

Sleep and Your Skin

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The importance of getting your “beauty sleep” isn’t just a myth. A good night’s sleep is essential for an optimal complexion. During the day, your skin is constantly battling damaging free radicals caused by sun exposure and air pollution both inside and outside. At night, your skin cells go to work to repair the damage and restore your complexion. So what happens to your skin if you don’t get enough sleep?

One too many late nights cause our bodies to release more cortisol, the stress hormone. Cortisol regulates many of our body’s processes, including metabolism. When our bodies are under stress and more cortisol is released, we can experience increased inflammation which can break down collagen, the main component of connective tissue. This translates to loss of firmness and elasticity in the skin, resulting in not only dryness, but fine lines, wrinkles, and premature aging.

Lack of sleep and resulting cortisol release can also result in poor blood circulation. Without good circulation, less oxygen and nutrients reach the skin, resulting in dull skin that looks older than it is. And we've all experienced those nasty dark under-eye bags. Without adequate sleep, the blood vessels under the delicate skin of our eyes can dilate, creating those puffy dark patches.

Another reason why a good night's sleep is essential for good skin is tied to our pituitary gland. A good night's sleep induces the pituitary gland to release HGH, or human growth hormone, a complex protein that helps maintain healthy tissue. For healthy people, the major period of growth hormone release is during the first period of stage 3 sleep – the deep, restorative sleep. Consequently, there is no increase of growth hormone when you skip sleep.

Tips for Your Best Complexion

While we sleep, our metabolism slows, causing our body temperature to drop and our natural hydration to decrease. Add to that dry bedroom air and you have a recipe for parched, flaky skin. In dry cold climates when our furnace continually runs, consider adding a humidifier to your furnace if it doesn't have one, or place a room-size humidifier in your bedroom to keep humidity levels up.

During sleep, skin cells regenerate, pushing their way up through the epidermis layer of the skin to the surface. If dirt and makeup are left on the skin, the skin cells can't work their way up, which is why it's critical to always wash your face before bedtime. In addition, if oil and dead skin cells build up and eventually become blocked, acne can develop. One of the best things you can do for your skin is cleanse before bedtime, giving your skin a fighting chance to rejuvenate.

When it comes to your skin, sleep is the easiest road to the fountain of youth. The best part is you will begin to see results immediately, and it doesn't cost a thing.