



healthy living » beauty

Eating Your Way to Healthy, Beautiful Skin

BY CAROLYN C. CHANG, MD, FACS



Beauty does come from within. Everyone knows that a healthy diet will help you lose weight. But most people don't realize that a healthy diet can also help your skin look radiant, beautiful, and younger. A diet of fresh, unprocessed food will not only deliver cosmetic benefits, but can also help the largest organ in your body—your skin—defend and heal itself against environmental contaminants and hazards such as the sun. As a plastic surgeon, my patients are always asking me what they can do to improve their skin. I tell them that a good skincare regimen, sunscreen, sleep, and a diet rich with skin-boosting nutrients are the key to the fountain of youth.

Here are essential foods and nutrients that help heal, remedy, and prevent a wide range of skin troubles, leading you to healthy, beautiful skin.

Green Tea Green tea is rich in antioxidants that can reduce inflammation and protect cell membranes. It has been called the “fountain of youth” for skin because it helps to reduce the damage from overexposure to the sun's ultraviolet light. This in turn can help reduce the risk of skin cancer. Green tea is host to polyphenols, a type of antioxidant. Antioxidants are important because they work to eliminate cancer-causing free radicals that are prevalent in our environment. These free radicals occur naturally but increase due to some environmental conditions like pollution, ultraviolet light, and cigarette smoke.

Salmon Foods with omega-3s, including salmon and other fatty fishes, are essential for achieving healthy skin. Salmon is full of

good fatty acids such as omega-3s that work to keep cell membranes healthy by keeping out harmful substances. Omega-3s also reduce the body's production of inflammatory agents that can damage the skin. Increasing your consumption of foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids will help keep your skin supple and youthful. Whenever possible, wild salmon is best, as farmed salmon often contains high levels of antibiotics and heavy metals.

Flaxseed oil If you don't eat fish, flaxseed is one of the best alternative sources of omega-3 fatty acids. Just one teaspoon of flaxseed oil per day provides 2.5 grams of omega-3, which will nourish and hydrate the skin.

Blueberries Many experts call blueberries the “highest food source” of antioxidants. Antioxidants target free radicals that can wreak havoc on skin cells. If skin cells are protected from damage, the skin looks younger for longer. When eating blueberries, go organic, as conventional berries are often sprayed heavily with pesticides.

Carrots These are an outstanding source of vitamin A, which is required for developing and maintaining healthy skin by assisting in cell turnover. This process keeps cell growth and development in motion. A deficiency of vitamin A can cause dry, flaky skin. Carrots also contain high levels of antioxidants, which prevent free radical damage in skin cells.

Mangoes Mangoes are great “face food.” Like carrots, they are rich in vitamin A—a serving provides more than 80% of your daily requirement. Besides working to combat dry-

Foods that are good on the outside

Some of the same foods that nourish our bodies from the inside can be applied to the outside to cleanse, moisturize, and minimize the effects of aging. I asked Angelina Umansky, owner of San Francisco's Spa Radiance, about foods that could be topically applied to the skin to improve its appearance and health. She cautions that before applying any food to your face, first try a skin test on your arm to ensure that you have no irritation or allergic reaction.

Yogurt Plain yogurt is a natural moisturizer when applied externally. It is high in lactic acid and enzymes that help hydrate and soothe the skin. Yogurt, when combined with honey and lemon juice, makes a wonderful exfoliation mask that will soften the skin on your face and neck.

Egg whites A mask of whipped egg whites is one of the easiest and most natural tightening and firming remedies known. The protein and lysozyme enzymes may be the reason this mask is often called the “egg white face-lift.” An egg white mask may also help reduce acne breakouts by narrowing the pores of the skin. Whip the whites of two eggs, add a tablespoon of honey and a few drops of lemon, smooth it on your face, and let it dry for 15 minutes, then rinse with warm water.

Green papaya A natural skin lightener, this fruit's skin contains papain, an enzyme that exfoliates and accelerates skin cell turnover. The result is the lightening effect of newer, brighter skin. Rub the fleshy side of a green papaya directly on your skin for optimal effects. Rinse after 15 minutes.

ness and flakiness in your complexion, vitamin A also works as an antioxidant by fighting the free radical damage that can prematurely age your skin.

Spinach, turnip greens, broccoli This trio of dark green vegetables is full of vitamin A. Remember, without enough vitamin A, skin can become dry, tough, and scaly. These vegetables can also help prevent acne and improve digestion because they are alkalizing. By reducing your body's acidity, they help your body keep in balance.

Citrus and cranberry Grapefruit, oranges, lemons, and cranberries are rich in vitamin C. Because your body doesn't store vitamin C very well, you need to consume these foods in abundance. Vitamin C works to produce and preserve collagen. Collagen breakdown really

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picks up in your mid-30s, so it is important to adopt a diet rich in citrus early in order to head off aging.

Almonds Few people realize that almonds are wonderful for your complexion. They are rich in oils and vitamin E, which is a powerful antioxidant that helps protect your skin against damage and premature aging.

Water It hydrates your skin cells, keeping nutrients in and flushing toxins out. Drinking plenty of filtered tap water will keep your skin hydrated, healthy, and younger looking. It seems basic, but most of us don't drink enough water. Not only does it hydrate our skin, it also is one of the most important fundamental nutrients that our organs need to thrive.

Super Healing Nutrients

Zinc Zinc helps reduce wound healing time and bolsters the immune system to help fight off infection. Zinc is present in a wide variety of foods, particularly in protein foods. Good sources for zinc include meat and dairy products, beans and lentils.

Vitamin C Foods rich in vitamin C help to strengthen scar tissue and reduce tissue death after trauma, and strengthen the immune system.

Bromelain An enzyme found in pineapple, bromelain is useful for reducing swelling, pain, and bruising. It acts like an anti-inflammatory, much like ibuprofen.

Food matters. Avoiding the wrong foods will help prevent bad skin reactions: Processed foods, high-sugar junk foods, saturated fats, fried foods, and refined carbohydrates such as white flour are especially bad for you, since they can trap the oil and bacteria under your skin that cause acne and other skin troubles. If you want beautiful, youthful-looking skin, start by consuming healthy portions of the right foods. A diet high in fatty fishes, leafy greens, nuts, fruits, green tea, water, and whole grains will help to reduce oil in the skin and help to ease redness and irritation. Bon appétit! 🍷

Dr. Carolyn Chang is a Stanford-educated plastic surgeon who specializes in cosmetic and plastic surgery for women. She serves as vice chairman of the department of plastic surgery at California Pacific Medical Center and is one of SF's leading plastic surgeons. She is a perfectionist whose natural approach reflects her commitment to overall health and wellness.