

Skigestion

You can carefully eat your way to beauty or simply swallow a pill. Does it matter which you choose?

By Julie Beun-Chown, The Ottawa Citizen

You've heard about skigestibles, right? You haven't?

If not, don't bother reaching for the dictionary -- and no spell-checker has heard of them either.

That's because not since the advent of Al Goreisms urging us to reduce our "water footprint" and live "carbon neutral" as "locavores" (before we collapse in a fit of "green fatigue") has a buzzword promised so much.

But even if the etymology is confusing, the concept of skigestibles is not. Call them what you will, they sound like what they are: pills designed to firm your jaw line, fade your wrinkles and deliver, within three short months, radiant beauty and renewed vitality from within.

Leading the pack is Imedeen (\$108 for a one-month supply of its Time Perfection "oral supplement"), a European cosmeceutical giant firmly entrenched there and in Asia, and now making headway in North America.

There are other contenders, too: Genuine Health (\$32 to \$59), AgeOff (\$59 to \$74.95) and Oenobiol (\$44). Each promises better skin and fewer wrinkles, each formula contains concentrated, patented variations of well-known antioxidants, amino acids, polysaccharides, vitamins and minerals, and each costs enough to cause cash-strapped consumers to choke on their double lattes.

But do they work?

Absolutely, says Ime-deen spokeswoman Pat Browne. A compelling public speaker for Ime-deen's Canadian distributor Nordic Selfcare Institute, Browne travels the country showing off the product's best asset -- her own glowing face.

After living under the hot antipodean sun in Sydney, Australia for a decade, Browne, 50, returned to Toronto slightly more photo-aged for the wear. She began taking Imedeen 10 years ago.

During presentations, she uses her own before and after shots to highlight the product's worth. Within 90 days of taking the pills, she promises, "You'll have a brighter glow, tightened up jaw line, more even skin tone. As you go forward, pore size refines. As the skin is healthier, it looks better."

Browne says dermatological studies conducted by Imedeen in the Netherlands and Denmark on women with mild to moderate photo-aging from sun damage found that, after 90 days on Time Perfection, subjects' skin had fewer wrinkles, better texture, improved moisture retention and even a reversal of age-related skin thinning.

"The difference between Imedeen and others is the quantity of science behind it," Browne says. "These are double-blind, placebo trials. All are published in peer-reviewed journals in Europe."

And the public is eager to believe skingestibles work: Consumers have catapulted the beauty supplement industry to an estimated revenue of \$20 billion annually.

Still, it's not enough to convince Joe Schwarcz, director of McGill University's Office for Science and Society and the author of the recently released *Brain Fuel* (Doubleday).

According to Schwarcz, who has a PhD in chemistry, studies like the ones quoted by Browne aren't statistically significant.

"When you look at them, they're either very, very small -- involving 50 people -- or there's no evidence of visual improvement," he says. "It's all instrument-measured results. Do you actually look better? It's up to you."

Even so, Schwarcz and others don't dismiss skingestibles outright. They are, after all, based on a fundamental scientific tenet: You are what you eat. Improving the quality of what goes into your body -- be it high-quality supplements or food -- inevitably impacts overall health.

"Healthy living is the first and obvious step in aiding our system to protect itself and repair the damage done," says Ottawa-based laser and cosmetic skin care specialist Dr. Karen Dover. "The importance of diet cannot be underestimated in its impact on our general health, which so often is declared through our hair, nails and skin."

Schwarcz agrees. "The underlying concept is not absurd. The fact is your body on the inside and outside is a function of what you put in your mouth. There is evidence that improper nutrition can affect skin quality, there is no doubt about that. The question is whether you're any better off taking a supplement than eating your seven to 10 fruits and vegetables a day and four servings of grains."

The results of supplementing an already balanced diet may not be significant, but "you take a sloppy American who eats three or four fast food meals a day and you may see a difference."

Indeed, the link between diet and skin health is clear. A 2001 Swedish study in the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition* found older patients who ate the most fruits, vegetables and olive oil and the least dairy and sugar products also had less wrinkling than those who didn't.

"Foods contain antioxidants and phytochemicals that work in synergy, like an orchestra, and isolated antioxidants as supplements can't compete with this," says U.S. dermatologist and researcher Dr. Mark Rubin, who recently published a study linking omega-3 fatty acids to mental well-being and skin health.

But that synergy goes more than skin deep. According to Sam Graci, the internationally renowned British Columbia nutrition researcher, author and founder of the Greens+ and Genuine Health supplements empire, the vast majority of us do not have the diet we need, partly through lifestyle and partly because food quality has declined. The result is "negative gene expression" -- more cancer, more inflammatory disease and, yes, more signs of aging.

The answer, Graci says, may come from another buzzword -- nutrigenomics, or the use of food to influence the negative effects of the natural aging of our genes.

"For example, we know that a diet of fruit and vegetables boosts bone health because they make the body alkaline, and therefore help build bones," Graci says. "Now why is that important? As our bones lose some of their density, those little ligaments holding our collagen become a little loose and we droop and wrinkle. So things like olive oil, fish oils, spices, tea and lycopene from tomatoes prevent skin membrane from aging. The foods we consume slow down the transcription factors, or how our genetic blueprint is affected."

If you're between 34 and 44, that genetic expression may have already made itself felt. According to a McGill University study, the average North American woman ages 18.6 years during that decade due to lifestyle and diet, while most men age 16.8 years. "Chronologically, we're 44," Graci points out, "but biologically, we're 64."

Yet it's never too late to turn back the clock, says Dover, who believes diet is just one aspect of youthful skin.

"Anything we can do to assist it is beneficial, and this is where supplements, cosmeceuticals, prescription topicals and other treatments such as laser and light therapy come into play.

"Each has its place," she says, "and depending on the person, can be the right choice."

What's in an skingestible?

Imedeen

- Biomarine Complex, a trademarked mix of proteins and polysaccharides to support skin structure and moisture;
- Vitamin C to build collagen;
- Soy extract to maintain collagen;
- Zinc to improve skin appearance;
- Tomato extract (lycopene) and grapeseed extract to protect against sun damage;
- Vitamin E, white tea extract, palm fruit extract and carotenoids, for their antioxidant properties;
- Chamomile, for its calming effects.

AgeOff

- Vitamin C for the growth and repair of collagen;
- Vitamin D to extend cell life;
- Vitamin E to improve appearance of skin and repair DNA;
- Vitamin B3 to energize tissues and cells;
- Vitamin B6 to support DNA repair and support the immune system;
- Folic acid to help form red blood cells and produce DNA;
- Vitamin B12 to help form red blood cells and protect the nervous system;
- Zinc to support the body's immune system and repair processes;
- Selenium, a powerful antioxidant, to prolong life and reduce cancer risk.

Genuine Health o3mega+ Glow

- EPA, an omega-3 fatty acid to decrease inflammation, prevent sun damage and add moisture

to skin;

- Lycopene to reduce skin cell damage and redness from UV rays, reduce inflammation and increase antioxidant presence;

- Vitamin C to prevent skin cancer, reduce signs of aging and promote collagen production;

- Vitamin E to reduce sun damage.

Sources: imedeen.co.uk; ageoff.com; genuinehealth.com

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