

*Your Diet,
Your Skin...*

THE WHOLE PICTURE

■ The skin is our largest organ. It performs a variety of functions, but primarily it acts as a vital, protective barrier to the forces of the outside world. As a critical part of the body's immune, circulatory and metabolic systems, the skin reflects the state of our well-being. What you eat is reflected in the function and appearance of your skin. In this article, I will discuss several key things you can do through diet and nutrition to promote the well-being of your skin.

First and foremost, take a look at your overall diet and determine what items are at the top of the list of unhealthy things you consume and eliminate them. For example, soda, sugary foods, overly spicy foods, high fat foods and highly processed white foods (white bread, white rice, many pre-made frozen and packaged foods, white potatoes and pasta) are things that your body could do without. Sugar is an enemy of skin health. It is believed by some that increased blood levels of sugar (such as those that occur after

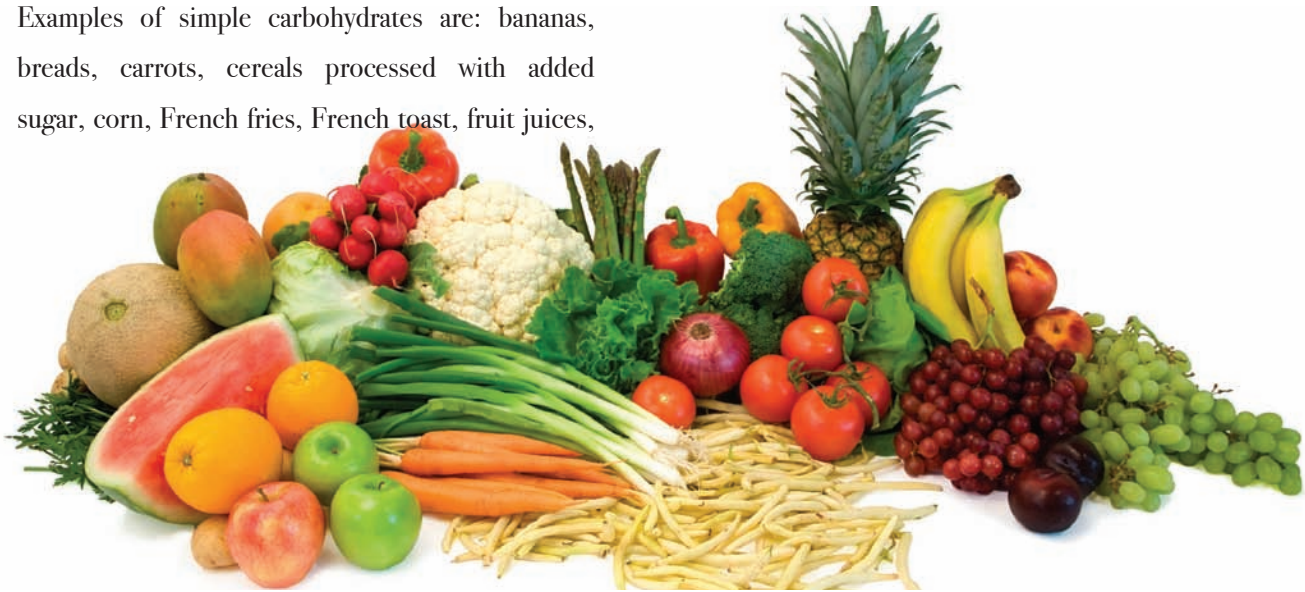
eating candy or white foods) lead to higher levels of inflammation in the skin and damage to the skin. Soda contains 39-41 grams of sugar per serving or about 10 tablespoons and causes a rapid rise in blood sugar. The link between sugar and eczema has not been well studied, but many scientists believe that sugar can contribute to eczema in children. It may also be the case that the sugary foods might trigger an allergic reaction. If one believes that candida yeast are involved in eczema, then following a low sugar diet may be the answer along with avoiding yeast, fermented food, acidic foods and hydrogenated oils.

By Todd E. Schlesinger, MD, FAAD



Reducing alcohol and stimulants like caffeine can help you control eczema or psoriasis. Stimulants and alcohol are acidic and alcohol contains lots of sugar, which can worsen these conditions.

Carbohydrates can be divided into those that are simple (bad) and those that are complex (good). Examples of simple carbohydrates are: bananas, breads, carrots, cereals processed with added sugar, corn, French fries, French toast, fruit juices,



mangos, pancakes, papaya, pasta, peas, popcorn, white potatoes, white rice, sugar, waffles. Examples of complex carbohydrates are: apples, asparagus, beans, broccoli, blackberries, blueberries, cabbage, cantaloupe, citrus fruits, green beans, honeydew melon, kiwi, leafy greens, peaches, pears, plums, raspberries, spinach, and strawberries. For the best health of your skin, avoid the simple carbohydrates and consume the complex ones.

Recent research has shown that iron deficiency has a much closer link to hair loss than many doctors realize. Iron is found in the blood and its function is to carry oxygen in the red blood cells to the muscles. Additionally, iron is what gives blood its characteristic red color. While controversy still exists, in my experience working with hair loss patients, treating for iron deficiency, even in the absence of anemia

or low blood count, may be the key to restoring hair growth. One way to check the total amount of iron the body stores is to run a blood test called a ferritin level. Ferritin is a protein that plays an important role in iron storage. As a general rule, the less ferritin in the blood, the less iron a body has saved up. What most doctors consider to be a normal ferritin level may

be in fact, too low. Ferritin levels in the 10-15ng/ml range are considered “normal”, but a ferritin level of at least 50-75ng/ml is needed to help replenish hair. Ways to replenish iron include dietary measures such as consuming tofu, lentils, beans, oysters, spinach, prunes, raisins and even lean beef (in limited quantities). Doctors use iron pills to replace iron, but you should never take iron supplementation unless a doctor has told you that you have iron deficiency. Unlike Vitamin C, your body cannot eliminate excess iron so easily if you take too much. If you are not deficient, you can get iron overload, which can be dangerous.

Biotin is a B vitamin that plays an important role in energy metabolism. Biotin helps essential enzymes break down carbohydrates, fats and proteins. Biotin deficiency is not common, but may be caused by

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consuming large amounts of raw egg whites or by taking antacids for heartburn, acid reflux or GERD. Taking biotin supplementation can help those with brittle nails and hair loss. Biotin may be found in foods such as brewer's yeast, green peas, oats, soybeans, walnuts, sunflower seeds, green peas, bulgur and brown rice. Biotin supplements may be found over-the-counter in moderate doses or in higher doses through your doctor. When used with care and according to standard dosage levels, dietary supplements are a safe and efficient means of maintaining the necessary daily biotin levels. In fact, for vegetarians, a dietary supplement containing biotin is probably a very smart choice.

Other vitamins play an important role in the health of the skin, however it is important to know that taking too much of a vitamin or mineral can be toxic and extremely dangerous. Vitamin A helps with the proper maintenance and repair of collagen, the building block of skin and mucous membranes. Vitamin A also reduces the production of sebum (the oil which is produced and excreted from your oil glands) and is a powerful antioxidant. The B-complex vitamins such as Thiamine (Vitamin B1), Riboflavin (Vitamin B2), Niacin amide (Vitamin B3), Pantothenic acid (Vitamin B5) and Pyridoxine (Vitamin B6) play an important role in ridding your body of toxins, improvement of the mucous membranes, improving circulation, stress reduction and immune system function. Vitamin C is an antioxidant required for many functions of the body including tissue growth and repair. Vitamin C protects against infection and enhances immune system function. Chromium helps reduce infections in the skin and is obtained in adequate amounts through supplements. Zinc aids in tissue healing and prevents scarring. Zinc also helps promote a healthy immune system and the healing of wounds in addition to being an antioxidant. Vitamin E is an antioxidant that promotes tissue healing and repair. It prevents cell damage by reducing the oxidation of fats and the formation of damaging free-radicals.



Finally, remember the simple things: eat a balanced diet rich in fruit, vegetables and grains, drink plenty of water, and avoid high fat or sugary foods and drinks. Remember to exercise, get enough sleep and wash your hands throughout the day to minimize the spread of potentially harmful bacteria.

For the health of your skin, wear sunscreen that blocks UVA and UVB rays with an SPF of at least 15-30, avoid excessive sun exposure and have your skin examined from head-to-toe by a board-certified dermatologist a minimum of once-a-year, more often if you have a personal or family history of skin cancer or get a lot of exposure to the sun. ■



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