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dermatology update

by Dr. Debra Price

Questions and Answers

The Western diet and acne

I recently heard a report that diet can exacerbate acne. My dermatologists has always told me the contrary. What is true?

A recent study of dietary habits and acne in Paraguay and New Guinea challenged the accepted belief that there is no causal link between diet and acne. The native populations of New Guinea and Paraguay studied have diets that exclude breads, sugars and soft drinks and they have no incidence of acne. The authors theorized that a traditional western diet high in refined carbohydrates, elevates growth and hormone levels, stimulating sebaceous secretions that exacerbate acne. Further prospective studies will be needed to conclusively address this controversial issue. Most dermatologists believe that the etiology of acne is multifactorial with genetics, stress, topical exposures and now possibly diet playing a role.

Antioxidants and aging

Is there any evidence that diet affects the skin aging process?

Diets high in antioxidant-containing fruits and vegetables may cause the skin to have a healthier appearance and heal faster. Diets rich in essential fatty acids such as fish oil and flaxseed oil are felt to decrease skin inflammation. Research in this area is preliminary, but there is some evidence that oxidative stress may promote aging of the skin and other

organs. An anti-inflammatory diet that excludes trans fatty acids and is rich in low glycemic antioxidant foods and essential fatty acids may improve the health and appearance of the skin. Certainly, avoidance of known environmental triggers of free radical formation such as sunlight and smoking will also contribute to maintaining youthful healthy skin.

Exercise and peels

How long should you wait to begin an exercise program if you just had a deep chemical peel? This would include a full face laser rejuvenation, microdermabrasion or a glycolic peel.

The skin is sensitive and erythematous (red) following healing after a deep chemical peel or full face laser rejuvenation. Exercise can temporarily increase redness and sweating and wiping can be irritating to newly healed skin. It is probably advisable to avoid rigorous exercise for one month following a deep peel or laser procedure. There is no contraindication to exercising after superficial microdermabrasion or glycolic acid peeling.

The athlete with rosacea

My athletic client has rosacea. Are there any suggestions for helping her keep it under control if she works out every day?

Exercise, sweating and overheating are factors known to exacerbate rosacea. Ideally, individuals with rosacea should exercise

indoors in an air-conditioned space. During exercise, rosacea patients should intermittently wipe their skin with a cool washcloth and following exercise, shower promptly.

Dry, chapped lips

I have a client who just came back from skiing and her lips are a sight! She said that she tried to keep them hydrated but the sun, wind and cold weather really made them chapped. They are so chapped they have deep cracks and look like they hurt. What is your recommendation for severely chapped lips?

Dry chapped lips respond to treatment with a topical steroid ointment and frequent application of a petrolatum lip balm. Avoidance of licking the lips or application of lipstick during the healing phase hastens resolution. ■

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Cystic acne

I have a client who has cystic acne on occasion. She will not use anything but tea tree on her cysts because her skin is so sensitive. I've tried to convince her to use a glycolic cleanser and moisturizer to help stop the breakouts, but she refuses. Meanwhile, she is still getting large cysts. What is the best treatment for rapidly getting rid of her cysts?

Unfortunately, there is no topical remedy for cystic acne. I recommend you refer your client to a dermatologist for prescription treatment. Cystic acne generally responds to oral antibiotic therapy, incision and drainage and intraleisional Kenalog injections. Accutane therapy is indicated for cystic acne that is unresponsive to maximal alternative therapy.

Crow's-feet

Other than not smiling or squinting, what's the best way to stop and reverse crow's-feet?

The best way to stop crow's-feet is to use a sunscreen daily, avoid smoking and midday sun exposure. Topical use of anti-aging therapies such as Retin-A, Differin, Tazorac and retinol may be beneficial, but Botox is by far the best remedy. Botox relaxes the muscles that create crow's-feet wrinkles. In individuals with more significant photoaging, combining Botox with ablative or nonablative laser treatment can enhance and prolong the results.

Generic Accutane

I recently heard that Accutane now has a generic version. Is that true and if so what is it called?

The generic version of Accutane, Amnesteem earned FDA approval in November, 2002, for the treatment of severe recalcitrant nodular acne. Like Accutane, Amnesteem has a formal program called SPIRIT to ensure patients are educated about the teratogenicity and other possible side effects. Many dermatologists may be reluctant to prescribe the generic version until its clinical profile of side effects is established.

Tea tree and fungus

I heard that tea tree oil extract can treat fungal infections of the foot. What is your opinion about its ability to do so?

Tea tree oil can eradicate tinea pedis (fungal infection of the foot) in 50 percent of patients who apply a 25 percent concentration twice daily for four weeks. The cure rate is lower than prescription topical agents, but it may be valuable for patients who prefer to try a natural remedy first.

Hair wax

I have been using hair wax to style my hair and noticed that I have developed an acne condition on my forehead and sides of my cheeks. Do you think hair wax could be the culprit and if so what hair products do you recommend I substitute?

Hair wax can sometimes migrate onto the face and occlude follicles causing an acneiform outbreak. If you have experienced complexion problems since beginning hair wax use, you may want to consider switching to a sculpting gel.

Human collagen

I heard that a human form of collagen was recently approved. Is this true and if so what is it called? Do patients need a skin test prior to treatment like collagen?

Two human tissue derived forms of collagen, Cosmoderm and Cosmoplast recently received FDA approval. Unlike Zyderm and Zyplast collagen, these new collagen implants do not require allergy testing. The longevity of response appears to be equivalent to bovine-derived collagen. ■

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