

How to Help Rejuvenate Aging Skin

By Dr. Elizabeth Roche



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For many of us, perhaps most of us, there's that one day when you take a look in the mirror and realize that not only do you look different from the way you once did, but your skin has dramatically changed. So what happened? How did once smooth, supple, wrinkle-free skin now have fine lines, wrinkles, sun damage and sagging? More important, how can I improve my over-sixty skin to match my youthful personality?

Let's rewind and look at how our skin once started out. After we were born, our body continued to make new skin cells or epidermal cells, at a very rapid rate. The turnover was quite high when we were younger so we always had plump new fresh skin cells on top. As we age, this cell division begins to slow down, leaving dry dehydrated cells on top, which result in a dull complexion. In addition, this slow cell division contributes to the thinning of the outer skin (epidermal) layer.

The decrease in production of elastin, the skin's elastic tissue, and collagen leads to loose skin. A natural decrease in oil production leads to drier skin. Does this sound like you yet? Perhaps you have lost bone structure, which is causing your skin to look as if it is hanging from your face, especially around your mouth.

Before we continue with how to correct these changes, a quick review of the structure of skin may be helpful in understanding the changes and how to correct them. Skin can be divided into three major layers, although it has many layers. The outer part, called the epidermis, contains epithelial skin cells, proteins and pigment cells. The middle part, or der-

mis, contains blood vessels, nerves, hair follicles and oil glands. This is the layer that provides nutrients to the epidermis. The bottom subcutaneous layer contains sweat glands, some blood vessels and fat. Each layer also contains the important collagen fibers for strength and elastin for flexibility.

It is inevitable that our skin will age as we age. However, different factors can age our skin to different degrees. These factors include genetics, nutrition, hormones and environmental elements, such as sun exposure and smoking. One can see the effects of sun exposure and how it ages our skin if we compare a commonly exposed area, such as our hands or arms, to one that may have had little to no exposure, such as the inner side of our upper arms. The sun exposed area will have fine lines, wrinkles and pigmented "sun spots," while the unexposed areas will look a lot younger.

Excessive, repetitive sun exposure reduces the connective tissues and, hence, the skin's strength and elasticity. This is easily observed on the faces of people

who have worked most of their lives outdoors or those who have worshipped the sun all of their lives. If you take a close look at your own face, which side looks older? The majority of you may answer the left. Are you wondering why? Because the incidental sun that comes through the car window while driving all these years has caused looser skin, more wrinkles and more sunspots on that side of our face. This is one area, unlike genetics, where we have some control in the aging process of our skin.

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It is not too late to develop good habits at sixty or older. Using sunscreen every day of the year—yes, even in the winter—can help preserve the remaining collagen and protect against the pigment causing cells called melanocytes from producing more melanin. Just be sure that your sunscreen has both UVB (SPF of 30 and above) and UVA (zinc and titanium dioxide) protection. Have your skin checked yearly by a dermatologist to ensure that small "sun spots" are not something that requires further attention.

The other environmental factor that can be controlled is smoking. Smoking breaks down collagen, causes wrinkles, clogs pores and decreases small capillaries. Smoking also slows down the flow of nutrients and oxygen to the skin. These are just a few of the 101 reasons not to smoke.

Decreased oil production occurs as we age. Our skin obtains a youthful glow from the oil production in the sebaceous glands. As we age, the sebaceous glands produce less oil, which in women mostly happens after menopause, while in men not until age eighty.

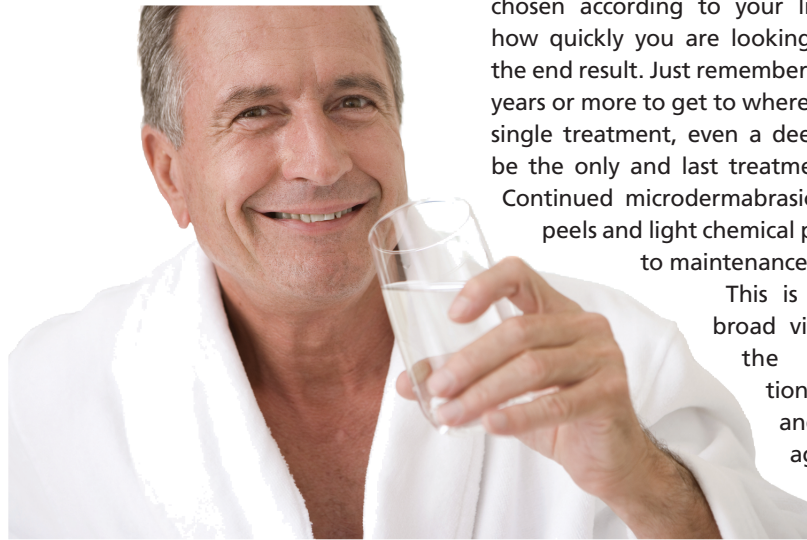
So what can be done besides using sunscreen and not smoking to help preserve or restore skin after sixty? Dietary changes are an easy and important first step to incorporate into your everyday routine. Something as simple as drinking plenty of water. Hydration improves blood circulation and is key to keeping skin supple. Eating fruits and vegetables rich in color will ensure ample phytonutrients, which provide antioxidants. Vitamins A, C, E, B-complex and essential fatty acids, which can be found in organic flax seed oil, support supple and healthy looking skin.

An at-home skin care regimen is the next line of defense. Your facial cleanser should be different from what you use on your body. The typical body soap is too harsh and drying for facial skin. Keep in mind that different skin types will require



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different cleansers. The next products that should be applied to your skin are growth factors. Growth factors help rejuvenate your skin and improve the appearance of fine lines, skin tone and texture.



and depths depending on the condition of the skin. An ongoing series of light treatments with just a few days of flaking will work just as well as a deeper or stronger treatment, which may require over a week of recovery. Treatments should be chosen according to your lifestyle and how quickly you are looking to achieve the end result. Just remember it took sixty years or more to get to where you are; no single treatment, even a deep peel, will be the only and last treatment to have. Continued microdermabrasions, dermapeels and light chemical peels are key to maintenance.

This is a relatively broad view of how the skin functions, and how and why it can age the way it does. A few simple changes

to your daily routine can help improve your skin's appearance. Start making those changes today so tomorrow, when you pick up your mirror, there will be healthier, more rejuvenated skin looking back at you.

Following the growth factors, apply a moisturizer that will work for you, not just make your skin feel moist. The moisturizer should contain peptides and antioxidants, such as vitamin C and E to help prevent free radical damage, as well as adequate hydration depending on the dryness of your skin. At night time, an application of tretinoin, also known as Retin-A, will cause a gentle exfoliation, which over time, diminishes the appearance of fine lines while stimulating the basal layer of the epidermis. Of course for women, the last thing to put on before makeup is a sunscreen.

If you are looking to have treatments that will make a noticeable change in the texture of your skin, then a treatment that goes deeper is the answer. Chemical peels, laser peels and micro-needling treatments can all be adjusted to different strengths

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