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8 Foods That Will Make Your Hair and Skin Look Better Than Ever

The New Year is always a chance to review your diet and see where you can make a change for the better. Usually, it's in an effort to shed the rubber tire or build buffer biceps. But what you eat can also have a very real impact on other vanity issues, like the quality of your skin and hair. "Your skin is your biggest organ," says **Julia T. Hunter, M.D.**, founder of Wholistic Dermatology in Los Angeles. "It requires both internal and external support for good health and to prevent aging." That means in addition to using the many grooming products that contain vitamins and minerals shown to improve skin tone and hair health, you need to consume foods filled with those nutrients as well.

What to avoid? "Toxins, fillers, and synthetic chemicals used in skin products and foods are a major factor contributing to internal inflammation and aging," says Dr. Hunter. "You want to go for green, green, and more green! Eat foods as close to nature as possible. The foods that keep you looking young are the same as those that keep you healthy: whole foods, with minimal processing." Here's where to find the best look-enhancing eats right now.

Citrus Fruits

Oranges and grapefruits are loaded with vitamin C, an antioxidant that protects your skin against free radicals that lead to wrinkles. According to a study in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, people who ate C-rich foods had fewer wrinkles than those who did not. In addition, some studies suggest that vitamin C may slow the rate of hair loss in men. When possible, look for darker-colored fruits: "They have a greater amount of antioxidants, which increase collagen production," says Dr. Hunter. In turn, "this thickens the skin in a more youthful way and decreases the abnormal blood vessels or rosacea."

Salmon

You may have heard about omega-3 fatty acids, the good kind of fats that lower your risk of heart disease. Found in plentiful amounts in salmon, these omega-3s also work as anti-inflammatories, reducing your risk of acne and breakouts. "In addition to promoting heart health, salmon and other fatty fish are great for your complexion and can help fight irritation, swelling, and other skin issues," says Dr. Hunter. A deficiency in this nutrient has also been linked to hair loss and flaky scalps, according to the University of Maryland Medical Center.

Water

So simple, yet so often overlooked. Keeping yourself hydrated is probably the easiest way to improve your appearance. A well-hydrated body allows for easier transport of nutrients to your cells, helps flush out toxins in your body, and supports your organs. More importantly for vanity purposes, well-hydrated cells appear plumper, meaning your skin looks firmer. For additional benefits, "add a green tea bag or add one to two ounces of organic whole leaf aloe juice to your water per day, which helps decrease brown spots and increase skin clarity," says Dr. Hunter.

Olive Oil

This antioxidant-rich, healthy fat is also an anti-inflammatory, meaning it will reduce puffiness under the eyes and helps irritated skin. Healthy fats strengthen cell membranes, giving skin a youthful appearance. Olive oil also inhibits the production of the hormone DHT, which is responsible for the narrowing of the hair follicle shaft as you get older, leading to thinner hair.

This is one of those foods that does double duty when applied topically – olive oil is a frequent ingredient in natural moisturizers and lip balms. A study in the medical journal *PLOS One* found that those who consume two teaspoons a day (dressing for your salad; dip for your bread) had 31 percent fewer signs of dry and aging skin than those who consumed less.

Whole Grains

It's not so much what's in these grains as what's not: High-sugar, refined carbs cause the body to produce more insulin, and increase the production of androgen hormones, which in turn cause your glands to secrete more oil, clogging pores and leading to breakouts. Choose whole wheat toast over white, and whole grain cereal over the sugar pops.

Steak

You read that right. The often maligned red meat has a super-high amount of protein in it, which helps your body to produce more collagen, the protein-based connective tissue that gives your skin its elasticity and firmness. It's true that your favorite dish is also high in cholesterol, so limit yourself to once a week, says Dr. Hunter. "You can also enjoy lean proteins such as turkey and wild fish (not farm raised because they don't have the same nutrients) for similar benefits," she adds.

Broccoli

Just how important is Vitamin A to your appearance? Consider: It is the main ingredient in the prescription acne-fighting drug Accutane. You'll find it in broccoli, carrots, and spinach, among other places. Limit your intake to 10,000 IU a day, since in this case you actually can have too much of a good thing and excessive amounts can be toxic.