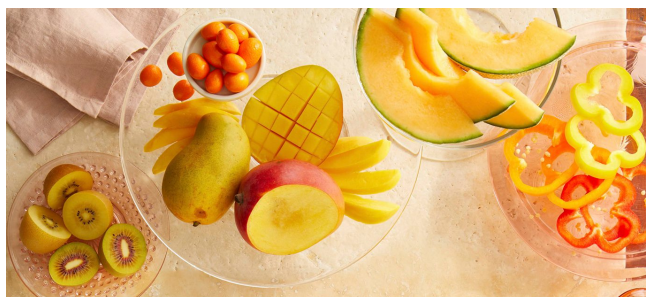


How to Eat for Healthy Skin

By Dana Hudepohl
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When it comes to your skin, certain factors matter: sun protection, [sleep quality](#), even how well you manage stress. But one of the most powerful things you can do for your body's largest organ? Choose your food wisely. "You can protect skin at the cellular level with what you're eating," says Houston-based dermatologist Suzanne Bruce, MD. Based on the latest research, here are the most impactful steps you can take for healthier skin.

1. Leave Behind Fried Foods and Meat

These foods contain harmful compounds called advanced glycation end products (AGEs) that eat away at the collagen holding up your skin. Ultimately, this leads to wrinkling. "I like to say if you want your skin to look like bacon, eat bacon," says Rajani Katta, MD, author of *Glow: The Dermatologist's Guide to a Whole Foods Younger Skin Diet* and a volunteer clinical faculty member at the Baylor College of Medicine and McGovern Medical School at UT Health. In a [2018 study](#) of nearly 3,000 elderly people in the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*, Dutch researchers found that women who consumed a diet heavy in [red meat](#) and [snacks](#) had more wrinkles than women who ate a [fruit-heavy diet](#).

2. Avoid Sugar Bombs

AGEs aren't just found in fried foods and meat; they also form when sugar molecules in the bloodstream combine with proteins. "AGEs are like termites," Katta says. "They weaken the support systems of your skin, leading to what we call sugar sag." A [2011 study](#) out of

the Netherlands found that people with the highest blood sugar levels were perceived to be older than people who had the lowest blood sugar levels. Minimize obvious sources of added sugar as well as juices, which are stripped of the fiber that helps prevent spikes in [blood sugar](#).

3. Drink Water, Not Milk or Sugary Beverages

Hydration with water is critical to skin health. Dairy and sweetened drinks, on the other hand, may be detrimental. A [2020 study in JAMA Dermatology](#) that looked at dietary habits of nearly 25,000 people found that drinking milk and sugary beverages (as well as eating fatty and sugary foods) was associated with [adult acne](#).

4. Choose Whole Plant Foods Over Processed Foods

Daily exposure to free radicals from things like air pollution and UV radiation accelerates skin aging. "Free radicals are like hail and rain hitting the roof of your house and starting to damage it over time," Katta says. To protect against this oxidative damage, eat [whole plant foods](#) including vegetables, fruits, legumes, [whole grains](#), nuts, and seeds. These are naturally rich in antioxidants, which neutralize free radicals and reduce skin-damaging inflammation. They are also rich in fiber to stabilize blood sugar and protect against wrinkles.

By comparison, [highly processed foods](#) such as white bread and white rice can also lead to rapidly elevated blood sugar levels that are so hard on your skin. Eating these nutritionally inferior foods crowds out healthier choices and is a lost opportunity to nourish skin with vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients.

5. Skip Antioxidant Supplements

In a French study published in the *Journal of Nutrition* that aimed to test whether supplementing with a combo of antioxidant vitamins and minerals could reduce the risk of skin cancers, women taking the supplement actually had higher rates of skin cancer than those given

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a placebo. Keep in mind that the myriad nutrients in whole plant foods work synergistically, and science hasn't entirely figured out how to replicate that magic with supplements.

6. Don't Skimp on Herbs and Spices

Spices are antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and anti-glycation powerhouses. A [study in *Nutrition Journal*](#) that evaluated the antioxidant content of more than 3,100 different foods found herbs and spices to be some of the richest sources they measured.

Ready to get started? Check out [Forks Meal Planner](#), FOK's easy weekly meal-planning tool to keep you on a healthy plant-based path. To learn more about a whole-food, plant-based diet, visit our [Plant-Based Primer](#).