

# STRESS

## BEAT IT BEFORE IT GETS UNDER YOUR SKIN



*The new trends in anti-aging skin care that have emerged in recent years mostly come from the realization that stress and other emotions or emotional conditions can affect the skin's health. Personally, I believe that women who are relaxed, calm and well rested appear years younger than those who look stressed and fatigued! Just think how many times you've looked in the mirror and cringed when you're overworked, stressed and not sleeping well. Now think about the times when you've felt content, happy and calm and have been happy with what you see in the mirror! It's simple really.*

Essentially, scientists and physicians realize emotions that are stress-related can cause an increase in the number of free radicals and stress hormones such as cortisol in the body. This can not only serve to age the skin, but can also cause many other allergic and inflammatory skin conditions. My patients are always surprised when I tell them that stress-related conditions include eczema, urticaria/hives, psoriasis, atopic dermatitis and seborrheic dermatitis.

What happens to your body in times of stress is this: As a result of negative emotions, the body's stress response is to release inflammatory stress hormones, which tend to disrupt the integrity of the skin's barrier. This is

because something known as 'collagenase' is activated, which can accelerate the breakdown of collagen. Moreover, inflammatory 'cytokines' are released from the immune system in times of stress, which lead to more inflammation within the skin cells. These also cause vasoconstriction, where the blood vessels are narrowed. As I always tell my patients, increased cortisol production in the body as a result of stress can also lead to other hormonal imbalances, which can further accelerate skin aging. The level of DHEA, an anti-stress hormone produced by the adrenal glands, is lowered when cortisol levels are increased. Increased cortisol can also increase insulin, a hormone which is involved in blood sugar control. Having more insulin in the body can lead to increased oxidative stress within the skin, leading to skin that looks aged.

But just as I always advise my patients, there are a number of steps you can take to balance out stress and these can be both internal and external.

When women come to me, I normally advise the following to relieve stress on the skin internally:

- Eat at least 5-6 servings of vegetables a day. My favourites for healthy skin are blueberries, cooked tomatoes, yellow and red bell peppers, bokchoy, broccoli and cucumbers.
- Consume at least one gram per day of omega-3 fish oils rich in EPA/DHA. Avocados, almonds and pine nuts, cold water fish such as salmon, halibut and tuna are also good sources of omega-3.
- Some natural herbal products, known as herbal adaptogens, can help the body to improve resistance to stress among other things. You might want to ask your doctor about herbal supplements. Ashwagandha, Bacopa and Brahmini can decrease cortisol levels and improve your mood.
- Ensure that you have enough vitamin B6, pyridoxine and vitamin B6, and pantothenic acid in your diet. These will help your body better deal with any stress response.
- You might consider taking other supplements. Phosphatidylserine has been shown

in studies in Europe to improve mood and memory. It also decreases cortisol levels.

- If you are considering supplements, then panax ginseng is another herbal adaptogen that can be very beneficial.
- Make sure that your diet includes basic antioxidants such as vitamin C, gamma tocopherols and alpha lipoic acid. You can get these by eating plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Perhaps most importantly, make sure you have enough restful sleep each night, and drink plenty of water!

To relieve stress on the skin externally, I always recommend the following to my patients:

- Keep your skin hydrated by using products that contain hyaluronic acid. This will maintain optimum skin hydration. Olay's Microsculpting cream is an excellent option.
  - Use creams containing topical antioxidants to decrease inflammation in the skin.
  - Use a good, chemical-free sunscreen with micronized zinc oxides, and with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15. This is hugely important for reducing stress in the skin, especially in hot Gulf climates.
  - When you choose your skin care products, go for those that contain pentapeptides. Pentapeptides help to enhance collagen production in the skin, making your skin younger and more elastic.
  - Meditation, yoga, self hypnosis, biofeedback and even psychotherapy can also help to reduce stress. Physical exercise is also an excellent remedy for beating stress in the body. I always tell my patients that believe it or not, working on toning those thighs can also help tone the face!
- If you asked me a really fool-proof way to help beat stress, my answer would be very simple, and perhaps very surprising: Laugh! Laughing out loud everyday for a minimum of five minutes will work wonders. Studies show that laughter can be extremely effective for reducing stress and cortisol levels.

So, start beating stress before it gets under your skin.

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