

Are bad habits ruining your skin?

Unhealthy diet

BRIGHT EYES, FEWER FINE LINES, GLOWING SKIN - HERE'S HOW TO TURN A PARTY-GIRL COMPLEXION INTO PERFECTION. BY SARAH BROOKS-WILSON

THE VISIBLE DAMAGE

You've only got to look in the mirror to see how lacklustre skin appears after a week of indulging in junk food. Poorly fuelling the body equates to poor body function, which results in dry, flaky skin and, potentially, acne. It can also worsen skin conditions such as eczema and psoriasis. Research has shown that some foods have such a negative effect on the body that they create damaging free radicals (see over). Offending meals include hydrogenated oils and charred barbecued food. A high-sugar diet has been linked to premature ageing due to collagen and elastin breakdown, which leads to inflammation and wrinkles.

THE DEEPER DAMAGE

It's not just the mirror that will show up too many takeaway dinners, but the scales, too. Eating more kilojoules than your body can use will not only cause weight gain, it also increases your risk of developing high blood pressure, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, cancer, stroke and gout, to name a few. Studies have shown that being overweight can also affect your fertility by impacting on your hormones, which then disrupts your menstrual cycle.

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

Eliminate refined sugar, caffeine and fatty junk foods. Nutritionist Catherine Saxelby says that you need to include these essential beauty boosters in your diet every day: at least two serves of fruit; five serves of vegies; four serves of healthy carbs like wholegrain bread, brown pasta and rice; one-to-two serves of fish, lean meat, chicken and eggs; and one-to-two serves of yoghurt with probiotics. Good skin also needs a little fat such as essential fatty acids and omega fats to improve its appearance. The best sources are liquid oils (like rice bran, olive, grapeseed, hazelnut and soybean oils), almonds, walnuts, pine nuts, avocado, wheatgerm and seeds such as sunflower, sesame, poppy and linseeds.

Dehydration also causes skin ageing, so drink at least eight glasses of water every day. This will not only hydrate the skin, but will help to remove waste from the kidneys and detoxify the liver. Saxelby says that fibre is another good skin tonic, as it acts like an "intestinal broom" that sweeps waste out of the body and keeps your digestive tract healthy. Recent studies have also shown that a low GI diet can help prevent acne. This is related to hormone reactions to food - regulating blood sugar levels and insulin will have a positive effect on the skin.

Smoking

THE VISIBLE DAMAGE

We all know that you're not going to improve your looks by inhaling smoke every day. There's a reason why smokers develop grey, sallow skin, lined faces and stained teeth. Free radicals (microscopic environmental aggressors), cause a breakdown of skin-supporting collagen and elastin. "Every puff of a cigarette increases the hit of free radicals on the body," says Hobson. Each gene in every cell of our body sustains an estimated 10,000 free radical hits every day.

If you smoke, you get one-to-five million extra free radical hits per inhalation. "The grey pallor you so often see on smokers is the result of nicotine reducing the blood flow to the skin, depriving it of vital oxygen and nutrients," Hobson adds. Smokers are also likely to develop lines around the mouth because of the over-use of the muscles to hold the cigarette. The lines around the eyes that smokers are prone to are caused by squinting the eyes to avoid the smoke. "Generally, a heavy smoker will age 10 years earlier than non-smokers," Hobson notes.

THE DEEPER DAMAGE

In addition to nicotine, there are over 4000 chemicals released into the body when tobacco burns - hardly surprising, then, that it's the number one cause of death in Australia. We have over three million smokers and it kills over 19,000 Australians a year. It causes cancer, emphysema and heart disease and can shorten your life by 10 years or more.

So why do 21 per cent of Australian women still do it?

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

Quit. If you've tried and been unsuccessful, at least cut down. Nutrition scientist Joanna McMillan-Price recommends exercise and full-body massages to improve circulation and to get the oxygen pumping around the system. Combine this with consuming high quantities of antioxidants, such as green or white tea, eating lots of red berries and taking grapeseed extract and ginkgo biloba, and you'll help lessen the effects. Natalie Clays, former smoker and now anti-smoking advocate, says if you're having trouble giving up, speak to your pharmacist about nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). This involves nicotine patches, inhalers, nasal sprays, gum or tablets. They will have side effects, so seek professional advice. McMillan-Price adds that hypnotherapy and acupuncture are good natural alternatives, but may require a bit longer to take effect. Once you give up, results will soon be evident. After just two weeks, circulation will increase and will continue to improve for the next 10 weeks. After one year, your risk of a heart attack will have dropped by half. And then there's that radiant skin.

Drinking

THE VISIBLE DAMAGE

As soon as you take that first sip of wine, your skin begins to dehydrate. As well as making you dry and puffy, alcohol is a stimulant that causes increased skin flushing. "If you drink consistently, that's every day for a few months, you'll start to see dilated capillaries and the first signs of ageing," says Emma Hobson, education manager at the International Dermal Institute. "This can become permanent and lead to sagging skin and visible thread veins." If that isn't enough, your complexion will also start to look sallow and experience breakouts. This is because alcohol affects the circulation and wreaks havoc on your liver and kidneys. "You're literally injecting them with a bit of toxins that the body has to get rid of," Hobson adds. Combined with a late night and disturbed sleep (caused by falling blood sugar levels overnight), you'll wake up with more than just a hangover.

THE DEEPER DAMAGE

The problems caused by drinking don't just end with a few fine lines and wrinkles. There are far more serious risks associated with daily alcohol consumption. Paul Dillon of Drug and Alcohol Research Training Australia says, "What's worrying are the long-term effects it has on the body." Constant, excessive drinking impairs your liver function, which can lead to it becoming inflamed and fatty, and even to cirrhosis. What's more, diabetes, breast cancer and even brain damage are all conditions that can be caused by alcohol. "Consume just three units a day and you'll triple your risk of these conditions," Dillon says. There's further evidence suggesting that heavy drinking can affect a woman's fertility by disrupting ovulation patterns.

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

Cut back and the health risks of drinking will be immediately reduced. The Australian Department of Health and Ageing recommends women drink no more than two standard drinks each day, with at least two alcohol-free days every week. A standard drink contains about 10g of alcohol, regardless of the container size or alcohol type. An average 150ml glass of wine accounts for one-and-a-half standard drinks; a gin and tonic (with one 30ml shot of the spirit) equates to one standard drink. Nutritionist Cherie Lyden has these tips for minimising damage: drink water before, during and after your alcoholic drink; make your wine a spritzer – it's got fewer kilojoules; drink alcohol with a meal, not by itself and avoid binge drinking. Your skin will give you a glowing thanks. →



Sunbathing

THE VISIBLE DAMAGE

The sun is enemy number one to the skin, as it causes premature ageing, hyper pigmentation, capillary damage, skin thickening and, worst of all, cell trauma resulting in permanent damage that could lead to skin cancer. Hobson suggests imagining your skin cells contain a "memory bank" (your DNA), and that every time you go out in daylight and are exposed to UV it "banks" this information. Skin then stores the damage over the years, but eventually it's payback time and the true cost of sunburn is revealed. UV rays also break down collagen (which gives the skin its elasticity) and this leads to wrinkles, especially around the forehead, eyes and mouth.

THE DEEPER DAMAGE

Most of us think the worst that can happen is sunburn, but just six instances of sunburn will double your chances of getting

malignant melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer. "Most people have already suffered much of their irreversible sun damage by the time they turn 18," says Craig Sinclair, Chair of the Cancer Council's National Skin Cancer Committee. What's more worrying is that it takes at least 15–20 years to show up. Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world, with about one in two people developing some form of it.

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

You know the drill: stay out of the sun between 11am and 3pm. If you do go out, make sure you wear an SPF30+ sunscreen, a wide-brimmed hat and big sunglasses, then stay in the shade as much as you can. There is evidence that a diet high in antioxidants can help prevent the free radical damage caused by sun exposure. McMillan-Price recommends eating as many brightly-coloured fruits and vegetables as you can. "The highest amounts of antioxidants are found in carrots, red capsicum, tomatoes, apricots and green leafy vegetables, as they are rich in beta carotene (vitamin A), which gives the most skin protection," she says. m

CHEAT YOUR WAY TO GREAT SKIN

WHILE THESE SKIN TREATMENTS WON'T CURE THE EFFECTS OF YOUR PAST OVERNIGHT, THEY WILL HELP TO REPAIR THE DAMAGE

Drinking

KEY NEEDS: Hydration, brightening and detoxing.



1. Line Peel Crystallant, \$110, by Biotherm at Myer, 1800 811 611. Illuminates the skin while refining its texture.
2. Auto Pilot Altitude Lotion Toner and Destresser, \$45, by Napoleon Perdis, 1800 814 572. Calms, hydrates and refines broken capillaries.
3. Peel Et Reveal Revitalizing Treatment, \$66, by Elizabeth Arden, 02 9409 7700. This awakens the skin with alpha and beta hydroxy acids and vitamin-rich cabernet grapeseed extract.

Smoking

KEY NEEDS: Hydration, anti-ageing and vitamin boosting.



1. Age Defying Sculpt-Logic Day Cream, \$45, by Revlon, 1800 025 488. Restores lost moisture, making the skin's structure stronger.
2. Moisture Defense Antioxidant Lotion, \$110, by MD Formulations, 1800 808 993. Antioxidants, hyaluronic moisturisers, vitamin E and green tea hydrate skin and decrease free-radical damage.
3. Ultra Correction Total Eye Revitalizer, \$110, by Chanel, 02 9900 2944. Smooths fine lines around the eyes, caused by dehydration.

Sunbathing

KEY NEEDS: Hydration, protecting and brightening.



1. Super Aqua-Serum, \$232, by Guerlain, 02 9695 4800. Deeply hydrates the skin and lessens any redness with a light formula.
2. Derma Genesis Eye Contour Cream, \$29.95, by L'Oréal Paris, 1300 659 259. A must to prevent those fine lines appearing around your eyes.
3. Face Milk SPF30+, \$8.99, by Sunsense, 1800 033 706. Gives maximum UVA and UVB protection. An everyday essential and one of the best-value beauty buys you'll ever make.

Unhealthy diet

KEY NEEDS: Detoxing, anti-ageing and anti-inflammation.



1. Pro-Collagen Oxygenating Night Cream, \$250, by Elemis, 1800 802 036. This night-time moisturiser helps to prevent collagen breakdown.
2. The Cleansing Foam, \$170, by La Mer, 1800 061 326. Marine extracts clean impurities while calming the signs of inflammation.
3. Firming Facial Mask with DMAE, \$220, by Dr Perricone, 1800 007 844. Instantly firms the skin while correcting discolouration and minimising the appearance of large pores.