

THE FOOD FRENEMIES

Tight skin, healthy hair and a strong body—to a certain extent, they're just the luck of the draw, determined by good genes. But even for the best of us, the glow fades as the years pass and the machine slowly starts to wind down. Ageing is inevitable, and there is nothing that can stop its progress—no miracle cream, no magic

berry. That's why eating right as you get older is the best thing you can do.

"It's all about weight management," says Dr Richard Kowal, a nutritionist and chiropractor in New York City and author of *The Skinny Book Of Weight Loss Tricks*. Managing weight through food intake is no anti-ageing panacea, but it can still go a long way. If you want to keep the kilos in check, small and frequent meals is the way to go.

To start eating right, you have to

stop eating wrong. Most of us have a general idea of the things we should avoid, but what sort of impact do they have on our weight, health and general well-being? Dr Kowal and Jodi Citrin, a registered dietician in New York and co-author of *The Little Black Apron: A Single Girl's Guide To Cooking With Style And Grace*, weigh in on the food rules to follow as we start to age.

Alcohol: Think it's okay to go by the one-glass-of-wine-a-night rule? Think again, says Dr Kowal: "Every glass of wine or beer contains 150 calories. Think about how much that adds when you spread it out over a week." Alcohol turns into sugar, which adds weight, and it is dehydrating even in limited amounts. "You'll see the effects of that in terms of wrinkles, dry skin and dry hair," Citrin says.

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Salt: It's everywhere and in everything, but in reality, we need very little of it. In general, salt leads to water retention and that results in bloating and puffiness in the face, according to Citrin. "Salt-heavy fried foods can lead to acne, even as we get older, as well as inflammation," she says. Something as innocuous as soy sauce has more salt than necessary, and certain breakfast cereals can be high in sodium.

Fat: Trans fats and saturated fats are our greatest enemies. Fortunately, trans fats are not natural, so they can be avoided by skipping packaged foods (even those that proudly claim to contain zero grams of trans fat) and focusing completely on non-synthetic foods, Dr Kowal says.

As for saturated fats, they're guaranteed artery cloggers. Red meat gets the biggest rap, but "chewing your chicken or mutton down to the bone is where you'll find the fattiest part of the meat," Dr Kowal says.

But don't make 'fat' a dirty word—



the body needs it even more as we age. Make sure you incorporate good fats, like omega-3 (found in olives, nuts, salmon and sardines) in your diet. "These are essential to making your skin glow, your hair shine and your memory stay sharp," explains Dr Kowal. "They're extremely important for your brain, health and general well-being, particularly as you age."

Coffee: It's one of those things we've been schooled to avoid, but in reality, coffee is still an unfinished story. "It isn't really bad for you," says Citrin, "and caffeine can actually have beneficial effects on your skin." Caffeine helps reduce puffiness. Research shows that it can even sharpen your memory and stimulate hair growth. But it's important to remember, "drinking too much coffee often causes people to skimp on water, which can lead to dehydration," Citrin says. "Too much caffeine can affect sleep patterns, and a lack of rest definitely ages you."

Sugar: We've all heard the story on sugar, particularly the refined kind. For Dr Kowal, though, there's no difference between the sugar content of so-called healthy food, like a bowl of rice, and junk food, such as a slice of cake. "From the body's point of view, they're all sugar cones," he says. Sugar is one of the greatest culprits of prematurely ageing skin and increasing wrinkles, Citrin says. That doesn't mean skipping out on fruit—just don't substitute it with a glass of juice, which without the fibre, is really just a shot of sugar.

Green vegetables: Common beliefs hold that if ever there were an elixir of youth, it would be made of spinach and kale. But would it really? While they're loaded with vitamins and minerals and are excellent sources of iron, greens alone are not enough. "It's very important to get all the colour groups—green, red, orange, yellow and white—when it comes to vegetables," Citrin says. "All of them have something to offer." Purple vegetables are bursting with antioxidants, for example, while the oranges, yellows and reds contain carotenoids that can protect skin against sun damage. —*Savita Iyer-Ahrestani*

THE GOOD PILLS

You eat right, get plenty of fruit and vegetables and stock up on the good fats. But you may still need the benefits of a nutritional supplement. Surprised? When dermatologist Dr Harshna Bijlani, who runs The Ageless Clinic in Mumbai, asked 10 of her healthy-eating clients to take a routine blood test, "almost every one of the results showed some kind of deficiency that needed correcting," she reports.

Mumbai-based dermatologist Dr Malavika Kohli says it's a myth that only specific groups need to take dietary supplements. "It's not just growing children, pregnant women, vegetarians and people over a certain age who need a boost. We can all benefit from one. Because of the lives we live today—all the stress and travel—our bodies generally need more help to repair," she explains.

These nutritional pharmaceuticals, or nutraceuticals as they're called, are made with ingredients (derived from food) that provide health benefits and even aid in the prevention and treatment of disease. They include vitamins, minerals and botanicals, functional foods like fortified cereals and health bars, and also medicinal food. Nutraceuticals specifically for skin, hair and nails are known as nutricosmetics.

SKIN DEEP

Among the most popular benefits of nutricosmetics is the assistance they offer in dealing with common skin dilemmas. They aid the skin's natural repair systems and help delay the effects of the biological clock. They usually include:

- **Vitamins A, C and E.** Vitamin A helps smooth skin; vitamin C helps in the production of collagen, which gives skin elasticity and helps heal wounds; vitamin E protects the skin against sun damage.
- **Antioxidants**, like carotenoids,



magnesium, manganese and selenium (a mineral found in nuts and tuna). They help the skin's repair systems. ALAs (alpha lipoic acids) "hydrate, giving you a natural glow," says Dr Bijlani, "and help revive dull, listless skin prone to pigmentation and age spots."

- **Coenzyme Q10**, an antioxidant found in our body, peaks between the ages of 20 and 30, and then starts to fall. Bumping up Co-Q10 levels either with oral supplements

or a topical application helps reduce the appearance of wrinkles.

- **Omega-3**, which flushes out toxins. Dr Bijlani suggests taking one pill daily or getting the required amount from your diet by eating at least four portions of oily fish, like salmon, a week, or a teaspoon of raw flaxseeds daily.

- **Plant-based flavonoids**, found in red wine, green tea and chocolate. Resveratrol, in red wine, is believed to be a powerful antioxidant, as is catechin, found in green tea. >

EASY FIXES

Find these at your local pharmacy

SKIN

Carofit: Includes carotenoids, vitamins C and E, selenium, chromium and folic acid

Exerge HC: Contains beta-carotene, vitamins C and E, zinc oxide, sodium selenate, cupric oxide and manganese

Oxidon: Contains vitamins A, C and E, copper, manganese, zinc and selenium

HAIR

Follihair: Includes niacinamide, selenium, manganese and biotin

Keraglo Forte: Includes biotin, sodium selenite, cupric oxide and zinc oxide

Radiance H: Contains biotin, collagen peptides, green tea extract, grape seed extract, amino acids, antioxidants, vitamin B and minerals