

## The Skin Beneath Your Mask

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One of the best things about medicine, is that we are constantly learning, about new diseases, new treatments, and new preventative methods for self-care. I remember taking a dermatology rotation in residency almost 20 years ago, learning more about skin conditions on my outpatient rotations and then practicing basic dermatology as an internal medicine physician and reading more about dermatologic conditions. Nothing is more fun and enlightening than sharing cases with trusted colleagues and learning from specialists who have had advanced training in different areas of medicine. May I introduce the wise, practical and friendly board-certified dermatologist and dermatopathologist from Denver Skin Doctors, (that I trust with my own skin) - Dr. Zeina Dajani.



I put together a summary of my talk on skin care filled with Dr. Dajani's pearls of wisdom (many plagiarized directly from her!) that I will now share with you. The summary is separated into tips for adults, tips for teenagers and young adults, and then universal tips for everyone.

### Adults

Consider the following skin care routine. In the morning, wash your face daily with a gentle face wash such as Dove, Cetaphil or CeraVe. Then, regardless of the season, apply a moisturizer with sunscreen every morning to your face, neck, chest, and the tops of your hands. The sunscreen should contain at least SPF 30+ with zinc and/or titanium. Zinc and titanium serve as a physical sunscreen that physically block against UV light allowing it to bounce off. Chemical sunscreens turn UV light into heat. A combination of a chemical and physical sunscreen is best. (Since, the audience usually asks, I personally use ELTA MD tinted sunscreen.)



For extra credit, as Dr. Dajani says, you can also apply a daily antioxidant serum containing vitamins C and E to bare skin after washing and before applying sunscreen (i.e. Skinceuticals, Ferulic CE) and take a daily oral antioxidant containing niacinamide (i.e. Heliocare).

In the evening, wash your face daily with a gentle face wash such as Dove, Cetaphil or CeraVe. Apply an over-the-counter moisturizer containing retinol or a prescription strength retinoid followed by a gentle moisturizing lotion with ceramides and hyaluronic acid (i.e. CeraVe PM) several nights per week. Retinoids are derived from Vitamin A, disperse pigment helping to prevent brown spots, normalize keratinocyte turnover unclogging pores, prevent acne, shrink pores and treat precancerous skin changes. Retinoids also build collagen to prevent fine wrinkles. Retinoids however can be very drying and make the skin more sensitive to the sun, so

if you choose to use a retinoid you must be equally committed to sunscreen and moisturizing. Retinoids work best if used daily.

May I impart a few words to the wise. Aside from the treatments discussed, paying extra for exotic vitamins in skin creams that promise to erase fine lines and prevent wrinkles will get you little more than an empty wallet. Very, very few are actually effective in preventing or reversing skin damage. This is because the molecules in the creams are either too large to be absorbed by the skin or the creams contain antioxidants at concentrations that are too low to be effective. For example, collagen is a huge molecule that is not absorbed into the skin. So, it comes as no surprise that there is no strong evidence for the clinical efficacy of either oral or topical collagen. Only selenium, vitamin E and vitamin C have been proven to decrease the effects of sun on the skin and actually prevent further damage.

Botox and fillers are also used cosmetically. Studies have shown that they make you look younger, not just because it makes wrinkle lines less deep, but because they increase confidence and you present a happier face. Another option might just be to smile more.



And for those of us who are sprouting hairs in unexpected places, may I suggest a good pair of tweezers or trimmers? And an honest friend to point out the ones you can't see...

### Teenagers and Young Adults

Consider the following skin care routine. Wash your face *twice* daily with a gentle face wash such as Dove, Cetaphil or CeraVe. Then, regardless of the season, apply a moisturizer with sunscreen every morning. If you have mild acne, start with over-the-counter salicylic acid or benzoyl peroxide wash several times weekly. Salicylic acid is a keratolytic that helps unclog pores and prevents whiteheads and blackheads. Benzoyl peroxide is an anti-inflammatory and anti-bacterial that helps with red acne papules and some with whiteheads and black heads. Both are very drying and the benzoyl peroxide will bleach clothing and towels. Over-the-counter Differin (adapalene 0.1%) gel several nights weekly as tolerated is a mild retinoid that can also help acne, but is also drying.

May people ask if diet can cause acne. There is some evidence that whey in protein shakes and reduced fat milk triggers acne. Whole milk is less of a trigger, as it has less whey. Also, avoid testosterone or DHEA supplements and muscle building shakes which also cause acne.

When should you go see Dr. Dajani? If you have not seen any improvement in 6-8 weeks of the over-the-counter treatment or if early scarring develops. Note, that it may take several weeks to notice and improvement and sometimes acne can get worse before it gets better... but it shouldn't cause scarring.



### Universal Tips

**Protect your skin from the sun every day.** Whether spending a day at the beach or running errands, sun protection is essential. You can protect your skin by seeking shade, covering up with clothing, and using sunscreen that is broad-spectrum, SPF 30 (or higher), and water-resistant. You should apply sunscreen every day to all skin that is not covered by clothing.

**Apply self-tanner rather than get a tan.** Every time you get a tan, you prematurely age your skin. This holds true if you get a tan from the sun, a tanning bed, or other indoor tanning equipment. All emit harmful UV rays that accelerate how quickly your skin ages and are not protective. Self-tanner does not do the same damage.

**If you smoke, ask for help to quit.** Smoking greatly speeds up how quickly skin ages. It causes wrinkles and a dull, sallow complexion. Wrinkles concentrate around the mouth from drawing on the cigarette or joint and around the eyes from squinting due to the smoke.

**Avoid repetitive facial expressions.** Remember when your mom said, “Keep making that face and it will freeze that way!” Once again... mom was right. When you make a facial expression, you contract the underlying muscles. If you repeatedly contract the same muscles for many years, these lines become permanent. That is why sunglasses are recommended. Wearing sunglasses can help reduce wrinkle lines caused by squinting.

**Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet.** Findings from a few studies suggest that eating plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables may help prevent damage that leads to premature skin aging. Findings from research studies also suggest that a diet containing lots of sugar or other refined carbohydrates can accelerate aging.

**Hydration.** Dehydration, especially from alcohol, deepens wrinkles and makes it look withered. Hydration keeps your skin looking bright and vital, by maintaining the skin's elasticity. Alcohol also depletes the body of vitamin A which plays an important role in skin firmness.

