

Beat wrinkles:

Tips for healthy, younger-looking skin



By Dr. Ian Landells

Our skin is the largest and arguably the most complex organ in our body. It is made up of multiple cell types and layers. It is also very robust and resilient. As we get older, however, it changes in a number of ways that we attribute to the aging process. We see fine lines, deeper creases and wrinkles, visible blood vessels, brown spots and dry, scaly patches.

Why do we see these changes?

Starting in our mid 20s, our skin ages naturally as the production of collagen and the turnover of new skin cells slow down—although we do not see the effects of this until we're much older. We also lose the layer of fat

under our skin and experience bone loss, which makes the skin sag and fall. This natural intrinsic aging, however, only accounts for a small percentage of the changes that occur in the skin as we age.

The main culprit behind wrinkles

The vast majority of wrinkles are caused by progressive damage to our skin by UV radiation from the sun, in addition to artificial sources of UV such as tanning beds or booths. UV penetrates our skin and damages all cell types, at all levels. Both UVB and UVA (which passes through clouds and windows) contribute to this damage. UV radiation also impairs our skin's ability to repair itself, which makes things worse.

As a result, over time the elastic tissue and collagen become fragmented. Our skin loses its springiness, then sags and forms creases and wrinkles. By comparing areas of the skin exposed to the sun with those that have been shaded, such as the inner arms, we can see how our skin might have looked with more sun protection over our lifetimes. Of course, UV radiation exposure is also the main cause of skin cancers and actinic keratoses (small scaly areas that develop on the skin parts most commonly exposed to the sun; see page 10).

Other factors to consider

Once our skin has become compromised, our facial expressions, sleeping positions and gravity influence where these lines and creases develop. The blood vessels also are damaged, and gradually become enlarged and visible. Pigment cells are affected and brown spots, moles and freckles will gradually appear. In addition, our skin is less able to retain water and becomes dryer. Vital structures such as the sebaceous glands can enlarge, pushing up the skin and causing small yellow-white papules to develop.

Smoking is also a contributor. It accelerates the aging process, and fine lines are seen in smokers as young as in their 20s. Quitting can reverse these changes!

If you want to keep your skin looking youthful and healthy, be sure to protect your skin from UV radiation. Most of the "aging" we see in the skin is actually UV damage, and is entirely preventable through sun protection. **CS**

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Forever young

UV damage is cumulative, so every small dose adds up. Start protecting your skin today.

- Moisturize and wear sunscreen that blocks UVA and UVB, with an SPF of at least 30.
- Wear a hat and sun-protective clothing.
- Quit smoking. If you don't smoke, don't start.