

Skin Care for Everyone: The Millennium Approach

In the sixties, moisturization with various lotions, creams, oil emulsion was the key to skin care; in the seventies, supermoisturization with ceramides and liposomes emphasized fatty delivery system to the epidermis. Moisturization, however, only improves transepidermal water loss temporarily, but does not alter the natural process of aging.

A little more light dawned in the eighties when tretinoin was discovered by Dr. Albert Kligman. Tretinoin reduces dysplastic changes especially induced by photodamage, increases angiogenesis and promotes collagen formation.

In the nineties, anti-aging ingredients such as alpha hydroxy acids (AHA) made news. These are, in fact, ancient remedies, that Queen Cleopatra of Egypt and Lady Yang Kwei Fei of the Chinese Tang dynasty used in their skin care routine. They had the wisdom to appreciate those ingredients can effect the increased epidermal and papillary dermal thickness, re-organise the polarity of keratinocytes, and improve the quality and density of collagen and elastic fibres in the science of skin renewal today.

Beta hydroxy acid (BHA) or salicylic acid is not a new invention either. It has been used for the treatment of acne and scaly conditions such as cradle cap, fungal infection and callosities for decades. It's use alone or in combination with AHA adds to the exfoliative properties and helps skin renewal.

The public is more aware of the damaging effect of ultraviolet rays. Although skin cancer is not a threat to the average office worker, skin aging concerns everyone. However there is still misconception about the longer UVA rays, that it is present during cloudy days, throughout the day in daylight and all seasons. The importance of UVA & UVB sunscreens cannot be

over emphasized in an effective anti-aging skin care regime.

For the health conscious, Vitamin C as antioxidants is important to mop up the free radicals induced by photodamage. The skin can utilize one twentieth of oral dietary Vitamin C. Hence topical Vitamin C in the right formulation of high acidity (pH <3.5) is a more direct way of drug delivery. Once applied, it can stay in the skin for seventy-two hours and thus supplement the sun protective properties of sunscreens.

In the millennium, having a youthful skin is not a myth anymore. The logical regime is cleansing with AHA and/or BHA, conditioning with tretinoin or derivatives, sunscreen protection everyday and/or supplemented by topical Vitamin C.

However, one must be aware that since this is a cocktail mixture, skin reaction is invariable. Gradual introduction of ingredients, careful surveillance and counselling is all that is needed for good clinical practice.

More specialised treatment as corrective or reconditioning skin care include bleaching agents for pigmentary problem, in-office procedure for weathered and scarred skin with glycolic acids of various strength, BHA and trichloroacetic acid peels, and even touch up of a few wrinkles by Botox injection.

In the beginning of the new millennium, in the fast evolving world of cosmetopeutics, the criteria for an anti-aging product for everyone is to work towards a better safety data, to demonstrate efficacy and establish compliance even in sensitive skin.

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