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WINTER 2019

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CREAMS
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GLOWY, HAPPY HOLIDAY SKIN—ALL YEAR LONG



VLADIMIR BULGAR/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY / GETTY IMAGES



We drink kombucha and sleep in probiotic-infused face masks because it's “healthy” for our gut and skin, but what does “good bacteria” really mean? We investigate.

by BRITTANY BURHOP FALLON

BACTERIA BASICS

DID YOU KNOW THERE ARE PREBIOTICS AND POSTBIOTICS TOO? HERE’S HOW EACH ONE WORKS IN BOTH GUT HEALTH AND SKIN CARE.



“Beauty begins in the belly,” is not only the motto of Aussie brand The Beauty Chef, but also a phrase becoming more and more popular with dermatologists looking to help patients with complex skin issues. The reason: “More than 39 trillion bacteria live in and on our bodies, and the majority of them are in the gut,” says gastroenterologist Will Bulsiewicz, MD. “Only 13 years ago, we knew very little about the gut microbiome—the community of microorganisms inside our digestive tract—but a new laboratory technique in 2006 completely opened it up to us for study. What we’ve learned since is that our gut microbes aren’t just along for the ride, thriving off the food we eat; they’re central to our health, and we can’t live without them.”

Not only do they boost our immune system, but Dr. Richard Firshein, integrative medicine expert and founder of Firshein Center, says these microorganisms (predominantly bacteria, aka flora) also have great control over our metabolism and hormones, and even our mood. “Our brains are constantly communicating with our ‘second brain’ in our digestive tracts,” he explains. “For instance, messages from the gut tell the brain when to seek food, while messages from the brain may trigger ‘gut feelings’ in response to stress.”

PROBIOTIC FIX

To keep the good bacteria thriving and the bad bacteria at bay, we rely on a healthy diet and probiotics. “The word ‘probiotic’ means ‘for life,’” says New York dermatologist Whitney Bowe, MD. “Probiotics are living organisms that support the health of the ‘good bugs,’ or bacteria, that make up our microbiome and sustain the barrier function in our gut. When barrier function is compromised, ‘leaky gut’ can occur, meaning the gut lining allows toxins, undigested food particles and bad bacteria to ‘leak’ out of your intestines and travel through-

out your body via your blood. Our immune system marks these foreign substances as threats, and therefore attacks them, leading to substantial health issues.”

In 2008, Jamie Lee Curtis’s Activia ads had us all studying yogurt labels in search of “live cultures.” Since then, kombucha and kefir started taking up space in our refrigerators, and kimchi became the “it” ingredient at five-star restaurants. “Although we can all benefit from eating probiotic-rich foods, that doesn’t mean we should be drinking 32 ounces of kombucha on a daily basis,” says Dr. Bulsiewicz. “A healthy gut is about diversity, not overdoing it on one thing we like.”

Additionally, these “good bugs” aren’t only found in foods: Gastroenterologists prescribe daily probiotic supplements—they’re also available over the counter—to patients to establish a healthier gut, as well as treat gastrointestinal issues such as IBS, bloating and constipation. “Current research also supports their use in weight loss, IBS, depression and anxiety, gut repair after taking antibiotics, food allergy prevention in children, and gastroenteritis, to name a few,” says Dr. Firshein.

“Although probiotics are generally considered very safe, not everyone needs a supplement-strength version, which is typically used with the intention to correct a specific medical issue,” Dr. Bulsiewicz adds. “There’s a lot of room for probiotic science and education to catch up with the hype.”

DAMAGE CONTROL

Perhaps the most widespread use of probiotics is to counteract the effect of antibiotics on our microbiome. “Doctors typically recommend taking the supplements during and after a round of antibiotics to replace the good bacteria the medicine destroyed,” says Dr. Firshein.

That daily Diet Coke you reach for around 4 p.m. can also wreak havoc. While artificial sweeteners add no calories to our diet, they do damage the naturally occurring bacteria in our gut, Dr. Firshein explains. “So the problem isn’t just Diet Coke; it’s all the products that use these sweeteners—they’re found in many desserts, cakes and even bread—which cause our bacteria to produce compounds that are toxic to our bodies.”

According to Dr. Firshein, one of the main concerns with taking probiotics is that they are not broad-spectrum enough to fill the needs of the average person. “Considering there are only a handful of strains in most probiotic supplements and up to 1,000 different types of bacteria in our guts, experts question whether ‘unbalances’ could promote the growth of harmful strains in certain individuals, or in some cases, limit the variations in the gut biome that a healthy person needs.”

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TRILLION

The estimated number of bacteria that live in and on our bodies, which Dr. Bulsiewicz says is more than the stars in 100 Milky Ways, and weighs nearly three to seven pounds.

WHAT THEY ARE

PREBIOTICS

GUT HEALTH

Dr. Bulsiewicz tells his patients to think of the gut as a garden: “**Prebiotics are the fertilizer, and are almost exclusively found in food**—predominantly plant fiber. They are the part of our food that has an effect on our microbiome. Benefiber is actually a prebiotic, and I like to mix it into my morning coffee—it doesn’t change the taste or texture, and improves gut health.” Other prebiotic foods include garlic, asparagus and dandelion greens.

SKIN CARE

“Prebiotics are **types of ‘food’ that bacteria on the surface of the skin can use to do their job**,” says Jeff Rosevear, founding scientist and head of product development for SKINSEI, a prebiotic skin-care line. “For example, the microbiome produces fatty acids, which are then used by the skin to maintain barrier health. Emerging science suggests that by giving the right food to the right bacteria, one can support the overall microbiome.”

PROBIOTICS

These are **living organisms in foods and supplements** that help maintain good bacteria in the gut for a healthy, balanced microbiome. “Probiotics act as the seeds in our gut garden,” says Dr. Bulsiewicz. “You can’t grow a seed without watering it and nurturing it with the right nutrients—in this case, prebiotics. When the two come together, there’s a synergy that creates postbiotics, like short-chain fatty acids.”

In skin-care products, probiotics are either living bacteria, bacteria that has been deactivated (killed), which is called a lysate, or the product of a bacteria, called a ferment. “Live bacteria are very challenging to formulate with in cosmetics, so **it’s more common to use lysates and ferments**, and there is scientific support to show that they both offer benefits to the skin,” says Rosevear.

POSTBIOTICS

Postbiotics are **the byproducts created when prebiotics and probiotics combine**. But, “you can’t just take a postbiotic supplement like butyrate because it would get absorbed in the small intestine and never make it to the colon, where it needs to be to work,” says Dr. Bulsiewicz. “The best way to get postbiotics is by eating a diversity of prebiotic-rich plants.”

These are **the metabolites, or byproducts of living organisms**: “the enzymes, organic acids, polysaccharides, peptides, etc. that further reinforce the skin’s healthy barrier,” says Dr. Bowe. According to the FDA, 90 percent of cosmetic products that have “probiotic” labels actually contain postbiotics, but are marketed “probiotic,” similarly to the way “natural” and “organic” have been overused in skin care.



DENNIS KUNKEL MICROSCOPY/SCIENCE SOURCE



It is scientifically established that gut health has a strong impact on skin health. “If the good and bad bacteria aren’t balanced in your gut, then conditions can result,” says gastroenterologist and founder of TULA Skincare, Roshini Rajapaksa, MD. “I was inspired to research the topical benefits of probiotics after noticing how much better my patients’ skin looked once their health had improved with oral probiotic treatments.”

What Dr. Rajapaksa learned is that our skin has its own microbiome, which acts as its first layer of defense from climate changes, pollution, sweat and other assaults. “The skin microbiome is amazing, adaptive and resilient when it’s healthy, but fragile when it’s not,” says Rosevear. “Everyone has a unique skin microbiome because it is the result of everything an individual’s skin has been exposed to over the course of their lifetime.”

Dr. Bowe explores this further in her book, *The Beauty of Dirty Skin*: “We know about ‘leaky gut,’ but there’s also ‘leaky skin,’ which is the compromise of our skin’s natural barrier due to an unbalanced skin microbiome,” she says. “Our obsession with antibacterial soaps and high-pH cleansers often strip our skin of its healthy bacteria, which causes inflammatory issues and sensitivity.” In 2016, the FDA banned the use of triclosan in antibacterial soaps, affecting nearly 2,100 products. Manufacturers have since removed the ingredient from other products too, including toothpaste. “It can kill off healthy bacteria

in some and promote drug resistance in others,” says Dr. Bowe. “Additional ingredients that can affect the skin microbiome include sulfur, benzoyl peroxide, sulfates, and high levels of harsh alcohols, surfactants or preservatives.”

However, this science is very new, and experts are just learning how each ingredient affects the microbiome. “For example, certain preservatives at low concentrations might only create a very transient dip in certain strains, and people with healthy skin might be able to recover within minutes or hours of exposure,” Dr. Bowe explains. “These are all questions companies are researching right now—Dove is conducting tests to ensure its cleansers don’t induce negative changes in our microbiome over time; Mother Dirt is using a live, ‘peacekeeper’ strain of bacteria to restore essential bacteria that have been removed by modern hygiene. It’s not enough to be clean these days; brands also want to be biome-friendly.”

BEAUTY BIOME

Hence, the surge in prebiotic and probiotic products, which have anti-inflammatory effects on the skin (effects on the scalp are also being studied). This makes them a great option for those with acne, redness, psoriasis, dry skin and/or eczema—“when used topically, *lactobacillus plantarum* has been proven to decrease the number and size of acne lesions, as well as redness, and may also help with rosacea flares,” Dr. Bowe says. But, it’s important to know that topical probiotics aren’t a magic bullet for eliminating inflammatory conditions. “The challenge with this category of skin care is that many consumers are focused on immediate results,” says Rosevear. “They need to shift their mindset to think more about the long-term benefits of an anti-inflammatory regimen.”

Some interesting tools are also emerging that may allow prebiotic and probiotic skin-care products to become more personalized and effective. “A handful of companies are researching the ability to test an individual’s gut and skin flora,” says Dr. Bowe, comparing the technology to that of genetic testing companies like 23andMe. “For example, ProdermIQ can analyze the bacteria that exist on your skin after a single swab. The hope is to use this data to develop customized, efficacious skin-care lines.”

COLD FACTS

Will products that contain probiotics “die” if they aren’t refrigerated? Rosevear explains that preservatives can kill live bacteria, which is why it is difficult to formulate skin-care products with them because they’d require refrigeration, and most of us aren’t willing to do that. (However, with mini skin-care refrigerators becoming desk-side staples, this could soon change.) To circumvent this issue, Dr. Rajapaksa says many companies, including her own TULA Skincare, have found a way to “extract the beneficial metabolites—postbiotics—from probiotic bacteria, isolating the specific actives that are effective on the skin. This ensures our products remain both shelf-stable and effective without the need to refrigerate,” she says.

THE KIT

THE TOP SUPPLEMENTS AND SKIN CARE TO TRY NOW



YOUTHEORY SPORE PROBIOTIC POWDER

Mix one scoop of this flavorless powder with water to support and replenish the healthy microflora in your gut. \$28, vitacost.com



HUM NUTRITION SKIN HEROES PRE+PROBIOTIC

The nine probiotic strains and prebiotic konjac root in these vegan capsules help combat non-cystic acne from the inside out. \$40, humnutrition.com



THE BEAUTY CHEF GUT PRIMER INNER BEAUTY SUPPORT

An exclusive Flora Culture blend powers this powder’s ability to reduce digestive discomfort and aid in healing leaky gut. \$69, us.thebeautychef.com



THE NUE CO. PREBIOTIC + PROBIOTIC

Fight bloating and symptoms of IBS with these daily time-delay capsules that go easy on the stomach and offer skin benefits, too. \$75, thenueco.com



TULA KEEP IT CLEAR ACNE FOAM CLEANSER

This blend of salicylic acid and probiotics cleanses skin and treats breakouts in one step to keep complexions calm and clear. \$34, tula.com



SKINSEI LUCID BEAMING SERUM NO. 219

Part of SKINSEI’s personalized, prebiotic-infused regimen, this serum reinforces the skin barrier and takes down inflammation. skinsei.com



MOTHER DIRT AO+ MIST

Spritz this expert-favorite live probiotic spray on twice a day to restore clarity to unbalanced skin—clinical research shows results in four weeks. \$49, motherdirt.com



GLOWBIOTICS HYDRAGLOW CREAM OIL

Bring dry, unhappy skin back to life with this creamy oil that contains both probiotics and light-reflecting minerals to impart a serious glow. \$59, glowbiotics.com

SPONSORED

PLANT-BASED PROBIOTIC



Skin doesn’t need to sacrifice efficacy for clean beauty. DERMA E provides a wide range of proven clean beauty solutions. Combining nature’s best ingredients with targeted vitamin solutions, DERMA E has created safe, clean, 100-percent vegan and cruelty-free products that actually work. One of our top picks? **Vitamin C Intense Night Cream**. The blend of anti-inflammatory probiotics, potent vitamin C and mineral-rich rooibos in this luxurious overnight moisturizer support the natural rejuvenation of environmentally stressed skin. Probiotics help guard against daily environmental aggressors, while stabilized vitamin C and antioxidant-rich rooibos work to reduce the appearance of age spots, wrinkles and uneven skin tone. The bottom line: A healthy skin microbiome goes hand in hand with a brighter, more youthful-looking complexion.

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