

Ayurveda - Health notes

Skin and the Sun

Vital Health Topic: Skin Savvy: The Ayurvedic Perspective Protecting your Skin from the Sun

In our world of ozone holes and SPF-30 sunscreens, most people have come to think of the sun as a formidable enemy of the skin. Many doctors consider visible signs of aging of skin on fair-skinned people - leathery texture, wrinkles and age-spots, for example - mainly the result of ultraviolet radiation. Yet the sun, besides being the source of energy for mind and body, also nourishes the skin. It's the best natural source of Vitamin D, which is necessary for calcium absorption and healthy bones. Many doctors today recommend 15 minutes of direct exposure to gentle sun on the hands and face to absorb the minimum daily requirement of Vitamin D.

"Over-protecting from sun is not a good idea," says Vaidya Mishra, Director of Research and Product Development at Maharishi Ayurveda Products International. "The challenge is to maximize the benefit from sun and at the same time protect it from damage.

" People with Caucasian skin definitely should avoid direct exposure to strong sun, because their skin makes less melanin, the pigment that acts as a barrier to UV rays. However, short periods of exposure to very early morning sun are soothing and mild on the skin, and allow even very sensitive skin to absorb necessary Vitamin D.

Vaidya Mishra recommends avoiding long exposure to the sun whenever you are angry, hungry or emotionally upset, as these factors increase Pitta - the fire element - in the body and make the skin even more sensitive to sun damage. At these times, it's important to protect yourself by wearing a hat, protective clothing (full-sleeved shirts and pants, for example) and sunglasses. People with naturally more Pitta in their bodies should always take care to protect themselves from the midday sun.

DIETARY TIPS

It's also a good idea to cool the body from the inside if your skin is very photosensitive. Eating green leafy vegetables and fruits such as raisins, sweet juicy pears, sweet apples, and pomegranates, for instance, will help nourish and restore balance to the skin. Amla Berry, available as a supplement and also contained in Amrit, is also an excellent antioxidant and rasayana for the skin. Rose Petal Preserve, blended with boiled and cooled milk, is an excellent cooling beverage.

Cooking your food with a skin-protecting spice mixture to stimulate digestion but not overheat your skin helps. Sauté equal parts turmeric, coriander, fennel and cumin in ghee and add it to your vegetables and grains.

Even in winter, people with photosensitive skin should avoid eating too much ginger, garlic, asafoetida (hing), red chillies or any types of hot peppers as hot foods can increase sensitivity to the sun.

HERBS FOR THE SKIN

Watermelon puree is an excellent mask to cool down facial skin. Apply it evenly, except in the eye area, and rinse off with room temperature or lukewarm water after 10-15 minutes. Cotton pads soaked in rose water can be placed over closed eyes.

Another good way to cool the skin is with a milk bath. Add a couple of drops of rose water to room temperature milk and either rinse your face with it, followed by room temperature water, or apply generously with cotton pads and rinse off after ten minutes with room temperature water.

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The Youthful Skin Cream contains *Butea monosperma* (Flame of Forest), which is renowned in ayurveda for helping to boost the skin's natural long-term resistance to sun damage as well as antioxidants to fight free radical damage. "This cream is not a sunscreen or sunblock," says Vaidya Mishra, "but it can help keep skin cells healthy and well-nourished."

WINTER TIPS - BEYOND SUNSCREEN

"Drink plenty of water, and avoid very hot water for baths and showers if your skin is photosensitive to keep your skin properly moisturized and to protect it from the sun," advises Vaidya Mishra.

Take a warm bath before and after skiing or exposing your skin to freezing temperatures for a long period of time. Any time it's freezing outside, the pores of the skin freeze shut and heat is retained in the deeper layers. This heat dries out the skin and lowers its resistance to the sun. That is why many people get worse sunburns after skiing than at the beach, and it's also why some people's skin breaks out after a skiing trip. A warm bath before and after tackling the slopes helps dilate frozen channels and supports the skin in its effort to release heat trapped in the deeper layers.