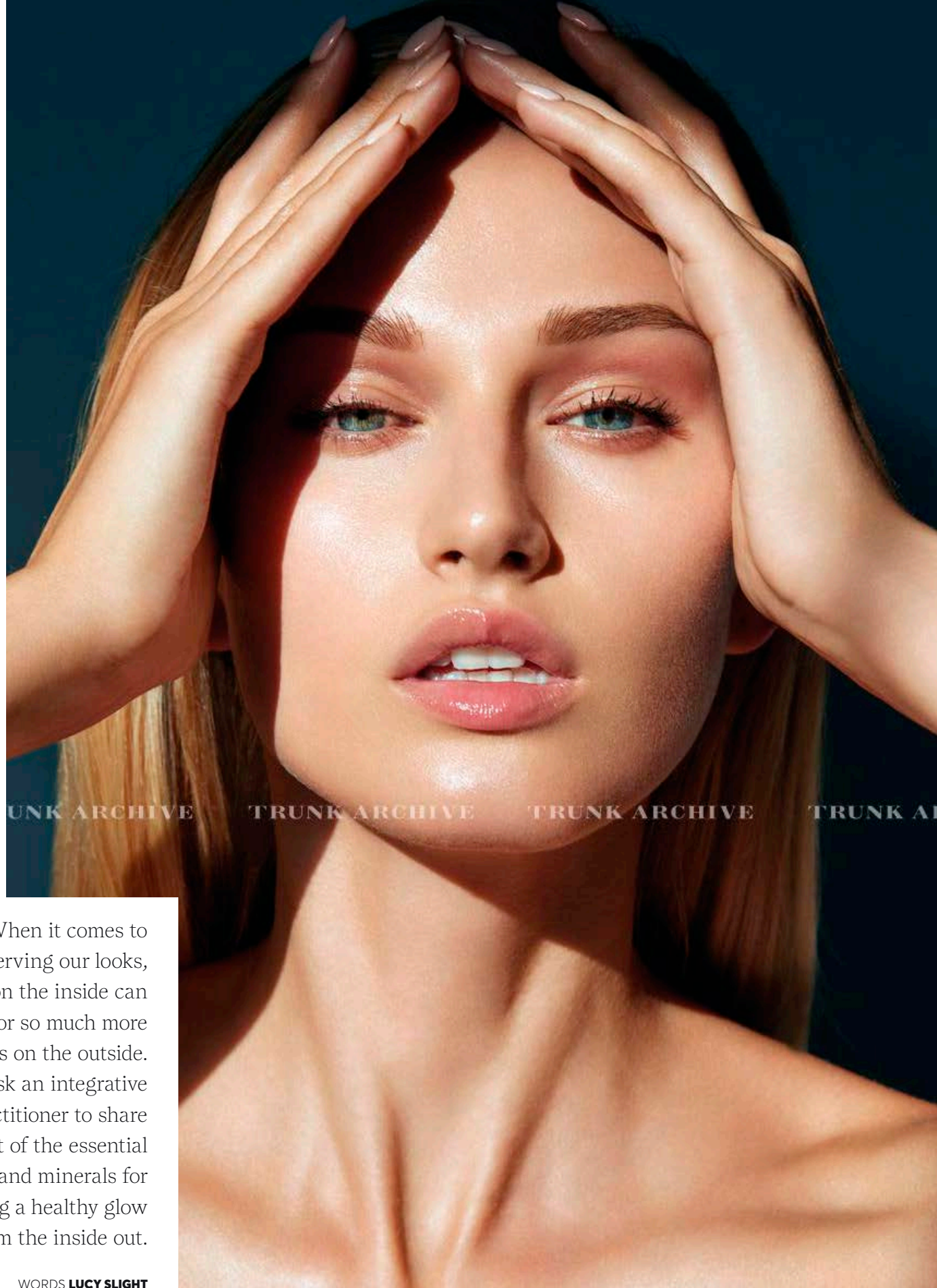


SKIN DEEP



When it comes to preserving our looks, what's on the inside can count for so much more than what's on the outside.

We ask an integrative health practitioner to share her list of the essential vitamins and minerals for achieving a healthy glow from the inside out.

WORDS **LUCY SLIGHT**

“ STRESS IMPAIRS THE BODY'S ABILITY TO ACHIEVE OPTIMAL SKIN, NAIL AND HAIR HEALTH. ”

Achieving full-bodied hair, skin that glows and strong nails takes more than a few topical products and a healthy diet. There are stressors associated with modern living that our bodies were never designed to deal with, and the depletion of nutrients from our soil does nothing to help.

We're now living with a reduced amount of 'good fats', vitamins and minerals in our food, compared with the wild foods we evolved to eat and which were the source of many of the nutrients we need to function. In fact, according to Dr Tracy Chandler, integrative health practitioner at Dr Wellness (drwellness.co.nz), there are now 40% fewer vitamins and minerals in our fruit and vegetables than there were 50 years ago.

"High-quality and extensive government research has shown that there is a massive epidemic of nutrient deficiencies – the most common of which are zinc, iron, magnesium, folic acid and vitamin D," explains Dr Chandler. "Vitamin D and zinc are two essential nutrients important for skin health, but additionally there is solid evidence for vitamin D's role in preventing cancer, optimising immune function and easing depression."

It's clear, therefore, that the need to supplement our diets with these essential vitamins and minerals is important for general health and wellbeing. Where skin, hair and nails are concerned, there are a number of nutrients that our bodies require to keep us in optimum condition. We asked Dr Chandler to talk us through the key players.

For glowing skin, strong hair and healthy nails, what type of vitamins and minerals do you recommend as a dietary supplement?

Dr Chandler: The best supplements for these concerns involve support for both a healthy gut and also for your body to grow and maintain great skin, hair and nails. To achieve these goals, we need to be supplementing with the following vitamins and minerals:

Antioxidants help repair damage caused by free radicals, which result from exposure to such things as UV rays, tobacco smoke, poor diet and stress. Antioxidants include:

- Vitamins E and C, and vitamin A and its precursor, beta-carotene. Vitamin C also encourages fibroblast proliferation, which makes collagen and other important skin fibres. Vitamin A is also a great tool for helping reverse the signs of skin ageing.
- Glutathione, crucial for the health of the liver and detoxification.
- Selenium. As well as being an antioxidant, selenium helps reduce our risk of skin cancer and sunburn.
- Phytochemicals, such as the lycopene found in tomatoes, which help protect skin from signs of ageing and hair loss.
- Manganese, which aids in the formation of connective tissue.
- Alpha-lipoic acid, which helps

to enhance the effects of other antioxidants, including glutathione.

- DMAE, which helps to improve skin firmness and elasticity.

Vitamin D is actually a hormone not a vitamin. It supports skin through its links to improved gut health, immunity and mood. Stress impairs the body's ability to achieve optimal skin, nail and hair health, so anything that helps lower stress, including vitamin D, will help these things. Vitamin D also reduces our risk of cancer, including skin cancer. Although vitamin D can be made by exposure to UV from the sun, we obviously want to minimise this for optimal skin health and slowing the signs of skin ageing. I usually recommend a daily vitamin D supplement to most of my patients. This is best done under the supervision of an integrative GP and ideally after testing, as it is possible to take too much vitamin D.

Vitamin K works in tandem with vitamin D and is important for reducing the signs of ageing and also those annoying, dark under-eye circles.

Probiotics are live micro-organisms which can have a beneficial influence on our gut health and immune function.

Essential fatty acids. These so-called 'good fats' help retain the lipid barrier and protect our skin (and therefore our body).

Calcium is helpful for skin turnover and the growth of new skin cells, as well as many other skin processes.

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COLLAGEN PREVENTS AND REVERSES THE SIGNS OF SKIN AGEING.
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B vitamins. Biotin (B7) is a major building block of our skin, hair and nails. Niacin (B3) is great for helping our skin to retain moisture and is anti-inflammatory, too.

Collagen is super-important for skin as it makes up around 75% of the dry weight of skin. Loss of elastic recoil in the skin as we age is partly due to a reduction in collagen production.

Hyaluronic acid helps to retain water in the cells and also helps keep the cells together.

Zinc is helpful for skin turnover and immune function but also operates as an antioxidant.

Copper helps us make elastin and collagen and is anti-inflammatory.

However, a word of warning, just because they can help, does not mean we should take supplements without them being prescribed by an integrative health practitioner. These nutrients can cause health issues if not prescribed properly.

Collagen seems to be the most buzzed-about anti-ageing supplement at the moment. Is it worth the hype?

Dr Chandler: Collagen is definitely worth the hype as it is the protein in our body that is found in the greatest amount. It is a significant part of skin, bones, hair, ligaments, cartilage and blood vessels. When we get to the ripe old age of around 25, we ideally need to supplement with collagen as we have a reduced ability to produce our own.

Also, as a species, we are no longer consuming all the parts of an animal when we eat – for example, the bones, which are a great source of collagen. Collagen is important for our skin as it helps to heal our gut, and a healthy gut equals healthy skin. Collagen also prevents and reverses the signs of skin ageing, strengthens hair and nails and helps to reduce the appearance of stretch marks and cellulite.

This essential protein supports our health overall by promoting sleep, supporting the health of joints and our

cardiovascular system, and aiding bowel regularity, the function of our nervous system, the detoxification of the liver and the growth of lean muscle mass.

For vegetarians and vegans, are plant-based collagens a worthy substitute for animal-derived products?

Dr Chandler: Anything you can do to increase your collagen, even taking plant-based ‘collagen’ supplements, will help. However, there is no such thing as ‘plant collagen’, only supplements that support collagen production and health. By far the best source of collagen is animal, fish or egg products.

If you are vegan, there are other things you can do to boost your collagen. These include consuming vitamin C (which helps to protect your collagen production, and build new collagen), amino acids (proline, glycine, arginine and lysine) from protein-containing foods, and other key nutrients, such as sulphur (from garlic), antioxidants, zinc, manganese, vitamin A and copper. ■

Skin-loving supplements



1. Re.skin Re.vive Supplements, \$169.95 for 90 capsules.
2. Nutra Organics Hemp Protein Vegan Collagen Glow, \$54.99 for 16 serves.
3. MitoQ Skin Support Complex, \$139 for 60 capsules.
4. Swisse Ultiboost Age Protect, \$34.99 for 60 capsules.
5. Advanced Nutrition Programme Skin Accumax, \$165 for 120 capsules.

If you're planning on making changes to your supplementary routine, it's important to seek advice from your doctor or integrative health practitioner.