

Cosmetic Dermatology: Healthy Looking Skin

By Dr. Benjamin Barankin



While many of us think about cosmetic dermatology solely in terms of beauty treatments and reducing the look of fine lines and wrinkles, using cosmetic techniques to improve the lives of skin patients who grapple with burns, scars, birth defects, rosacea and other visible skin conditions is a big part of what dermatologists do. Dermatolo-

Cosmetic dermatology has come a long way, and new treatments become available with each passing year. Even if you have lived for a long time with a birthmark, port-wine stain, scar or excess (or thinning) hair on visible skin surfaces, it's worth talking to a qualified dermatologist to discuss treatment options.

Other factors include environmental damage, the amount of pigment in the skin and even genetics. As skin ages it becomes increasingly dry, thin and less stretchy. It shows more damaged blood vessels, sallowness and brown spots. In addition, sun-exposed skin is more prone to developing pre-cancerous lesions and skin cancers.

If you are interested in improving your appearance from age-related changes in elasticity or pigmentation, again, your best bet is a dermatologist—preferably one who handles all aspects of

dermatology as well as performing cosmetic procedures. That way, you will be assured that your overall skin health is taken into consideration and the risks associated with some cosmetic procedures are minimized.

“One of the newer players on the botanical scene is soy protein. This has shown anticancer and antioxidant properties, in the lab with early suggestions of benefit in humans.”



gists are the skin, hair and nails specialists. Their expertise in all cosmetic procedures—whether for patients with clinical issues or for aging skin—is based on years of research into the intricacies of healthy and disease-affected skin.

Skin aging and the sun

More and more people with relatively healthy skin are turning to cosmetic treatments to reduce the signs of aging. The most harmful and significant cause of skin aging is exposure to the sun's rays (ultraviolet light).



Good Stuff for Skin

- Some creams (particularly sunscreens) deliver antioxidants such as vitamin C, vitamin E, green tea extracts, soy proteins and coenzyme Q10 for improved skin quality.
- Consider topical retinoids, vitamin A or tretinoin to reduce ultraviolet light damage, even-out skin pigment, smooth fine wrinkles and improve skin texture. These agents require a prescription from your physician.
- It's never too late to use sunscreen! There is good evidence that, even after years of sun exposure and skin damage, some changes can be reversed by improving your level of sun protection.
- Try alpha-hydroxy acids such as glycolic and lactic acid to increase skin thickness and smoothness, and even-out skin colour.

Hint: There is no evidence that high-cost creams are more effective than low-cost creams.

The dollars and Sense of aging skin

The search for the fountain of youth has turned into big business. The topical products market for aging skin is worth millions or even billions of dollars. Over-the-counter anti-aging products are popular because of their availability and affordability, and because they don't require a visit to the physician. However, many creams don't live up to expectations, and people are increasingly looking to procedures for help.

Cosmetic procedures can be pricey, but those that target disease-related conditions are sometimes covered

by insurance or government health plans. Those that relate to the effects of aging and sun damage are generally not covered.

Here is a partial list of conditions affecting aging skin, together with some treatment options.

Obvious small blood vessels (telangiectasia)

Options for telangiectasia include laser or intense pulsed-light devices (relatively expensive) or electrocautery (in which an electric current zaps the blood vessel). Electrocautery is effective for a few blood vessels and inexpensive.

Dry and itchy skin

Dry and itchy skin often becomes more of a problem as we age—in particular during the winter. The lower

legs and feet are most commonly affected.

Using bland moisturizing soaps or cleansers is the best bet, with repeated applications of moisturizers with no fragrance or additives. See the article on page 10 for more on this topic.

Dry skin can sometimes be persistent and very itchy, and may in fact be a form of eczema. This often requires a short-term treatment with topical steroids or relatively newer non-steroid creams and ointments.

Easy bruising and skin thinning

Aging skin is more prone to tearing and minor trauma. Unfortunately, there is no good treatment for this. Skin thinning is partly a result of the natural aging process and partly a reflection of sun damage. Bruising goes along with skin thinness and is more common in those on blood thinners such as aspirin or warfarin.

The best advice is to use sun protection, avoid trauma and minimize use of other blood thinners such as vitamin E, ginkgo biloba, ginseng and alcohol. Regular moisturizing may be of some help.

Flat brown spots ("liver spots" or lentigines)

Liquid nitrogen spray (cold and with a slight stinging), some creams (vitamins A or C, or sometimes hydroquinone), chemical peels and laser and intense-pulsed light therapy (expensive) are among the treatment options for flat brown spots.



Raised brown spots ("granny warts" or seborrheic keratosis)

Treatments for raised brown spots include liquid nitrogen spray, electrocautery or cutting out under local anesthetic.

Rosacea

People with lots of blood vessels in the face, easy flushing, skin sensitivity, gritty dry eyes or pimples may have this condition. Depending on the type of rosacea, the physician may advise the use of creams or oral antibiotics. To address the redness or dilated blood vessels, lasers and light devices are the most effective treatment.

Rough, red, scaly spots (actinic keratosis)

If only a few spots are present then these pre-cancers require treatment with liquid nitrogen. If there are many spots, chemical peels or creams may be prescribed.

Seborrheic dermatitis (seborrhea)

As we age, we are more prone to redness and yellow-scaling of the scalp, eyebrows and along the sides of the nose. This often requires a mild topical steroid or an anti-yeast cream. The rotating use of over-the-counter dandruff shampoos can also be beneficial.

Skin cancers

New spots or bumps developing after the age of 40 years that don't go away on their own after a few weeks should be examined by a physician. In some cases, a small piece of skin is removed (a skin biopsy) to determine if the spot is cancerous. See the article on page 8 for information on skin cancer prevention and treatment.

Varicose veins

Sclerotherapy (needle injection, moderate cost) and laser therapy (expensive, less effective) are options for treating varicose veins. Keeping legs elevated when possible and wearing

compression stockings can help prevent new varicose veins, reduce leg swelling and ulcers, and make the legs feel less achy.

Wrinkles

Prescription-grade vitamin-A/tretinoin creams can help with fine wrinkles. Botulinum toxin type A paralyzes the muscles that cause forehead furrows, bunny lines between the eyebrows and wrinkles around the eyes. For wrinkles due to loss of fat and gravity, or to increase lip size, skin dermal fillers can be quite beneficial. Dermabrasion (which removes the top

Topical vitamin C is an antioxidant that is being studied for its ability to increase production of collagen, neutralize free radicals and have anti-inflammatory properties.

layers of the skin), chemical peels and different types of lasers can help, depending on the depth of the wrinkles. A dermatologist should be consulted when considering treatment for the complexities of skin wrinkles.

Whatever skin problem you face or enhancement you desire, it makes good sense to see your dermatologist. He or she will rule out serious problems and give you

the best answers to questions about improving your appearance. **CS**

Benjamin Barankin, MD, FRCPC, is a Toronto dermatologist specializing in medical, surgical and cosmetic skin care. A widely published author, he also serves on several editorial boards, including the International Journal of Dermatology, Journal of Cutaneous Medicine & Surgery and Skin & Aging.

Tips For Every-day Skin Health

Don't ...

- ... go outdoors unprotected. Years of unprotected sun exposure and wind damage result in skin with an aged appearance. An SPF of at least factor 30 should be applied liberally (most people apply half the amount required) and daily—summer and winter. Sunscreens should not be considered a replacement for sun avoidance or the use of protective clothing, hats and sunglasses.
- ... EVER use tanning booths.
- ... smoke. Wrinkling is far more common and severe in smokers, and even worse when combined with too much sun exposure.
- ... overdo alcohol and caffeine. Too much will dehydrate the skin.