

False Hope In A Jar?

Dr. Baxt sorts out anti-aging claims for today's skin care.

By Rebecca Baxt, M.D., M.B.A., F.A.A.D., Baxt Cosmedical

Happi.com



Here's what is certain: There are no firming or tightening products whose results can duplicate what you derive from in office procedures such as dermal fillers, botox, lasers, or cosmetic surgery. There are anti-aging products or ingredients that do perform significantly better than others and can make a profound difference in the skin's appearance while others are simply "false hope in a jar."

Why don't most products work the way they claim? Almost without exception, when you buy a product claiming to tighten skin, its effects, if any, are due to ingredients such as film-forming agents. Just like the name states, film-forming agents form a film on the skin, and that can make the skin "feel" tighter. The effect is temporary and you won't see noticeable lifting of sagging skin, but the sensation is often enough to convince women that the product is working. Skin "feeling" tighter is not the same as making a real change for the better in the tone or laxity of your skin. Using what really works will get you closer to the results you want.

THE HEROES

Sunscreen SPF 30 or above is the best antiaging cream you can use. It prevents skin cancer as well as UVA rays that cause loss of collagen and wrinkles in the skin. Reapply every two hours, use a powder sun block and carry in your pocketbook for quick and easy sunscreen touchups. My favorite powder sunblock is Colorescience, and my favorite base sunscreens have titanium or zinc oxide in them as active ingredients.

Retinoids work great to reduce fine lines and wrinkles and help boost collagen production. Over the counter retinols are good, Neutrogena makes a good one, or prescriptions such as Retin-A.

Glycolic acid also reduces fine lines and wrinkles and helps fade pigmentary damage from the sun. I often have patients alternate nights with retinoid and glycolic.

Vitamin C is a great antioxidant which reduces free radical damage and is great for anti-aging and

helps brighten the skin. I often recommend it in the morning, underneath sunblock, or at night if patients are too sensitive to tolerate retinoids and glycolic acid.

Ceramides are a type of lipid found in the membrane of cells. They help hold skin cells together, forming a protective layer that plumps the skin and retains moisture. Ceramide levels decrease as we age which leads to loss of hydration, less skin turnover and dryer, more damaged skin. Replenishing the skin's ceramide levels will help restore moisture and fortify the skin's natural barrier, helping skin look and feel younger. So use a ceramide containing moisturizer for your whole body daily.

Hydroquinone works to even out sun spots, blotches, and mottled skin. A little hydroquinone goes a long way. It's the most effective ingredient for bleaching skin. Hydroquinone fades hyperpigmentation by blocking the enzyme that triggers melanin production in the skin.

Green Tea Extract is loaded with nutrients called polyphenols, which have been shown to fight free radicals. Studies have found that ingredients in green tea can reduce sun damage and may protect against skin cancer when applied topically. Using green tea extract under sunscreen can provide an extra dose of protection. Polyphenols in creams and lotions may help slow signs of aging, reduce sagging skin and decrease wrinkles.

THE ZEROES

The majority of anti-aging creams are still based on moisturizers such as mineral oil. Wrinkles look worse when they are dry, so any kind of moisturizer helps, but it's only temporary and doesn't address the root cause of the wrinkles such as collagen loss, free radical damage, sun damage and environmental factors. Don't be fooled by the antiaging labels. Unless there is an actual "active ingredient" such as retinol, the benefit is just moisture but nothing else.

B Vitamins Many forms of vitamin B (like B12) can only be absorbed in the small intestine, so no matter how much is loaded into your moisturizer or serum, it's not going to make a difference. Vitamins like niacin can have an effect on the skin's texture and color, but your skin can't absorb them. If you really want to tap into the power of vitamin B to improve your skin's glow and appearance, stick to eating leafy greens like spinach, asparagus, beans, and peas.

Caffeine. Much like a Starbucks Latte for your brain, caffeine in skin creams can give a boost to your skin, too. Until it wears off. Caffeine can temporarily reduce puffiness, especially around your eyes. But don't expect permanent results.

Botanical extracts are ingredients extracted from plants (flowers, roots, stems, trees, etc.) for use in skin care for everything from healing blemishes to reducing fine wrinkles. They have been used for centuries and have anecdotal purposes in many cultures. The issue: Botanical extracts need to remain on your skin in order to work. In cleansers, there is simply not enough contact time on your skin for any true anti-aging benefit to take place. Another issue is that most botanical extracts are water soluble, which means that the moment you wet your skin and begin to wash your face, they're watered down and rendered useless.

Collagen and elastin in anti-wrinkle products. Collagen and elastin in skin-care products can

serve as good water-binding agents, but they cannot fuse with your skin's natural supply of these supportive elements. In most cases, the collagen molecule is too large to penetrate into the skin. But even when it is made small enough to be absorbed it cannot bind with the collagen existing in skin, and there isn't any research indicating otherwise.