredient among cosmetics companies, vitamin A, is less

controversial than C, but just as integral to skin care. "Vitamin A is an extremely effective topical exfoliant," says Jane Steinberg, MD, a board-certified dermatologist and medical director of the Advanced Cosmetic Laser Center in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. "It works from within, by zeroing in on problems beneath the surface, correcting collagen and making damaged skin cells line up properly. It's also very effective at diminishing the tiny wrinkles around your eyes and mouth."

So what does it do exactly? All forms of the vitamin—Retin-A, Avita, Renova, micro-Retin A, and retinol derivatives—speed up your skin's metabolism, thinning layers of dead skin cells and correcting skin imperfections—like large pores and uneven texture—in the process.

Those with sensitive skin, however, need to start out slowly. "Retinoids increase circulation to the skin's surface, which can cause redness and irritation," says Dr. Steinberg. "Start by using vitamin A every two or three days until your skin has time to adjust."

"I recommend patients use retinol products at night and vitamin C in the morning. Retinoids are deactivated by the sun, and in higher strengths, they can cause increased sun sensitivity," says Dr. Perricone.

THE WAY OF THE FUTURE

So, the benefits of topical applications of vitamin A and C seem apparent, but what can we look for in years to come? Dr. Perricone is excited about a whole slew of new research and several super-hot products that are now emerging.

"There's a new component of vitamin E, called Tocotrienal, which I've measured to be 40 to 60 times more powerful an antioxidant than the vitamin E component already used in skincare.

TOP: MURAD'S VITAMIN C INFUSION TREATMENT (SEE BOTTOM CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT); ELIZABETH ARDEN'S CERAMIDE HERBAL BOTANICAL SUPPLEMENTS FOR THE FACE; SONYA DAKAR'S SEAWEED LIPOSOME WITH ANTIOXIDANTS AND VITAMINS A, C, AND E; SJAL CELLULAR REPAIR CREME WITH VITAMINS A, C, AND E; EMERGIN C TOPICAL VITAMIN C WITH MILK CAPSULES. ALSO, THE N.V. PERRICONE, MD COSMECEUTICALS AMINE COMPLEX FACE LIFT IN THE VITAMIN C ESTER LINE, OR THE BODY TONING LOTION IN THE LIPOIC ACID LINE (NOT SHOWN)

Start looking out for it on labels."

Vitamin P, a buckwheat extract once only found in health food stores, is a mixture of citrus bioflavonoids and rutin that works to eliminate spider veins. "Spider veins are not 'broken capillaries'—they're weakened and stretched. Vitamin P strengthens those dilated capillary walls and shrinks them back to their original size," says Stephen Strassler, president of ReViva Labs in Haddonfield, New Jersey. "In three to four weeks, you may see them lessen."

"Ultimately, the key to getting the most out of vitamins will be to use all of them," says Dr. Goldberg. "Vitamin C alone, for example, is great, but combining it with an arsenal of other vitamins is even better—and it's never too late to start." ■

