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HIGHSTYLE

Trends and Temptations: Sumptuous Glamour for Spring and Beyond

My personal obsession with staving off wrinkles went into overdrive several months ago, when a bartender asked a group of my girlfriends, all around the age of 30, for ID before serving us. I was overjoyed—until I went to hand over my license. The bartender held up her palm as if she were refusing fresh pepper from a waiter and snapped, “I don’t need yours.”

I had long used a rotating cast of expensive skincare creams, which I admit I’d selected primarily for their chic packaging, but now it was time to get serious. Nearly every product these days is labeled “anti-aging,” so I asked my dermatologist for the one thing that most doctors and patients seem to regard as the wrinkle-fighting equivalent of the Second Coming: retinoids. I ignored my doctor’s skeptically arched eyebrow as he handed over a prescription for Retin-A Micro and urged me to use it “sparingly.”

Within a week my skin was coming off in flakes, as if my face were made of dried Elmer’s glue. My dismay was allayed by a smug feeling that, at some undetermined point in the future, I would be significantly less wrinkled than my peers. Then one day, when sorting through press releases on new antiaging products, I came across a product touted for its ability to “slow the process” of cell turnover. This was infuriating. I’d thought the whole point of retinoids was to speed up the cell cycle. But now we were supposed to keep our cells alive longer? Was my raging case of face dandruff for naught? I became desperate to understand the science. So many products out there were making different, even contradictory, promises. Which ingredients actually work?

Conversations with dozens of dermatologists and chemists revealed that I was not initially wrong: Prescription retinoids (Retin-A, Retin-A Micro, Renova, etc.) are widely considered a kind of god-send. “Nothing else on the market can get rid of sun damage and reverse aging and thicken collagen like they can,” says Debra Wattenberg, a New York dermatologist. “They are probably the one thing people should use across the board—if you can tolerate it.” Unfortunately, it seems my skin, which is thin, pale and on the dry side, can’t handle even a low concentration of the stuff.

Aged and Confused

With thousands of antiaging products flooding the market, what’s a girl who’s obsessed with wrinkles—but not ready for fillers—to do?

Photograph by JENS MORTENSEN

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THE AT-HOME
GUIDE TO
ANTIAGING

MAKING SENSE OF
PEPTIDES, RETINOLS, ANTIWrinklers,
AND ALL THE REST



LIANTS
Intensive Resurfacing Peel [1] gently
dead skin cells with bamboo beads
ian extracts. \$165; murad.com

all daytime companion, RoC Retinol
on Deep Wrinkle Daily Moisturizer
F 30 combines retinol and sun-
\$20; at drugstores.

OX R+ De-Aging Cream [2] is
mate before-bedtime cocktail of
antioxidants and peptides. \$225;
dorf Goodman.

OXIDANTS
as addressed the instability of
C in its Perfect Repair serum by
ng the vitamin with a molecule that
t from oxidizing. \$175; barneys.com

hyaluronic acid and antioxidants,
que Recherche Serum Yall-02
rizes and plumps up skin. \$75;
que-recherche.com

ie packs six different antioxidants
Anti-Aging Longevity Serum [3].
aprairie.com

**IDES AND OTHER
PLUMPERS**

tricone, M.D. StimulCell mixes pep-
roteins and lipids with hyaluronic
d the firming agent DMAE to
te repair of damaged skin cells.
vperriconemd.com

s Renovage Sirtuin Telomere Support-
concentrate products use an enzyme to
en the cell cycle. \$199; isomers.ca

ne High Resolution Collaser-5X [4]
hs rice peptides to boost collagen
tion. \$65; lancome-usa.com

Hydramax + Active cream [5]
with a fruit extract that stimulates
duction of enzymes in the skin.
anel.com

HTENERS

caille Vital Essence serum [6] uses
n and retinol to reduce age spots.
elmanmarcus.com

ndt's new Laser Lightning Night
[7] contains albutin, mushroom
rus extracts to fade sun spots.
sephora.com

Aged and Confused

But there are alternatives, and though they may not stimulate collagen as rapidly, they perform retinoids' primary function—shedding old cells that contribute to dullness and wrinkles—without causing as much peeling or increased sun sensitivity. Says dermatologist and skincare entrepreneur Howard Murad, "Microdermabrasion, alpha hydroxy acids and products containing enzymes derived from papaya and pineapple all get rid of the dead skin." Many antiaging products include retinols, the less potent cousin of prescription retinoids. And several of my friends and colleagues, even those with sensitive skin, swear by Biologique Recherche's Lotion P50 toner, which uses lactic acid to gently exfoliate. The line's president, physician Philippe Allouche, is one expert who believes retinoids are too harsh for most skin types. "The epidermis is a thin structure, and its function is to protect the rest of your skin," Allouche says. "People are making it thinner and thinner. You want to exfoliate, but not like crazy."

If constant cell turnover is key, then what's with all the potions—like Isomers Renovage Sirtuin Telomere Supporting Concentrate, the product that initially sent me into my antiaging tailspin—promising to extend the cell cycle? As it turns out, exfoliation is only one weapon in what experts say should be a multipronged attack against aging. Newer skin needs to be kept firm and voluminous—which explains the plethora of products claiming to repair cells, plump them up, stimulate their collagen production and, yes, lengthen their lives. This also explains the deluge of products now featuring peptides, or short-chain amino acids. "Peptides are small molecules, so they have the potential to get through the stratum corneum"—the top layer of skin—"and exert benefits below," says New York dermatologist Amy Wechsler.

"Peptides are very exciting," offers Ben Kaminsky, a chemist and the cofounder of B. Kamins, Chemist skincare. "Different families of peptides have different functions." His line includes a product called Therapeutic Anti-Aging Wrinkle-Lift, which uses two types of peptides: one that builds new collagen over time and one that immediately tightens the skin, resulting in a temporary "lifted" look. "There's been a lot of research on the role of peptides in wound healing, and we're finding they latch onto receptor cells to actually regrow collagen fibers," says Kaminsky. That's good news, particularly for those of us with skin too sensitive to take advantage of the collagen-stimulating properties of prescription retinoids. Dermatologist and fellow skincare entrepreneur Fredric Brandt is equally enthusiastic about peptides. "They're a good option for evening if you don't want to use retinols, or even used in conjunction with retinols," he says.

I now had a plan to combat the encroaching wrinkles and deflated skin. But I needed to address one more issue before I could hope to be carded again: tone, the third element of the antiaging triumvirate. "Unevenness, brown spots and red spots can make one look just as old as wrinkles can," says Wechsler. Both she and Brandt mentioned a study by Procter & Gamble scientists. "The testers gave subjects photos of people to look

the photos and merely erased the pigment spots, subjects thought the skin looked much younger." Younger women may be able to even out tone with exfoliants, but older women with more sun-damaged skin may need extra help, hence products like Brandt's new lightening line and Chantecaille's Vital Essence serum, which contains both lightening agent arbutin and retinol.

Of course, the best defense against wrinkles, spots and sags is prevention. So aside from sunscreen, an obvious essential, I was told to look for products containing antioxidants, which protect against many of the environmental causes of aging, including sunlight and pollution. "Certain antioxidants even boost the effectiveness of sunscreen, and they protect against rays and other pollutants that get past the layer of SPF," says Wattenberg.

Dermatologist Gary Goldfaden recently developed Goldfaden Skin Care, a line of products with high concentrations of red tea, which he found to be an even more powerful antioxidant than the more common green tea. "In addition to combating free radicals, antioxidants also promote the growth of new skin cells," he says. Fellow dermatologist and product guru Nicholas Perricone is equally bullish on antioxidants. "Free radicals trigger an inflammatory response, and inflammation is responsible for wrinkles," he says. "Antioxidants are powerful anti-inflammatories, so they have a preventative and a reparative effect."

The problem is that it seems every botanical on earth—pomegranate, açai, coffee berries, kangaroo paw flower extract—has been deemed a great source of antioxidants, and the effectiveness of each isn't always clear. Vitamin C, for instance, is incredibly popular with cosmetics companies but so unstable that it can quickly lose potency in the bottle. (Several brands now offer alternatives: Perricone, for example, uses vitamin C ester, a more stable version of the vitamin.) "The more different antioxidants you can blend into your routine, the better," says Manuela Marcheggiani, a cosmetic chemist and cofounder of the Isomers skincare line, who suggests alternating products with differing antioxidants or using a product that combines several. "It's like eating your vegetables—you want to eat a variety, not just a lot of one."

As a result of my research, I've finally settled on a routine: After cleansing, several times a week I use either a lactic acid toner, scrub or enzyme mask for exfoliating; I apply an antioxidant serum morning and night; in the morning I follow it with an SPF product, and at night I finish with a serum or cream with peptides.

I am confident about my new approach—except for one small, nagging issue. Nearly every professional I consulted emphasized the importance of a proper diet. They urged me to not only apply antioxidants to my face, but also to load up on fruits and vegetables; to not just put peptides on my skin, but to ingest lots of protein and omegas. And I was warned repeatedly about the perils of sugar and alcohol. "Too much alcohol will dehydrate your skin," says Wechsler, "making it wrinklier and more sallow."

Sadly, it turns out the only thing worse for you than being insulted by a bartender is the steady flow of cock-