

## Feed Your Skin



**I**n the pursuit of health and beauty, what you put on your skin is as important as what you eat...

Most people do not realize that 60 to 80 percent of the ingredients in personal care products may be absorbed through the skin. As the largest digestive organ of the body, the skin provides the functions of both absorption and elimination. This process can work for or against us, depending on the products we apply to the skin. Just like eating "junk food," junk skin care products can produce negative effects. Conversely, eating a healthy organic diet and using healthy, organic skin care products as "skin food" will increase the health, beauty, and vibrancy of our skin.

As an example of the difference between "junk food" skin care ingredients and healthy "skin food" ingredients, let's look at the topic of pigmentation and the ingredients used to treat this condition. Pigmentation affects most Floridians and is also known as photo-aging or sun damage. The brown spots (hyperpigmentation) and the white spots or lack of pigmentation (hypopigmentation) are symptoms of damaged skin cells.

Until recently, the ingredient hydroquinone was often considered the gold standard used to reduce unsightly pigmentation changes. Several months ago, I wrote an article outlining my concerns about this ingredient and am happy to report that the FDA also recently began questioning the safety of products containing this bleaching agent. Hydroquinone is a good example of "junk food" for the skin and is one of the most commonly used bleaching agents for both pigmentation and freckles, despite the fact that death can result from exposure to as little as 5 grams.

Fortunately, there are several excellent natural choices which can achieve wonderful results in reducing pigmentation. Some of the most promising natural "skin food" ingredients include:

- **Arbutin.** Derived from bearberry extract, also known as the uva ursi plant, Arbutin is a naturally occurring form of hydroquinone and is an effective alternative.

- **Azelaic Acid.** A castor oil derivative which acts as a natural bleaching agent and has anti-bacterial qualities. Excellent for acne conditions and post-acne hyperpigmentation.

- **Kojic Acid** is mildly antibiotic and is derived from a genus of fungi which effectively inhibits excessive melanin formation (brown spots).

- **L-Lactic Acid** is a purified form of lactic acid (from yogurt) and is therefore non-irritating. It has the ability to soften proteins and speed cell turnover, making it a lightening and brightening ingredient.

- **Licorice root extract** comes from the glycyrrhiza plant group. There are several categories of this ingredient whose function ranges from anti-inflammatory to antioxidant to skin-lightening abilities, depending on the formulation.

- **Mulberry** is a potent natural alternative to chemical bleaching agents.

As important as knowing what healthy "skin food" ingredients are available is knowing what unhealthy "junk food" ingredients to avoid. In addition to hydroquinone, be on the lookout for these unhealthy ingredients:

- **Parabens.** The most commonly used preservative in personal care products,

the parabens (ethyl, methyl, butyl, and propyl-parabens) are endocrine disruptors which confuse the hormonal system and have strong links to breast cancers (20 out of 20 biopsies of breast tumors contained parabens).

- **Phthalates** fall into a category of plasticizers and are commonly found in perfumes, hairsprays, and nail polishes in addition to being in baby and animal toys. As endocrine disruptors, they also play havoc on the hormonal system, creating conditions conducive to the growth of mutated cells.

- **TEA** (Triethanolamine), **DEA** (Diethanolamine), and **MEA** (Monoethanolamine): also common cosmetic preservatives which are hormone disrupting chemicals that form cancer-causing nitrates and nitrosamines.

- **FD&C** and **D&C colors:** carcinogenic and found in most conventional cosmetics. These are synthetic petroleum products made from coal tar, containing toxic heavy metal salts.

- **Mineral Oil:** comedogenic (pore-clogging) petroleum byproduct and a known carcinogen. Impedes the elimination of toxins and promotes acne and other disorders. Slows down skin function and cellular turnover, resulting in premature aging.

- **Sodium Lauryl Sulfate (SLS)** and **Sodium Laureth Sulfate (SLES):** detergents and surfactants which are used in car washes, garage floor cleansers, and engine

degreasers and in 90 percent of personal care products that foam. When combined with other chemicals, SLS and SLES can be transformed into nitrosamines, a potent class of carcinogens. Our bodies can retain SLS for up to five days, during which time it may enter and maintain residual levels in the heart, liver, lungs, and brain.

Because our skin absorbs much of what we put on its surface, it is important to choose our personal care products wisely. While the use of junk ingredients in conventional personal care products is common, there are healthier botanical alternatives available. Find a qualified practitioner who can answer your questions about ingredients and help guide you in making healthier choices. In the pursuit of health and beauty, what you put on your skin is as important as what you eat.

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