Skin care: five basic principles to keep the skin healthy

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Introduction
The pharmacist’s assistant is at the forefront in the pharmacy to answer questions and advise customers on the basics of good skin care. With the advent of puberty, younger customers may need information on how to treat and prevent acne. On the other hand, life expectancy is continuously rising in developed countries, but the mystery of ageing remains partially unresolved, and customers are more aware of skin care than ever before. Skin ageing is also particularly important because of its social impact. This article will provide an overview of skin ageing, acne skin care and suggest five basic principles that can be followed in order to keep the skin healthy.

Skin ageing
Nicholas Perricone, a prominent American dermatologist, begins his book with the words: “Wrinkled, sagging skin is not the inevitable result of getting older. It’s a disease, and you can fight it”. Botulinum toxin injection, microdermabrasion, filler injection, laser hair removal and chemical peeling are the top five cosmetic non-surgical procedures.

There are two main processes that induce skin ageing: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic ageing, also known as the natural ageing process, is a continuous process that normally begins in the mid-20s. Extrinsic ageing is caused by environmental factors, such as sun exposure, air pollution, smoking, alcohol abuse and poor nutrition. Genetics and time influence intrinsic ageing. Signs of intrinsic ageing include smooth, thinning skin, with exaggerated expression lines. Extrinsically aged skin is characterised by photodamage as wrinkles, pigmented lesions, patchy hypopigmentation and solar keratoses (scaly spots or patches on the top layer of skin. With time, the spots or patches may become hard with a wart-like surface). Timely protection, including physical and chemical sunscreen, as well as avoiding exposure to intense ultraviolet (UV) radiation, is essential.

Antioxidants, such as vitamins E and C, coenzyme Q, alpha lipoic acid and glutathione can reduce the signs of ageing. Further anti-ageing products include three generations of retinoids, of which the first generation is broadly accepted. A diet with numerous fruit and vegetables that contain antioxidants is recommended, as well as exercise 2-3 times a week.

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Acne skin care
It is necessary to reassure patients that acne is not a hygiene-related disease. There is also no evidence that diet plays a role in acne. However, the importance of a healthy and balanced diet in promoting healthy skin is widely recognised. Hot weather, sweating, emotional stress, topical and oral corticosteroids, anabolic steroids and an excessive intake of iodine can exacerbate acne, and many women experience a premenstrual flare. Moisturisers, make-up and sunscreens can also irritate acne. Most acne undergoes spontaneous resolution in the early 20s, but acne can persist, and sometimes also occurs for the first time later in life.

There is no quick method of treating acne. Ongoing treatment is often required to prevent its return once it is under control. Regular cleansing with a mild soap or one of the many acne
cleansers is advised. Regular facials can also be beneficial. Finally, it is important to emphasise to patients that strict compliance with acne medicines is necessary in order to obtain optimal results with the treatment.

**Five basic principles to follow to keep the skin healthy**

**Protect against the sun**

Protecting skin from the sun is one of the most important ways of caring for it and preventing ageing. UV filters are now present in cosmetic products for daily use, such as make-up, creams, lotions and hairspray. Modern sunscreen should protect against UVA and UVB rays, as well as being photostable and water resistant. It is advisable to use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) at the highest level that you can afford, or at least one with an SPF of 15. When outdoors, sunscreen must be reapplied every two hours, or more often if swimming or perspiring. The sun should be avoided between 10h00 and 14h00, when its rays are the strongest. Cover the skin with tightly woven long-sleeved shirts, pants and wide-brimmed hats. Some laundry additives provide clothing with an additional layer of UV protection for a certain number of washes. Special sun-protective clothing is also available that is specifically designed to block UV rays.

**Don’t smoke**

Smoking makes your skin look older and contributes to premature wrinkling. It narrows the tiny blood vessels in the outermost layers of skin, which decreases the blood flow. This depletes the skin of oxygen and nutrients that are important to skin health. Smoking also damages collagen and elastin, the fibres that provide skin with its strength and elasticity. In addition, repetitive facial expressions made when smoking, such as pursing the lips when inhaling and squinting the eyes to keep the smoke out of them, can cause wrinkles. If you smoke, the best way to protect your skin is to quit.

**Employ a gentle cleansing routine**

Daily cleansing and shaving can take their toll on the skin. To ensure that the routine is gentle:

- **Limit bath time:** Hot water and long showers or baths remove oil from your skin. Limit your bath or shower time, and use warm, rather than hot, water.
- **Avoid strong soaps:** Strong soaps and detergents can strip oil from the skin. Instead, choose mild cleansers.
- **Shave carefully:** To protect and lubricate the skin, apply shaving cream, lotion or gel before shaving. Use a clean, sharp razor for the closest shave. Shave in the direction in which the hair grows, not against it.
- **Pat dry:** After washing or bathing, gently pat or blot your skin dry with a towel so that some moisture remains on the skin.
- **Moisturise dry skin:** If your skin is dry, use a moisturiser that suits your skin type. For daily use, consider a moisturiser that contains an SPF.

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**Eat a healthy and balanced diet**

A healthy diet can help you to look and feel your best. Eat plenty of fruit, vegetables, whole grains and lean protein. The association between diet and skin isn’t clear, but some research suggests that a diet that is rich in vitamin C and low in unhealthy fats and processed or refined carbohydrates might promote younger-looking skin. Zinc is an essential trace element. Its usefulness when applied to the skin for the treatment of acne is based on its anti-inflammatory action.

**Take steps to manage stress**

To encourage healthy skin and a healthy state of mind, take steps to manage your stress. Set reasonable limits, scale back on your “to do” list, and make time to do the things that you enjoy. The results might be more dramatic than expected.

**Conclusion**

The skin is exposed to a number of unavoidable, as well as avoidable, damaging factors. Good skin care and healthy lifestyle choices can help to delay the natural ageing process and prevent various skin problems.

**Bibliography**