

The Flower of Your Youth

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It has been said that spring time is when a young person's heart turns to love. While we would not dispute that, a corollary may be that spring time is when a person's attention should be turned to good skin care. The ravages of winter are passed and the onslaught of summer has not yet begun. Although we may be turning pages forward on the calendar, we would like to turn the pages back on our aging appearance. Certainly good skin care will go a long way in this regard.

Most of us realize that our skin deteriorates with age due to sun, toxins, and other factors. In addition to developing the leathery, discolored surface imperfections, the foundation (dermis) of the skin loses collagen and elastic fibers, as well as other elements. In youth our skin contains a vital element: retinyl palmitate, a vitamin A derivative. This crucial element regulates many important skin functions including cellular turnover, circulation, and even rebuilding collagen. This is lost due to sun and aging, so much so that by adulthood, there is a serious deficiency. Many years ago retinoic acid was introduced as an acne drug to replace the lost retinyl palmitate. Soon after, it was suggested that this will reverse many of the signs of aging.

Retinoic acid, or the generic term t-retinoin, will speed up cellular turnover in the epidermis as well as enhance circulation and collagen deposition in the dermis. It should be the basis for great skin care as well as most treatments of the skin including laser, peels, et cetera. We believe that patients coming for treatment probably should be using this medication. Many of our new patients coming state that they have tried this in the past and after two or 3 weeks of use discarded it because it irritated the skin. This is largely because the patient was never educated in its use.

Several factors should be remembered when using t-retinoin. What some patients perceive as irritation can also be viewed as the process of improving the beauty of the skin. For instance, the flakiness and dryness that people complain of is a shedding of the dead skin cells that give our skin the dull, leathery look. Redness which is seen is simply a manifestation of the new vessels growing in the skin. These vessels are necessary for the healing of years of sun exposure. Even the itching and burning occasionally seen reflects the skin's healing. Proper education helps the patient understand the benefits and can minimize the distractions.

T-retinoin is no exception to the rule that most skin care items require a period of skin accommodation. This is especially true after laser, peels, and other beauty treatments. Starting at a reduced dose (dilute the skin care preparation) or a reduced frequency of treatment for several weeks will allow the skin to accommodate the new regimen. A specific treatment program for t-retinoin will be given below. A person should also realize that the skin requirements change with the weather, hormone changes, and other factors, necessitating the change in usage pattern. During a period of dryness, for instance, reducing the concentration of the product, perhaps by increasing the moisturizer

content will ease the patient through this period, following which the treatment regimen can be resumed.

Specifically for the use of t-retinoin (retinoic acid), we recommend starting every third night. After perhaps a couple of months this can be advanced to every other night, and increased until the patient is using it every night for 4 to 6 months following which the patient can go on a maintenance program of perhaps a couple of times per week. Every third night, using a pea-sized amount of the tretinoin mixed with your moisturizer this should be spread evenly on your face after letting it dry thoroughly following washing. When the skin has become accustomed to this, sometimes requiring two months or more, the regimen can be advanced to every other night. By incrementally increasing the frequency and/or the concentration the skin will be improved. Similar regimen can be used on the neck chest, hands, arms and other areas. Although there is a pregnancy warning, very few other contraindications exist. As mentioned above, the treatment program can be altered depending on the weather, your needs, et cetera. Proper sun protection is necessary (even for those not using tretinoin) because there is decrease in the barrier layer (the leathery look) on the skin with tretinoin, laser treatment, et cetera. Again, many of these treatments can be combined for maximum benefit.

Finally, science and common sense dictate that good nutrition, avoiding smoking, sun protection, etc. should be practiced. Among the important nutrition in addition to avoiding refined carbohydrates (free radicals) is the proper intake of vitamins A, C and E., zinc and copper, and fish oil (omega-3 and 6).

About sun protection will be coming later.