

# Enjoying a Lifetime of Healthy Skin

**W**hen most people embark on a fitness program, they are primarily concerned with losing weight, lowering cholesterol, or improving other aspects of their internal health. There is another benefit that should motivate adults to focus on diet and exercise: **great skin**.

The quality of your skin is tremendously affected by what you eat and how you care for your body. Maintaining a healthy diet and exercise regime—and taking a few extra steps in your general personal care routine—can greatly improve your skin and perhaps even slow down the effects of aging.

During these dry winter months, we should pay particular attention to the health of our skin, making sure we look and feel our best. Here are simple suggestions to get you started:

**Exercise**—Regular exercise helps reduce stress and increase the circulation in the body, which is important for delivering nutrients from food to the skin cells. Strong circulation is also important for making collagen and reducing the appearance of wrinkles. So make sure you are taking brisk walks, going to the gym, doing a few laps in the pool, or taking on some other form of regular exercise.

Keep in mind that if you have acne on your face or body, a great workout might be the most important thing you can do. The sweat created during a vigorous workout cleanses pores and helps calm acne-causing testosterone hormones.

**Diet**—A daily multi-vitamin is important for overall health, including skin health. Your food choices should be rich in vitamins as well.

The antioxidant **Vitamin A** is important for maintaining healthy skin cells and fighting free radical damage that can prematurely age the skin. A deficiency will result in a dry, flaky complexion. Mangos, sweet potatoes and spinach are rich in vitamin A—and are great with any meal.

Another antioxidant, **Vitamin E**, protects against skin damage and premature aging of facial tissue. The mineral selenium (found in cottage cheese, nuts, sunflower seeds, and oily fish) works with vitamin E to protect against skin cancer and fight dandruff.

The anti-inflammatory niacin (**vitamin B3**) soothes irritated, red, or blotchy skin. Great food choices include avocados, wheat bran, veal, and liver.

Essential fatty acids (**Omega 3s**) found in flaxseed oil,



salmon, and pumpkin seeds also are crucial to hydrating the skin, keeping pores clean, and helping prevent acne.

**Vitamin C**, yet another antioxidant, fights skin damage and wrinkles by helping produce collagen, the structural protein in your skin, and elastin, the skin's elastic protein. Peppers, kale and kiwi are great sources of vitamin C.

**Personal Care**—Skin becomes dry when it loses too much water or oil—particularly during dry winter months when we are spending more time indoors. We can take simple steps every day to restore lost moisture and make our skin softer, smoother, and less likely to crack. These include:

- Using warm water for bathing, and avoiding hot water which quickly removes natural skin oils.
- Using mild, fragrance-free soaps or cleansers that contain moisturizer (avoiding products with alcohol).
- Shaving after bathing, and using a shaving cream or gel (for best results, leave cream or gel on the skin for 3 minutes before shaving).
- Taking only 5- or 10-minute baths or showers (any longer and your skin become less hydrated), and drying off by patting skin to retain moisture.
- Using a daily moisturizer to seal water into the skin and help it stay soft, supple, and younger looking.
- Applying ointments, lotions or creams right after bathing while the skin is still moist.
- Using a humidifier to keep the air in your home moist.
- Drinking plenty of water daily.
- Using sunscreen with SPF 15 or more daily, year-round. Also, always avoid the sun between 10AM and 4PM, when its rays are the strongest.

For smokers, perhaps the thought of improving your skin's appearance will motivate you to stop. Among its many other dangers, smoking decreases blood flow by narrowing the tiny blood vessels in the skin, and depletes the skin of oxygen and nutrients. It also damages collagen and elastin, which makes your skin look older and contributes to wrinkles.

We already know the many benefits of making better food choices and continuing with a regular exercise program. Now, with a few simple tweaks to our everyday personal care routines, we can add healthy skin to the list. And, once these steps become habit, we will enjoy a healthy, youthful look for many years to come.