



About Face

Age gracefully by staying savvy about what you put on your skin. Avoid potentially irritating chemical ingredients and opt instead for safe, natural anti-aging skin care.

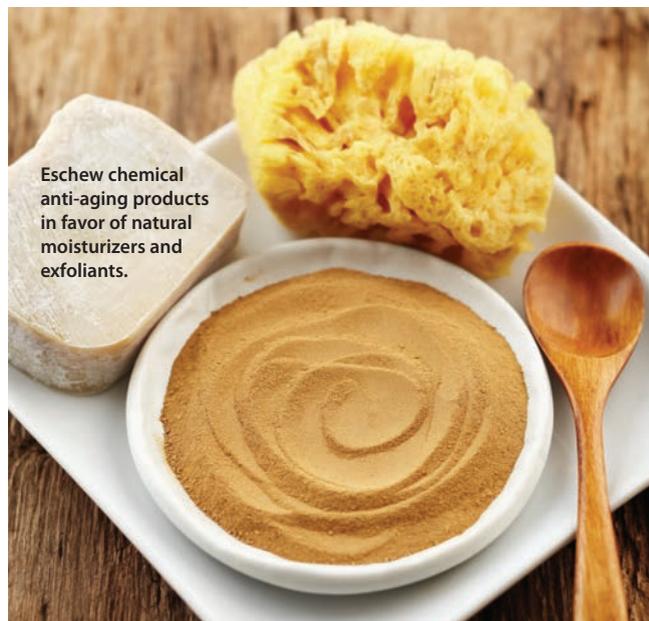
BY GINA DEBACKER

ANXIETIES ABOUT AGING have many of us swarming the market for products that promise to bring back youthful, radiant complexions—the U.S. anti-aging skin-care industry is expected to expand from \$80 billion in 2011 to \$114 billion by 2015, according to the market research firm Global Industry Analysts. It can almost feel more natural to fight the aging process than to embrace it.

Aging is a fact of life, and some natural skin changes are unavoidable: Our skin starts to produce about 1 percent less collagen each year after age 20, leaving it thinner and more fragile. As we age, skin also produces less elastin and glycosaminoglycans (GAGs), which help support elastin and collagen.

Get Your Beauty Sleep

As it turns out, “beauty sleep” is not just an old adage. In a new study commissioned by Estée Lauder and conducted at University Hospitals Case Medical Center, researchers used a skin-aging scoring system to identify signs of aging in 60 premenopausal women between the ages of 30 and 49, half of whom fell into the category of “poor-quality sleeper.” Poor-quality sleepers showed increased signs of intrinsic skin changes such as fine lines, uneven pigmentation and skin elasticity, whereas good-quality sleepers recovered more efficiently from environmental stressors such as sunburn. There’s no magic number when it comes to adequate sleep, but aim for seven to nine hours of quality sleep each night. (Read about getting better-quality sleep on page 54.)



But our habits also affect our skin. Sun and environmental damage such as pollution can leave us with freckles and sun spots, and exacerbate loss of collagen, elastin and GAGs. In fact, up to 90 percent of the wrinkles, dark spots and loss of collagen we typically attribute to aging is actually caused by sun exposure.

To maintain youthful skin, start with healthy habits: Eat well, stay hydrated, exercise regularly, and avoid exposure to sun and smoke. Signs of aging such as wrinkles take decades to develop. It’s unlikely they will disappear entirely with a smear of a cream. Instead, aim to slow the aging process by preventing damage. Protect, exfoliate and moisturize, and pay attention to what you put on your skin—many “miracle creams” are made with potentially irritating chemicals that offer modest results at best.

SAFE, NATURAL SOLUTIONS

PROTECT: Sunscreen is one of the most important ways we can keep younger-looking skin. People who regularly apply sunscreen have 24 percent fewer signs of skin aging than those who only use sunscreen on occasion, according to a new study published by the journal *Annals of Internal Medicine*. Avoid sunscreens made with vitamin A (more on that later), estrogen-mimicking oxybenzone, and SPFs higher than 50, which research indicates may not actually provide additional protection. Opt for a mineral-based natural sunscreen that lists micronized zinc and titanium dioxide as active ingredients, at SPF 30.

EXFOLIATE: Because it sloughs away dead skin cells and unclogs oil and dirt from pores, exfoliation is particularly important for aging skin. As our skin ages, the natural exfoliation process slows and dry cells linger longer on the surface. Gently exfoliate mature skin once or twice a week with natural particles such as sugar, nuts or seeds. (Salt is typically too abrasive for facial skin.)

Avoid products with plastic microbeads, also known as polymers. These scrubber fragments move through drains and into the ocean, where they have become a concern to marine life.

MOISTURIZE: As we age, our top layer of skin can dry and form microscopic cracks that make it more irritable and prone to inflammation. Regular application of moisturizers with natural emollients and ingredients can help: A popular active ingredient in anti-aging moisturizers, coenzyme Q10 can improve skin’s texture and elasticity, boost collagen production and ward off free radicals. Indian frankincense extract, also known as *Boswellia serrata*, has anti-inflammatory properties and may help reduce wrinkles. Vitamin B3, often called niacin or niacinamide on product labels, boosts hydration and reduces redness.

MORE TOPICAL SKIN TREATS

RESVERATROL: Most often associated with defending against heart disease, the antioxidant resveratrol may also fight sun damage when applied to the skin, according to a 2005 study. Look for topical beauty products that contain resveratrol, and consider taking it in supplement form for additional skin benefits.

TEA: Green, black, white and oolong teas contain antioxidant and anti-inflammatory compounds that help calm and soothe skin. Green tea extract is used in wrinkle creams to help slow the development of some signs of aging and enhance sun protection.

VITAMINS: Aging skin naturally loses vitamin C, a nutrient that can help fight signs of aging. Use beauty products with this essential nutrient to reduce age spots and boost collagen production for firmer skin. Combined with vitamin E, it can pack a powerful punch in repairing skin damage from both age and sun. >>

Anti-Aging Arsenal

Try these editor-recommended products.



Rich in antioxidants and vitamin E, Argan Oil from Kahina Giving Beauty can help reduce fine lines and restore elasticity.
\$36, kahina-giving-beauty.com



Protect skin from sun damage with Age Defense Moisturizer from Renée Rouleau, an SPF 30 lotion enriched with green and white teas.
\$37, reneerouleau.com



Lightly citrus-scented Clarify & Illuminate Cleanser from NOW Solutions is a gentle way to boost collagen production.
\$16, nowfoods.com



Infused with antioxidants, vitamins and coenzyme Q10, Eight Greens Whip Moisturizer from Eminence Organic Skin Care can rejuvenate mature skin.
\$62, eminenceorganics.com



Reduce dark circles and puffiness with Sea Buckthorn Age Defying Eye Cream from Sibu Beauty.
\$25, sibubeautey.com

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CONCERNING ANTI-AGING INGREDIENTS

Shopping for anti-aging skin care, you will see many of the same “miracle ingredients” listed on product after product. Just because they’re popular doesn’t mean you should assume they’re effective—or safe. The laws surrounding labeling on skin-care products aren’t as stringent as you might think (or hope). Here are a few common anti-aging ingredients that raise concerns.

RETINOL, a derivative of vitamin A found in skin-care products and sunscreen, is often used to reduce the appearance of wrinkles, boost skin elasticity and encourage skin regeneration. Retinol can also cause itchiness, dryness and peeling. The renewed skin retinol encourages may be more sensitive to sun and susceptible to risks such as sunburns and skin cancer. Studies show that high doses of retinoids (the class retinol is part of) may be harmful to children in utero and nursing infants. Oral retinoid isotretinoin (used in some acne treatments) is known to carry a high risk of birth defects or even loss of pregnancy. Avoid using products with retinol during daytime (especially sunscreen) and do not

use them if you are pregnant. Retinol may be listed on labels as retinyl linoleate and retinyl palmitate.

ALPHA-HYDROXY ACID (AHA) is added to anti-aging products to exfoliate and remove dead skin cells. Unfortunately, this chemical ingredient also increases sensitivity to ultraviolet rays. The FDA has warned consumers about AHA concerns, revealing reports of effects that include burning, dermatitis and swelling.

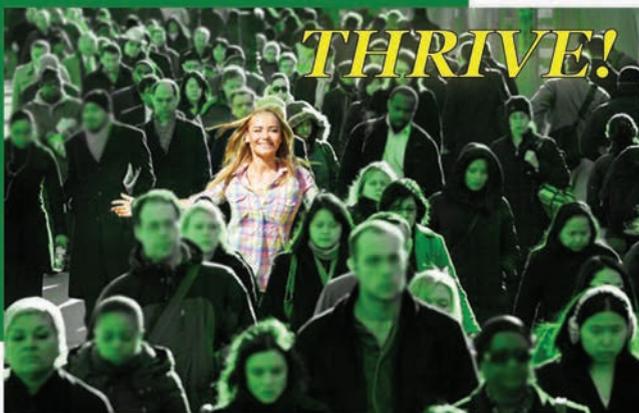
1,4-DIOXANE is used in creams to make harsh ingredients milder. Banned from personal-care products in the European Union, it is associated with headaches, respiratory and skin irritation, and is a probable human carcinogen. You will rarely, if ever, see 1,4-dioxane listed as an ingredient on personal-care products. Instead, look for the ingredients sodium laureth sulfate and chemicals with xynol, cetareth and oeth in their names—1,4-dioxane is a frequent contaminant of these chemicals.

Mother Earth Living assistant editor GINA DEBACKER is a natural beauty enthusiast who lives in Lawrence, Kansas.



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