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Beauty Around the Clock

Hour-by-hour tips to getting gorgeous skin.

Sara Reistad-Long *Posted: Thu, Jan 7, 2010, 1:40 pm EDT*

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You're a busy woman. And with everything going on in your life, we're willing to bet that your skin is the last thing on your mind. However, it's important to remember that taking care of your complexion requires more than just washing your face twice a day. Daily habits that you don't even give a second thought to have a huge impact on your appearance. "Your stress levels, exercise habits and diet all play a part in how your skin looks and feels, now and in the years to come," says Patricia Weider, MD, an A-list dermatologist in New York City.

Luckily, the road to radiance can be easy and pain-free - you just have to fit a few daily do's into your schedule. Here's how you can help your skin look its best, hour by hour:

8 a.m. Rise and de-shine! Beauty rest? Forget about it. According to Soren White, MD, chief dermatologist at Skinklinik, a physician-staffed skin spa in New York City, the greatest danger to skin isn't dirt or pollutants; it's the oil and dead cells that build up on our faces overnight. However, that doesn't mean you should scour, scald or squeeze before you put on your makeup. Pass on toners and scrubs, which can strip and irritate your face. Instead, swipe a cotton ball soaked with a glycolic acid product over your skin. This sugarcane-derived natural exfoliant promotes cell turnover, allowing any cleansers and moisturizers you use to better penetrate your skin. Follow up with a moisturizer containing SPF - scientists now speculate that as much as 95 percent of premature aging is due to sun damage - along with a light foundation or foundation powder, advises Dr. Weider. These create a protective shield, safeguarding your skin from sun and dirt. (Remember to keep your makeup brushes clean by lightly washing them every few weeks with shampoo.)



9 a.m. Drink up. Pour yourself a big glass of water, the first of at least eight today. Water keeps skin cells plump and healthy; it also distributes nutrients and helps eliminate waste. Try washing down a multivitamin along with it - nutritional deficiencies can make your complexion dull and sallow.

12 p.m. Stop stressing! Anxiety can worsen breakouts and skin conditions, says Dr. White. Fortunately, while you can't sweep all the stress out of your life you can do a lot to minimize it by making time for yourself. Learning a few quick yoga or relaxation techniques will do wonders to free your mind and soothe your skin.

12:30 p.m. Hit the gym. A good workout stimulates circulation, a surefire way to keep your skin nourished and rosy, says Dr. White. Crunched for time? Even a quick walk around the block can get your blood moving fast enough to make you look great.

3 p.m. Bring out the balm. Preventing dryness is an all-day job. Just as you should keep your water bottle full morning to night, it's a good idea to have a light moisturizer or water mist on hand so you can continue to topically hydrate, especially if you spend a lot of time indoors, notes Dr. White.

5 p.m. Let 'em see you sweat! Think perspiration is a definite skin defiler? Think again! Research shows that approximately 30 percent of toxins in the body are eliminated through the skin. A good sweat promotes this cleansing process, keeping your skin healthy and your complexion clear. So whether you're lounging in your gym's sauna or making a particularly nerve-racking phone call, go ahead and take the heat!

7 p.m. Touch up your T-zone. If end-of-day shine is a problem for you, Dr. White suggests dabbing an alcohol-based product, such as Clinique Clarifying Lotion 2, on your T-zone. If you're headed out for the evening, freshen your face with a little tinted moisturizer. You'll give your skin a lift and your color a boost.

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9:30 pm: Practice moderation. Many women let down their guard and indulge in their favorite vices at night. But before you drink up, light up or consume one more sugary treat, keep in mind that these lifestyle don'ts are sabotaging the benefits of your skin do's. Alcohol dehydrates the skin and promotes flushing, which can lead to burst capillaries and, consequently, a ruddy, uneven complexion. Smoking constricts your small blood vessels, and this prevents water and nutrients from reaching your skin. Sweets, meanwhile, offer empty calories that contain none of the skin-nourishing vitamins and minerals that fruits and vegetables do.

11 pm: Take it off! Removing your makeup and washing away the day's grime feels great and minimizes the oil buildup that leads to blemishes. But remember, your nighttime routine should be as pared-down as your morning one. Use a gentle cleanser, and follow up with a skin-specific therapeutic product - a mild glycolic acid for very young skin, or a stronger, retinol-based product if you're in your mid-thirties to forties. Finish with a moisturizer, and let your cells go about renewing themselves all night long!

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