

[IMAGE]

Healthy From the Inside Out

By Peggy Raikes

What does it take to make a life-changing decision to improve one's health? For some, it's illness, a near-death experience or even the loss of a loved one. For others, it might simply be the realization that an unhealthy lifestyle will one day catch up with them. A 68-year-old patient of mine recently reported it was a shopping trip with her aunt, who was almost 90 at the time, that prompted the decision to enhance her health.

What was her motivation? It didn't come from clothes that wouldn't fit, pictures of lingerie models on the walls of the store, or an unpleasant reflection in a dressing-room mirror. Instead, it was when a fellow shopper asked if she and her aunt were twins that she knew she needed to make a change.

Like many of us, my patient found herself backed against a wall and her first thought was, "Get me to the spa!" And while that might be a good step, a commitment to exercise and improved nutrition is often the best therapy. Unfortunately, the multibillion-dollar beauty business is a great cover-up for an unhealthful lifestyle. Cosmetics, plastic surgeons, drugs and airbrushing offer instant gratification, and these options are regularly substituted for more natural and, in the long run, more effective choices.

One of the simplest and most important things we can do to revive our appearance, physical health and mental acuity as we age doesn't involve cosmetic changes or a trip to the spa; it's as easy as supplying our body with the nutrient-rich food and physical activity it so desperately needs. Beauty literally comes from the inside, and it takes responsible day-to-day choices to ensure this translates outwardly. Here are some suggestions on what you can do - starting today - to cultivate beauty from the inside out.

1. Control the Inflammation

Healthy Inside Out - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark One of the best ways to reclaim and maintain health, and even take years off of your appearance, is to control something called *inflammation*. Simply put, inflammation is heat, swelling or pain. When it is chronic, inflammation can make us age prematurely, and has been associated with diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, depression, cognitive decline and other conditions.

Inflammation can take many forms. Many of us have chronic, smoldering inflammation that causes digestive disorders such as gas, bloating, heartburn and irritable bowel. Others exhibit inflammatory problems in the form of acne, eczema or psoriasis. Sources of inflammation in Americans' lives include stress, obesity, smoking, drugs and sedentary lifestyles. One of the leading inflammatory triggers is unhealthful food, including sugars, red meat, artificial ingredients, gluten, trans fats and alcohol. Packaged and processed foods, especially those laden with hormones, antibiotics and preservatives, also contribute to inflammation. An inactive lifestyle, combined with a diet favoring inflammatory foods, can lead to free-radical damage, which might spur disease and appear in the skin as lines and wrinkles.

The first step toward looking and feeling better is an improved diet that includes plenty of vegetables, lean protein sources, green drinks, beans and raw foods. It's also important that inflammatory grains, such as pasta and bread, be replaced with foods such as quinoa, buckwheat and wild rice, which are more easily digested by most people.

2. Maximize Nutrient Absorption

While the above dietary choices might seem obvious, there's one important thing to remember: It's not entirely what we eat that leads to good health; it's also what we're able to digest and properly absorb. You need to thoroughly digest healthful foods in order to garner the most benefit from their nutrients. One of the best ways to ensure proper digestion and assimilation is through the use of digestive enzyme supplements and probiotics. Digestive enzymes provide the following:

- better digestion of cooked and processed foods;
- enhanced nutrient absorption;
- reduced digestive stress, which can increase energy for immune function; and
- decreased food sensitivities and digestive disorders, such as indigestion.

One secret to gorgeous skin, hair and nails is optimal digestion and nutrient absorption. Enzymes can help repair and rejuvenate the skin from the inside out while they help restore youthful vitality and energy. Most people would also benefit from a probiotic supplement to improve nutrient assimilation and immune health. Probiotics, known as "friendly bacteria," help restore and maintain a healthful bacterial balance in the colon and intestines, reducing the likelihood of conditions such as leaky gut syndrome.

Many years ago, probiotics offered me the first successful step in winning my battle against eczema, a personal problem I had dealt with for most of my life. At its worst, the skin rash covered my entire body, and the only solution from dermatologists and medical doctors was a lotion that had serious side effects, including thinning my skin. It was only later that I realized poor digestion and stress were at the root of my problem, and probiotics became part of the solution.

3. Make Healthy Lifestyle Choices

In addition to eating nutritious foods and getting the proper enzymes and probiotics, I recommend that many of my patients make the following lifestyle choices: drink plenty of water; try to get a good night's sleep; exercise regularly; reduce prescription and over-the-counter drug use; and use stress-management tactics. Most life-changing health practices can take place at home, naturally, without a tremendous amount of expense or expertise. All it takes is a firm commitment and realistic expectations. Remember, you're worth it!

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