

FOR  
WOMEN OF  
STYLE  
AND  
SUBSTANCE

# MORE

MARCH  
2016  
VOL. 19  
NO. 2

**WEAR  
THIS, NOT  
THAT**  
AT 30, 40,  
50

**THE NEW  
DRUG-FREE  
WAY TO HEAL  
YOURSELF**

MEXICO'S  
HIDDEN  
GEM

DIANE LANE

**ON KICKING  
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**BEAUTY  
MUSTS FOR  
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**THE #1  
SECRET  
TO FIRM  
SKIN**

**WOULD  
YOU  
REALLY BE  
HAPPIER  
WITH LESS  
STUFF?**



GET  
*firmer*  
SKIN FAST

Have you met collagen, your skin's best friend? Time to get to know each other better, because if you're over 30, this pillowy, fabulously face-plumping protein has already started to diminish. Here, every possible tip and trick for protecting the stores you have and creating even more

BY JOLENE EDGAR

PHOTO: FLORIAN SOMMER / FELIX ARCHIVE

## AFICIONADO

BEAUTY

**NEXT TIME** Netflix fails to deliver a satisfying weekend binge, try this (utterly unscientific) experiment: Pull up the 2006 *Friday Night Lights* pilot and check out Connie Britton as the coach's wife; then flip over to a recent *Nashville* and see her as "Queen of Country" singing star Rayna James. Or observe Ellen Pompeo as a lovestruck intern on the first season of *Grey's Anatomy*, then fast-forward a decade, to where the character is a highly successful but newly widowed top surgeon. Past and present, both women are capital-G Gorgeous, showing precious few signs of aging. But when you before-and-after the women's faces (streaming makes it mercilessly easy to do), it's hard not to feel that a little something has been lost. Of course, we have all undergone the same loss, as is obvious when we look through old photos and see our own "before" faces: ripe, plump and full, with a soft, light-catching curve to the cheeks. Huh... where'd that woman go?

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#### THE STUFF OF GREATNESS

WHAT'S missing from our faces would be collagen, the most abundant protein in the body. As an integral part of our wound-healing process, it sometimes unglamorously reveals itself in lumpy postsurgical scars. In its more celebrated role, collagen makes skin thick, taut and strong—strong enough to resist folding when we move a facial muscle—and keeps pores tight and unnoticeable. "Like the boning in a couture gown, collagen provides structure and support, holding everything up," says Jessica Wu, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. "Decrease the collagen and skin not only sags and crinkles but loses its ability to reflect light, so its radiance dims."

When we admire the fresh beauty of a recent college grad, we're actually reacting to more than collagen, explains Boston-based dermatologist Ranella Hirsch: "That look derives mainly from three skin components—collagen, elastin and hyaluronic acid—all functioning independently and synergistically to create that supple, youthful canvas." The three are nestled deep in the skin matrix, a cushy layer beneath the surface. While collagen contributes the skin's framework,

elastin gives it stretch, so it springs back into shape after we smile or squint. Hyaluronic acid (HA) holds water in the skin, keeping it hydrated and plump and allowing all its cells—collagen-making fibroblasts included—to perform perfectly. At their peak, the trio stave off wrinkles, hollows and jiggly jowls. Collagen, however, is crucial to the retention of elastin and HA, says Whitney Bowe, clinical assistant professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City. So when collagen diminishes, the others do too—codependent to the end.

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#### THREATS TO YOUR COLLAGEN

ONCE WE TURN 30, we begin to lose collagen at the rate of about 1 percent a year as the natural result of aging, but certain factors exacerbate the slowdown of the protein's production. **THE SUN** is collagen's biggest foe. Beyond corrupting our cellular DNA in cancer-inducing ways, ultraviolet beams give rise to inflammation, harmful free radicals and nasty enzymes called MMPs, all of which chew up or otherwise weaken collagen and elastin. Other threats to your collagen are pollution and cigarette smoke, which "constrict blood vessels in the skin, severely limiting the flow of collagen-essential oxygen and nutrients to cells," says Dendy Engelman, director of dermatologic surgery at New York Medical College. **SUGAR** is another kind of kryptonite for collagen. When we consume it to excess, it lingers in the bloodstream and gloms onto collagen and elastin fibers, stiffening and distorting them (a process known as glycation). While sugar's toll is somewhat gradual, menopause—or, more specifically, **THE PRECIPITOUS DROP IN ESTROGEN** punctuating this phase—packs a more immediate punch. As a potent antioxidant, estrogen protects collagen by extinguishing inflammation and neutralizing free radicals. What's more, "there are estrogen receptors on the fibroblasts in our skin, which, when switched on by the hormone, directly stimulate collagen synthesis," explains Diane Madfes, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City. As estrogen levels plummet, those receptors shut down, causing a swift 30 percent drop-off

in collagen creation in the first five years of menopause. Studies estimate an average loss of 2 percent per postmenopausal year over a 20-year period, but "continued decline really depends on the person," Madfes notes. If you're stressed (*if??!*) or wrestle with insomnia, you are also contending with cortisol, a hormone that creates inflammatory cells, which crumble collagen.

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#### SHORING UP YOUR SUPPLY

IS IT TIME for the good news yet? Yes! Several strategies exist for protecting and rebuilding collagen. "Using sunscreen is the best thing you can do to prevent the degradation of collagen," says Hirsch, who recommends a daily dose of broad-spectrum SPF 30+. At this point in sunscreen history, most products block only UVA and UVB rays, not infrared and visible light, which have also been shown to corrupt collagen; to fight those, you need antioxidants, such as vitamins C and E, ferulic acid, tea extracts and resveratrol, which can "defuse the free radicals that light breeds while suppressing MMPs," says Bowe. Antioxidants are also your best defense against pollution, and vitamin C offers the added perk of triggering new collagen growth while safeguarding your existing supply. For maximum efficacy, look for C in the form of l-ascorbic acid at a 15 or 20 percent strength, as found in **SKINCEUTICALS CE Ferulic (\$162; SKINCEUTICALS.COM)** and **DRUNK ELEPHANT C-Firma Day Serum (\$80; SEPHORA.COM)**.

Your nighttime regimen should include a collagen grower, such as retinol (or a prescription retinoid), glycolic acid, peptides or growth factors. The best-studied anti-agers on the planet, retinoids "go to work at the fibroblast level, getting them to produce more youthful, normal strands of collagen," explains David Bank, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at New York-Presbyterian Hospital in New York City. Ease in with a low-dose, moisturizing product, such as **ROC Retinol Correxion Sensitive Night Cream (\$20; DRUGSTORES)**. An alternative to retinol, glycolic acid (found in everything from serums to peels) dissolves the glue binding dead surface cells and, in doing so, "sends a message to the live layer beneath to build

## AFICIONADO BEAUTY

new collagen," says Neal Schultz, clinical professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City. (**BEAUTYRX** *The Progressive Peel*, \$70; **BEAUTYRX.COM** and **OLAY** *ProX Anti-Aging Nightly Micro Peel*, \$40; **DRUGSTORES** are gentle enough to use nightly.)

Dermatologists can amplify your at-home results with an array of fast-acting pro tools, from chemical peels and lasers to tightening and microneedling machines. The key to these procedures is "to induce a controlled injury in the skin and take advantage of the body's wound-healing process and the new collagen it creates," says Joshua Zeichner, director of cosmetic and clinical research in dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City. Our best bets, doctors say, are fractional lasers, ultrasound therapy and radio frequency procedures—all use heat to jump-start collagen—along with the latest MD-administered needling treatments, such as Profound, which combines microneedling with radio frequency energy. "Radio frequency heat is delivered at the tips of 10 fine needles inserted into the skin at the depth of the dermis," says Wu. "It's the only treatment shown to generate collagen, elastin and hyaluronic acid." (Expect up to 10 days of downtime and a \$3,500 price tag.)

### THE ESTROGEN FACTOR

COUNTLESS STUDIES have confirmed the hormone's ability to ramp up collagen production. One trial found that a year of oral estrogen therapy can increase the skin's thickness by 30 percent. Even with estrogen creams, "the skin rejuvenates itself, getting thicker in as little as two weeks," says Wu. Of course, the hormone is also highly controversial, having been linked to a potentially elevated risk of breast cancer, among other diseases. Another smart move for menopausal women is to up their intake of plant-derived phytoestrogens (with foods such as roasted soy nuts, tofu or ground flaxseed) to reap the estrogen-like benefits they're known to afford. Of course, you should always talk to your doctor before using any of these methods, especially if you have a personal or family history of an estrogen-dependent cancer.

### SKIN-FIRMING FOODS

CUTTING back on added sugars and refined carbs—sweeteners in coffee, evaporated cane juice in yogurt, white bread on sandwiches, sports drinks and soda—can help preserve collagen. Certain spices, such as cinnamon and ginger, and resveratrol-rich red grapes have also been shown to fight glycation, says Brooke Alpert, a registered dietitian in New York City and coauthor of *The Sugar Detox: Lose Weight, Feel Great and Look Years Younger*. And when it comes to sparking collagen production, "nothing beats vitamin C," she adds. Make sure you've got a C-rich food on your plate at least twice a day. It's equally crucial to have some form of protein at every meal; all are "tantamount to eating collagen," Alpert notes. This brings us to the latest supplements and drinks aimed at cultivating collagen from the inside out. While not all ingestible collagens are alike, some companies have done solid clinical testing to substantiate their claims. One is the maker of Verisol, the brand of peptides found in **RESERVEAGE Collagen Replenish** (**RESERVEAGE.COM**). In a recent double-blind, placebo-controlled study of 114 women ages 45 to 65, those who took a Verisol supplement once a day for eight weeks experienced a 20 percent reduction in crow's-feet on average (with a maximum improvement of 49.9 percent).

### REPLACING WHAT'S BEEN LOST

"HYALURONIC acid fillers are a substitute for what's lost with age, be it collagen, bone or fat," says Zeichner. In addition to building volume, HA has another advantage, which scientists at the University of Michigan discovered: collagen stimulation. Other non-HA fillers, such as Sculptra (made from poly-L-lactic acid) and Radiesse (calcium hydroxylapatite), trigger collagen as more of a primary goal; however, unlike HA, they can't be dissolved with a simple shot if you're unhappy with the outcome. ©

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