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How to stay young in the sun

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Protecting your skin against the ageing effects of the harsh Middle Eastern climate involves more than just sunblock. Diet, lifestyle and a humble cup of tea can help you avoid that "leather" look, as Helena Frith Powell explains.

We have all seen them. Those women who look like a cross between one of Brigitte Bardot's donkeys and a brown leather handbag. You whisper, "That woman has had too much sun", followed closely by, "How can I avoid ending up like that?"

The bad news is that living in the Middle East is a terrible start, and as the leather-heads confirm, constant sun exposure is the single most ageing thing you can do to your skin. Then again, as Coco Chanel once said, "a woman has the age she deserves". In other words, there are things that anti-ageing experts suggest you can do to slow down the ageing process significantly.

You might think the most obvious thing is to put on some sunblock and wear a large Chanel hat. Of course, sunblock is essential (more on that later), but what you should also do at least half an hour before any sun exposure is boost your antioxidants.

"When we go out in the sun, our levels of the co-enzyme Q10, vitamin E and other antioxidants decrease by 50 per cent within 10 minutes," says Dr Naina Sachdev, a medical director and anti-ageing expert. "So it makes sense to increase antioxidants before sun exposure. One great way to do this is to drink decaffeinated green tea."

Dr Naina suggests that when living in a hot climate, you should begin each day with breakfast loaded with antioxidants, starting with a mixed fruit juice.

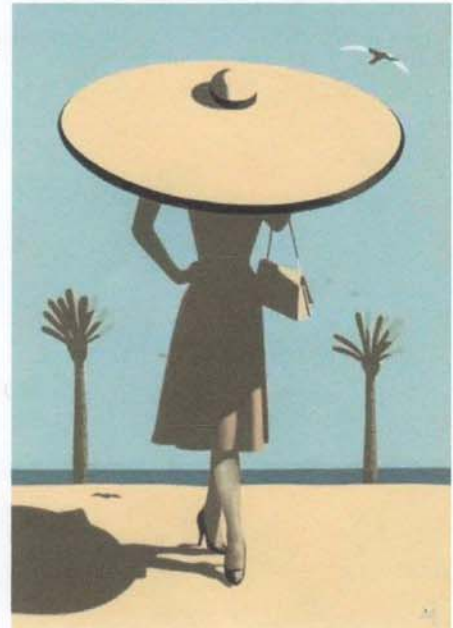


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"Each fruit has different antioxidants, so why deprive yourself by sticking to just one?" she points out. "Mix them up and benefit from as many as you can."

Following juice, Dr Naina says that the ideal breakfast would consist of egg whites, rice cakes and some walnuts. These are all foods that will not upset food intolerances (which are inflammatory and therefore ageing) but are high in protein and antioxidants. You could add some red grapes: they are rich in the antioxidant resveritol, which is hugely anti-ageing.

"You should also drink a lot of water throughout the day," adds Dr Naina. "Water is alkaline, which increases oxygen and abnormal [or ageing] cells do not survive in oxygen-rich environments."

John Stirling, a biochemist in the process of developing a substance called TimeGuard, an anti-ageing supplement, agrees.

"There are a number of foods that help protect the skin against sun damage," he says. "Foods high in beta-carotene such as carrots, pumpkin, sweet potatoes (the orange variety) and tomatoes are all a good source of lycopene. Beta-carotene and lycopene both reduce oxidative damage to the tissues."

Tina Richards, a London-based holistic dermatologist, suggests eating a teaspoon of tomato purée every day because it is rich in lycopene.

"You can cook with it or eat it on a cracker," she says. "That might sound slightly eccentric, but actually it's delicious and it is fantastic for protecting your skin from the sun. But obviously this is just one of many things you need to do to protect your skin."

Sticking to the diet theme, Stirling suggests adding sardines to your daily diet because they are a good source of vitamin A and D: both necessary for skin health and a good way to reduce inflammation.

"Oily fish will help reduce inflammation, which is also associated with overexposure to the sun," he says.

Stirling suggests stocking up with vitamin-C rich foods because they help strengthen connective tissue (a

The experts' top 10 anti-ageing tips

- Wear sunscreen every day, even if it's cloudy. Not just so you age well, but so you get the chance to age in the first place.
- Eat a teaspoon of tomato puree every day.
- Exercise as often as possible.
- Eat healthily. Think about the fact that you can eat things that will actually keep you young-looking as opposed to ageing you.
- Use beauty products with active ingredients.
- Sleep on your back. Sleeping on your side creates wrinkles where your face presses into the pillow.
- Don't get stressed

form of fibrous tissue of which collagen is the main protein) and prevent free radical damage. Mango, papaya, strawberries, blueberries, oranges and lemons are all good sources. "Olives, avocado, almonds and Brazil nuts provide vitamin E, selenium and beneficial fatty acids that help keep skin supple and smooth," he adds. "Selenium is an essential component which manufactures Glutathione peroxidase, a vital enzyme that protects connective tissue against free radicals."

Stirling's TimeGuard, which will be available by the end of this year, focuses on both oral and topical anti-ageing (things you can do to help on the outside).

The most essential part of topical care is, as already mentioned, is sun cream.

Kerry Payne, a skin specialist who works at the Beauty Spot in Abu Dhabi, says that although you can't protect your skin completely from the sun, you should wear a cream with an SPF (Sun Protection Factor) of 25 and upwards at all times, even when the sun isn't out.

"You should also use an SPF on hands," she says. "Basically protect any part of your skin that is exposed. You might think you look healthy and tanned now, but the damage will show in a few years' time. You will have wrinkles and lines. Your complexion won't be as clear, and your skin will be more sensitive."

Payne also suggests a daily, weekly and monthly skincare routine that will keep your skin young. Every day you should cleanse, tone and moisturise before you put on your sunscreen, always rubbing in creams using an upwards motion. If you are under 35 then use eye gel; if you're older, use an eye cream. Every night, use a night cream with an active ingredient like Vitamin C or green tea. If you are over 25, then use a serum as well.

Dr Naina agrees. "Just do the same on the outside as you would on the inside," she says. "Use creams with green tea, for example, or amino peptides that promote cell to cell regeneration, like the Olay Regenerist Precision range. When you buy a cream look at the list of ingredients. Look for green tea, vitamin E or hyaluronic acids. Ask the sales assistant: 'Does my cream have pentapeptides in it?' Does it have antioxidants in it?'"

Payne suggests that you exfoliate once a week and use a moisturising mask. These are both things you can do at home. She suggests a non-abrasive exfoliator like the Dermalogica Daily Microfoliant. On a monthly basis, she suggests you should have a facial and a microdermabrasion. The latter is a treatment that removes dead skin cells and basically vacuums them up, leaving your complexion clean and fresh. "Leaving dead cells on the outer layer of the skin is incredibly ageing," says Payne, "so it is essential to cleanse thoroughly and use regular treatments."

Dr Marian Coutinho, a dermatologist at the Kaya Skin Clinic in Abu Dhabi, says another thing we must do more than just look after our faces. "When you are applying sun screens and moisturisers, bring them all the way down to your neck and décolletage area," she says.

Dermalogically speaking, there are three levels of age control, she says, and we need to work on all three simultaneously to get the best results. First, there is the outer level as mentioned above, second is the dermal and third is the muscular. Coutinho recommends glycolic peels for level one. "I would not suggest a chemical peel in this climate," she says, "but glycolic peels are made with fruit acid obtained from sugar cane so not as harsh. However, if you have one you will have to avoid the sun for a few days afterwards."

Peel or no peel, she suggests we should all stay out of the sun completely between 11am and 4pm.

In order to treat level two, the dermis and the collagen, she suggests various laser-based treatments such as photo facials or the fraxel laser. "These treatments heat up the skin and help stimulate the fibroblast cells that make collagen and increased collagen production to improve the appearance of small lines and wrinkles as well as open pores."

The final level of skincare is the muscular layer. For this option, pads that transmit microcurrents that stimulate your muscles. "This makes the muscles on the face and neck tighter and firms up the jaw line," says Coutinho. "In this category I also put Botox, but I would say it is not a permanent solution. You need to follow the other steps as well."

There is a more natural (and cheaper) alternative to this: facial exercises. Basically, you just exercise your facial muscles like you do your bodily ones. One of the leading experts in this field is Carolyn Cleaves, who is based in the US (www.carolynsfacialfitness.com). "Facial exercises are one of the fastest growing fitness programs happening today. Not only can you rid yourself of wrinkles exercising the facial muscles, you can also redefine the cheekbones and jaw line, as well as the nose," Cleaves says. "Facial exercises help alleviate the papery skin around the neck and under the eyes. Dark circles fade away along with that tired look. The lips become fuller and the nose becomes more defined. In other words, you regain that youthful, dynamic look you had when you were young. And it's all natural."

Coutinho suggests that we start looking at methods of "age control" at around 30. She also stresses the importance of an all-round approach to anti-ageing. "Start the day with a proper breakfast, drink enough water, get enough sleep, exercise – this is essential, it helps you to tone your body and also de-stresses you. Stress can play havoc on your skin and hair. Cut down on alcohol, don't smoke, and don't drink coffee as it dehydrates the skin. The sun is not the only culprit!"

But it is one of the main ones. So keep your Chanel hat on.

Anti-ageing: a glossary of terms

AHAs Alpha hydroxy acids are chemical compounds, either synthetic or natural, that reduce wrinkles and the signs of ageing by improving the look and feel of skin. Found in some creams and chemical peels.

Amino Peptides Peptides are polymers or molecules which link amino acids. Amino-peptides are shown to have a remarkable

– especially not about ageing. Stress is extremely ageing.
- Laugh as much as you can; it is a great facial muscle workout but also brings with it a host of other health/anti-ageing benefits.
- Don't smoke – ever. And cut back on alcohol to a minimum.
- Get enough sleep – this is when your cells regenerate.

anti-inflammatory effect deep within the skin's surface that promotes anti-ageing properties, including tissue regeneration.

Botox A toxic protein which paralyzes muscles and therefore temporarily erases or significantly decreases wrinkles.

Co-enzyme Q10 A vitamin-like substance which generates energy in cells.

Collagen A type of protein that connects our bodily tissues and provides the skin with strength, flexibility and resilience. Deteriorates with age, leading to wrinkles.

Fibroblasts A type of cell that makes collagen. The point of laser treatments is to heat the fibroblasts so they are tricked into thinking the skin is being damaged and thus produce collagen to protect it.

Hyaluronic Acid Also known as a "filler" and injected to plump up lips for example. Contrary to some claims, it has no effect at all when used topically but needs to penetrate the upper dermis to have an effect. So there is no point in buying an expensive cream with Hyaluronic acid in it.

Lycopene An antioxidant found mainly in tomatoes which protects against UVA rays.

Pentapeptides Amino acids that renew the skin's outermost layer to reveal smoother, younger-looking skin. Pentapeptides work by stimulating the production of new collagen, which helps diminish the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles.

Topical Something you put on your skin or in your hair as opposed to eating it.

SPF Sun Protection Factor.

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