



skin solutions

The New Year brings hope for ageless-looking skin as the race for a youth cream picks up speed. **Shirley Lord** reviews the likely winners and describes how you can best improve your skin now

You're 30 and look 40 . . . 40 and look 50. Whatever age you are, your skin looks older than it should: dull, poor elasticity, broken capillaries, enlarged pores, fine lines, and deeper wrinkles. Sun exposure caused most of this damage before you were 20. That's when ultraviolet rays began a "breakdown" of skin's inner layers, invisible at first but inexorably moving up to attack the skin's entire support system: the fat layer and the two proteins—elastin and collagen—that give the skin its firmness and elasticity, and the skin's own complex natural moisturizing factors (which enable skin to retain moisture), all of which affect the skin's outer layer you see in the mirror, the stratum corneum.

The good news? Sun damage can be partially to totally reversed, depending on its extent. The government gave everyone a break back in the seventies when it allowed sunscreens/blocks to be sold without prescription, encouraging everyone to wear them regularly to preclude skin cancer and premature aging. Neither the government nor the dermatologic experts knew then the full extent of what sun exposure does to the skin. Now we do.

"People need to wear sun protection every day," says Ellen Gendler, associate professor of dermatology, New York University School of Medicine. "If you're somebody who goes to work at 6:30 A.M. and doesn't emerge till 8:00 P.M., it may not be so critical. But for the majority we can't underestimate the effect on the skin of even small doses of sun. Once we incorporate sunblocks into our general routine—never forget the children—it will become easier to accept the everyday need for them."

At an 8:00 A.M. breakfast, John McCook, corporate vice president of research and development for Elizabeth Arden, shows me two slides of human skin as seen under the microscope. In the first—of skin prematurely aged by the sun—the stratum corneum looks like shredded wheat, undulating in a range of peaks and valleys. In the second all shreds, peaks, and valleys are gone. It's the same skin after being treated for two months with Arden's new elixir, Alpha-Ceramide Intensive Skin Treatment, which utilizes a combination of two of the most talked-about age-fighting substances in skin care to date: alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs), natural substances from milk, sugarcane, apples, and other fruit; and synthesized ceramides (ceramides are lipids present in the skin that provide a waterproof insulating shield for moisture control).

"Ceramides propel the power of AHAs," McCook says, as proud as a new father, while switching the slides back and forth to point out how in the "after" picture, the skin, a profusion of blobs, bubbles, and dots, is



of new blood vessels, and diminishing fine lines." New research indicates that this combination may also build back collagen and elastin. Study results announced at the American Academy of Dermatology's recent annual meeting revealed that 12 percent ammonium lactate (an AHA) increased skin's resilience and thickness by 20 percent, and its natural humectant, hyaluronic acid, by 50 percent over a six-month period. Westwood-Squibb's prescription-only moisturizer Lac-Hydrin contains 12 percent ammonium lactate.

Effective new over-the-counter AHA treatments: Avon's Anew Intensive Treatment for Face and Pond's Age Defying Complex both contain 8 percent glycolic acid, so far the highest nonprescription AHA concentration for facial products; and Prescriptives All You Need for Drier Skin. For men: this month comes Aramis's Lift Off! to exfoliate, moisturize, and protect from the sun (SPF 7); in March Clinique introduces Turnaround Lotion for men, with salicylic acid to help fine lines disappear.

As beauty manufacturers rush to add AHAs to their products, James Leyden, M.D., professor of dermatology at the University of Pennsylvania, cautions that when it comes to AHAs, it's not the concentration in a formula that counts as much as the balance of ingredients, the correct pH, and the right medium to deliver the ingredients to the skin.

The skin and the environment

"We live in a sea of oxygen, which is very corrosive stuff," says David Baltimore, Ph.D., a Nobel Laureate in medicine/physiology, at another breakfast to discuss aging, this one given by the Irvington Institute for Medical Research. "Aging begins around 30 years of age. Cell growth slows, hair thins . . . [but] if you want to know the truth, we're rusting."

For the last few years the cosmetics industry has been trying to prevent or at least slow down that "rusting," taking on not just the number-one skin enemy, the sun, but other outdoor and indoor dangers: pollution, cigarette smoke, car exhaust, smog, stress, and other ugly facts of life that trigger "free radicals"—unstable oxygen molecules that can damage the DNA and ultimately the skin and other organs. Beta-carotene, selenium, and vitamins A, C, and E are all proven antioxidants or "blockers" of free radicals. (Industry giant Union Carbide is testing a drug containing a 10 percent concentration of vitamin C, which, once government approved, will be sold as a skin protectant from environmental hazards.)

Now there's fresh thinking from Estée Lauder with Resilience Elastin Refirming Creme, a new product that protects and improves skin with a mix of antioxidants, enzyme inhibitors, and botanical and marine extracts, in particular one ingredient from a soft coral discovered by California's Scripps Institute.

Alayne Zatulove, Lauder's senior scientific adviser, explains, "When the skin recognizes an intruder, it calls up its whole army when, if you like, only a foot soldier would do. When free radicals attack, the skin's immune system goes on alert and interprets the offender the same way it would a full-fledged bacterial attack, releasing a protective flood of enzymes, which, as they ward off the attackers, also damage the skin's collagen and elastin." Resilience precludes that level of response. Studies carried out on women volunteers record that with Resilience, elasticity and moisture retention were improved in four weeks, with a 42 percent reduction in lines in eight weeks. The Resilience campaign also marks the first time in Lauder's history that an older model (43-year-old Dayle Haddon) will be used.

With the onset of the dry, cold winter season, Lancôme also introduces this month a dual counter-attack to the elements: Nutriforce, a

Menopausal skin sag and bag

When estrogen levels ebb during menopause, it has a big effect on the skin, which can become blotchy—thinner in some places, thicker in others. (Because it's more protected, body skin 'ages' more slowly than that of the face, but it also begins to dry and get thinner.)

The good news: "Estrogen replacement therapy [ERT] promotes cell proliferation and improves skin cells' ability to hold water, so skin actually becomes thicker and moister," says Wulf Utian, M.D., Ph.D., chairman of reproductive biology at Case Western Reserve University. Studies have also suggested that ERT minimizes the breakdown of collagen after menopause and that it stimulates the production of hyaluronic acid, which improves skin cells' moisture-retaining ability.

The Food and Drug Administration clamped down hard on hormone creams in the sixties when Revlon and Helena Rubinstein used progesterone in creams for "mature skin." Research has come a long, long way since then, uncovering other "reviving" substances. Approved now in France are two prescription creams that deliver ERT topically, and research from the Pasteur Institute has helped produce the first cosmetic cream specifically for postmenopausal women, Christian Dior's Capture Lift Firming Night Treatment for the Face, targeted to support ERT with a patented vitamin A propionate, specifically used to zip up skin elasticity and tone.

Can postmenopausal emotional changes and mental attitudes register on the skin? Leyden answers, "Our nerve endings are in skin's connective tissue, so obviously the central nervous system can't be ignored."

Grove adds that facial wrinkles and sags can also be caused by weak facial muscles, for which a solution may be the new Facial-Flex—an appliance to exercise facial muscles. Tested at George Washington University, it showed an improvement of patients' skin tone and sag after three months.

As frown lines and naso-labial lines deepen from nose to mouth and the mouth sags inward, the face can look haggard. "As women get older, they tend to diet more, which aggravates this," says New York dermatologist Patricia Wexler. To counter this, there is the fat transfer procedure, another example of cosmetic dermatology replacing cosmetic surgery, in which fat from the patient's own body is injected into the "sags" or hollows to return fullness and softness to the face. Enough fat is taken and frozen for the eight to ten treatments it takes for the transplanted fat to become permanent.

Wexler has been carrying out this treatment for the past three years, achieving a considerable reputation on both coasts for improving skin and face shape the most natural way (212/684-2666). Although since the advent of liposuction, fat removal is a relatively standard, simple procedure, the preparation techniques involved in obtaining the correct fat consistency and precisely reimplanting it is the secret of success. Also under way now: clinical studies of a new procedure, Autologen injection, in which a patient's own collagen—often obtained from punch grafts of the stomach or buttocks—is injected to fill out facial wrinkles. There's enthusiastic response from dermatologists around the country. "Since the collagen comes from a patient's own skin, it should remove the possibility of an allergic response," says Melvin L. Elson, M.D., medical director of the Dermatology Center in Nashville.

All these methods, new materials, and formulas represent great advances in skin care. "But to say or think there's just one panacea for aging skin is rubbish," says top Unilever skin researcher Ian Scott, Ph.D, who recently moved to the United States to join the skin-care race. "We don't yet know what the structural composition of wrinkles actually is, but we do know we're on the way to finding the means to get rid of them." ●