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Fuss-free way to healthy skin

By Meera Murugesan

With so many skincare essentials in the market, Meera Murugesan finds out what's really necessary for good skin

THERE was a time when a woman's skincare routine consisted of only soap and water. Those days have long gone.

Take a look at the average woman's dressing table today and you'll find a multitude of bottles, jars and tubes for use on a daily basis.

SKINCARE MAYHEM

There are serums, essences, creams and lotions, different products for day and night, some providing hydration, others with anti-wrinkle benefits and yet others for sculpting or firming the skin.

That's not the end of it either. In the bathroom, you will find a range of products to cleanse, tone and exfoliate the skin.

Keep in mind that, for best results, you have to remember when to use which product and in what amount and frequency.

Skincare today is rocket science and costs as much too but is such a complicated regime necessary?

THREE ESSENTIALS

Good skin can be achieved with a simple approach and there are only three essential products: A cleanser, sunscreen and moisturiser, says Dr Chang Choong Chor, consultant dermatologist at Gleneagles Kuala Lumpur.

The cleanser can either be a mild soap (preferably non-alkaline) or a soap-free cleanser and generally, washing twice a day is sufficient.

The sunscreen should be a broad spectrum one that protects against both UVB and UVA rays. It should be applied half an hour before one goes out into the sun and reapplied every two hours if one remains under the sun.

Moisturiser is essential for people with dry or sensitive skin. However, Dr Chang says those with normal skin may not need it all the time, only on certain occasions, such as when they travel to places experiencing cold weather.

But those with dry skin who need both a moisturiser and sunscreen can opt to make their skincare regime simpler by purchasing a product that's a combination of both.

Dr Chang says they can use either a moisturiser with sun protection or a sunscreen with moisturising effects. He personally recommends the latter because sun protection is more important and moisturisers with a built-in sunscreen may not offer enough protection.

SIMPLE IS SAFER

Dr Chang says a simple skincare routine is less likely to lead to adverse reactions caused by chemicals in different products.

Skincare during travelling or vacations also becomes a chore if we bring along a multitude of products for daily use.

"If it's too complicated, you would probably do it for a short period and then give up and perhaps try again later, which means you are not consistently caring for your skin which is important," he says.

Keeping it simple means saving time and money and our skin will not be exposed regularly to many different types of chemicals.

Dr Chang says that a single skincare product may contain, on average, between 20-30 different ingredients. If an irritation or allergy occurs, it can be very difficult to identify the "culprit" if the person concerned is using 10 or 15 different products. Doctors may have no choice but to direct that person to discontinue the use of all products.

But a simple skincare routine would make this process of identification much easier. Similarly, some products, when used on their own, may cause no reaction but when used in combination with others, may lead to an irritation or allergy.

BARE TRUTH

Dr Chang believes some women use a multitude of products because they have been influenced by the marketing gimmick of certain brands which imply that one has to use a complete range or set to see best results.

Aesthetic practitioners often propagate the same notion and this, coupled with a woman's fear of growing old and developing fine lines and wrinkles, drives her to purchase as many products as possible to reverse the cycle of ageing.

The truth is that reversing this cycle is not as easy as some skincare brands make it out to be. Dr Chang explains that there's no evidence that over-the-counter anti-wrinkle creams or solutions can penetrate the skin barrier to eliminate the signs of ageing.

"As a result, unless you have a specific problem that a doctor needs to address, skincare can and should be kept simple."

NON-ESSENTIAL SKINCARE PRODUCTS

TONER: No matter what the label says, a toner won't help shrink your pores. In fact, some toners which contain alcohol or organic solvents may strip off the skin's natural protective acid mantle and cause irritation.

SERUM: Many women spend hundreds of ringgit on serums for their supposedly anti-wrinkle benefits. But serums often contain a high concentration of active ingredients and may cause irritation in those with sensitive skin.

SCRUB: Our skin exfoliates naturally so it's not necessary to use a scrub. Overuse of scrubs can also reduce the skin's protective barrier, making it more sensitive.

EYE CREAM: These often cost a lot because they target the delicate under-eye area. The truth is a light gentle moisturiser can also be used to hydrate the under-eye area.

FIND YOUR BEST MATCH

THE key to healthy skin is consistency and using products that are suitable for one's skin type, says Rachel Tan, director of Purecare Health & Beauty, the sole marketing company for the Simple skincare range in Malaysia.

Rachel keeps her routine easy, using a soap-free cleanser and for sun protection, a light

moisturiser with SPF30.

She believes some women use a multitude of products because most skincare items focus only on addressing one problem whereas a person may be facing various different issues with her skin.

If that is the case, then consumers must ensure that the products used do not contain irritants like artificial perfume, colour and alcohol.

Most people think more is better where skincare is concerned when in fact, one should go by the motto of "less is more", says Low Hooi Wan, division manager of Nuvanta Sdn Bhd, the local distributor of Bio-Oil, a specialist skincare product.

"Neither does it mean that the more expensive a product, the better it works. It all depends on what works for your skin," she says.

She believes that keeping skincare uncomplicated is important as too many products may cause problems such as acne and flare-ups.

Her personal skincare routine is simple too. She cleanses twice a day and uses a moisturiser with sun screen.

At night, she uses Bio-Oil to hydrate the face..

GOOD SKINCARE

Good skin depends not just on an effective skincare regime but also on the right mind-body balance.

Here are the simple rules:

1. A healthy, balanced diet

When you eat well it shows on your skin and vice versa. A good mix of vitamins and minerals from a variety of food and adequate water is the way to go.

2. Appropriate sun protection practices

Prevention is always better than cure and sun damage can lead to fine lines, wrinkles and pigmentation, so cover up.

3. Adequate good quality sleep

Exhaustion leads to tired dull-looking skin and even a few days of bad sleep can show on the skin.

4. Regular exercise

Exercise promotes healthy blood circulation and increased blood flow actually helps to nourish skin cells.

5. A positive attitude and a healthy mental state

Being stressed and having negative thoughts affect the behavior of our immune system. Such people have a higher risk of inflammatory skin diseases like psoriasis and eczema.