

Short takes

Usable news & tips & items of interest

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HORMONES FOR THE FACE

These days, you can't turn on the TV without seeing an infomercial for face creams containing plant hormones from soy, licorice, black cohosh, flax or wild yam. These are touted to combat the effects of "hormonal aging" of the skin, which, depressingly, seems to set in with a vengeance right in our 20s! But does slathering your face with female hormone mimics truly work?

"These plant-based products can help soften and plump up skin and reduce fine lines, but to a modest degree," says Dr. Benjamin Barankin, a Toronto dermatologist and medical director of Toronto Dermatology Centre (www.torontodermatologycentre.com)." They can also help to slowly fade brown age spots." But while there is some benefit from these agents, he adds, it has not been as scientifically validated as that from other skin agents such as retinol, glycolic acid, tretinoin, matrixyl and coffeeberry extract.

COLD-WATER HIVES

Beware of jumping into icy water on a dare. Apart from the sheer temperature shock, frigid water can sometimes cause a severe allergic reaction called cold urticaria (hives), which can lead to a dangerous drop in blood pressure. Allergists think this may be the culprit behind some unexplained drownings in strong swimmers.

HEAVENLY — AND HEART-HEALTHY

Great news for chocolate addicts: not just one study but a whole box show that your favourite food protects your heart. A U.K. scientific review of seven investigations reports that chocolate can reduce cardiovascular risk by a third.

The analysis, done by researchers at the University of Cambridge and reported at the European College of Cardiology, involved more than 114,000 subjects. It showed that those who consumed the highest amount of chocolate had a 37% reduction in cardiovascular disease and a 29% reduction in stroke.

Lead author Dr. Oscar Franco, however, cautions that no one should be urged to eat large amounts of chocolate since most chocolate products contain high quantities of fat and sugar, which can contribute to heart disease. He thinks chocolate manufacturers should consider reducing the amount of fat and sugar in their products.

Other researchers have suggested eating a few small squares of pure, dark semi-sweet chocolate (at least 70% cocoa) per week or adding unsweetened chocolate to chilis, soups and stews.



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