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Foods that help improve skin problems

Whether it's a pesky patch of dry skin or a sprinkling of acne along the jawline, most of us struggle with our skin from time to time. Visit any pharmacy and you'll find a wealth of products promising to transform your skin from the outside - but what about improving your skin health from within?

We speak to the experts to learn how our diet may be affecting our skin.

Inflammation

Inflammation - our body's natural defence mechanism - is great for fighting off the flu. But many of us suffer from unnecessary inflammation within our bodies as our immune system reacts to a perceived threat, such as stress. This unhelpful inflammation has been linked to a number of skin conditions, including [acne](#) and [psoriasis](#).

Whilst stress or immune disorders can cause this inflammation, your diet may also be playing a part.

'Foods with a [high glycaemic index](#), such as sugar-processed carbohydrates, breads, crisps, cookies and cakes, should be avoided, as they trigger inflammation,' explains Dr Suchitra Badvey, consultant dermatologist at [Twenty-five Harley Street](#).

'Nightshade fruits such as tomatoes, peppers, eggplant and potatoes should also be avoided.'

Happily, other foods can help to bring down inflammation. 'Turmeric and ginger are anti-inflammatory foods and can also help to alleviate psoriasis symptoms,' explains Badvey. 'Foods that are rich in antioxidants should also be an important part of anti-inflammatory diets.'

Balance of fats

These days, we're bombarded with information about food, meaning most of us are aware that the modern diet, rich in processed foods, tends to contain too much saturated fat. But as well as cutting down on 'bad fats', we need to top up our intake of omega-3 'good fats' for a healthy balance.

'Omega-3 fatty acids are one of the biggest deficiencies in the UK,' explains Laura Clark, specialist dietician at [Well Aware](#). 'People are better off if they have a balance, where they don't have significantly more omega-6 (found in vegetable oil) than omega-3s (found in oily fish, nuts and seeds) in their diet.'

Hormonal issues

Anyone who breaks out at their time of the month, or suffered from skin problems during puberty, will be well aware that hormones can affect the appearance of our skin. But did you know your diet could affect your hormones?

For example, diets high in sugar can send blood sugar rocketing, elevating our insulin levels.

'Elevated insulin levels indirectly stimulate the secretion of certain hormones,' explains Badvey. 'This leads to increased sebum production, which worsens acne conditions.'

In addition, when it comes to consuming dairy products, 'there may be an indirect influence due to the hormones produced by cows during pregnancy,' says Badvey. 'These may indirectly stimulate the release of sebum. Some acne sufferers have benefited greatly from reducing their intake of milk and other dairy products.'

Vitamin deficiency

Chances are, if you're eating a balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables that are rich in colour, you're probably getting a good dose of vitamins.

However, some supplements may be beneficial to sufferers if they are deficient or feel their intake of certain foods is low. 'Supplements of cod liver oil or krill oil can help decrease inflammation and may have a positive impact in reducing the severity of psoriasis, [eczema](#) and acne,' explains Badvey.

'There are studies which show links between [vitamin D3 deficiency](#) and eczema and psoriasis; hence taking a good supplement of vitamin D3 could help improve these conditions when one is not getting enough sunlight,' explains Badvey, who also recommends sufferers be tested for deficiencies in zinc and vitamin C.

However, popping vitamin pills won't undo the damage done by that lunchtime doughnut. 'Supplements appeal to our uncertainty,' agrees Clark. 'But ultimately, you can't supplement out a bad diet.'

Gut health

Feeling a bit sluggish? Having poor digestion may be wreaking havoc on your complexion.

'Improving gut health in inflammatory skin conditions such as psoriasis, eczema and acne helps to alleviate the symptoms,' explains Badvey.

Adapting our diet to include plenty of fibre will help improve our digestive transit, and also improve skin health. In addition, 'highly-processed foods tend to cause an [imbalance of gut-friendly bacteria](#),' explains Badvey.

As well as cutting down on processed foods, 'taking a [probiotic supplement](#) will help restore the balance of gut-friendly bacteria and may help alleviate symptoms of inflammatory skin conditions.'

'Fermented foods such as sauerkraut can be beneficial in helping to balance intestinal flora by providing it with health-promoting bacteria; however; such foods should be taken with caution in eczema patients as they may exacerbate symptoms.'

No magic solution

Let's face it: we'd all like to find that eating a banana a day will cure pesky dry skin, or gorging on dates will improve eczema. However, it's important to remember that while diet plays a part in our health, eating well and ensuring we get enough vitamins won't guarantee problem-free skin. 'It's part of the puzzle,' agrees Clark. 'But it's an enormous puzzle.'

'There is no magic solution - but we are all looking for it!'

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