

## Special Report - What Our Skin Tells Us about Our Health

Tips on How to Take Care of Your Skin



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## **Special Report: What Our Skin Tells Us about Our Health**

### **Introduction**

The inside of our bodies may be hidden from view but what goes on in there is not. It is a fact that changes inside will show up on the outside, namely in our hair, skin and nails. Scientists can test a hair follicle to gain insight into your life.

For instance, if you have been taking any type of drug, it will show up in your hair. The effect is similar to the life rings on a tree. Each one has a story to tell about the life of that tree during that year. Chemicals separate out in your hair like rings yielding a timeline of use or abuse.

The largest organ in your body is your skin and it happens to be on the outside of you. It provides a protective layer for the rest of the organs of your body. Because it has such a big job, it would stand to reason that it is affected by changes we don't normally see.

This is not bad news. The skin can give early warning signs to us about conditions that need to be dealt with right away. You wouldn't go to the doctor unless you felt or saw something that was out of the ordinary. Thanks in part to your skin, many diseases can be caught in the early stages and treated.

So, what does your skin say about your health? It may say more than you are letting on. In this report we will explore some of the [common skin conditions](#) that people see but ignore because they don't understand what they mean. With some of the signs, the underlying causes may be obvious and some may not. Either way, it is an eye-opener into the complex world of your skin.

### **Anatomy of the Skin**

Your skin is a living organ. It has more than one layer and more than one purpose. Let's begin with the layers. There are three of them: the epidermis, the dermis and the adipose layer. The epidermis is the outermost layer of the skin. It is continuously sloughing off dead skin cells, on the surface, and replacing them with new ones, that move up from below. Skin rejuvenation happens all the time but we don't notice it.

The cells that are responsible for pigmentation are located in this outermost layer of the skin. We all have melanocytes but people with darker skin have more pigment present.

The middle layer of skin is called the dermis. Here is where all of the structures are found in your skin. Its blood supply rises from this layer. Your hair follicles live here and so do sweat glands and lymphatic vessels. There are nerve endings here that respond to pain as well as touch.

The dermis is made up of a meshwork called collagen. Collagen is a protein that gives skin its strength and tone as well as elasticity. When skin gets saggy it is lacking a strong collagen framework.

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The deepest layer is the subcutaneous or adipose layer of the skin. This is where your fat cells reside. But fat is not all bad. In your skin, the fat layer acts as a cushion or “shock absorber.” It also holds in heat in the winter so that your body can maintain a constant temperature. Collagen is also present in this layer of the skin.

The function of the skin is to provide a barrier to moisture loss, regulate body temperature and protect the inner organs from injury. The skin also stores vitamin D that it receives from the rays of the sun. There are many pain receptors in the skin. Detecting heat from a hot stove can prevent a more serious injury to the deeper tissues.

### **REASONS FOR CHANGES IN THE SKIN**

Your skin has quite the job to do. So, it is that much more distressing when changes occur. Besides the normal responsibilities, your skin also channels internal changes. Everything that you see on your skin is not necessarily the result of outside incidents. Knowing your skin can help you to be alert for any differences that come about.

#### **Skin Color**

We each have varying degrees of melanin in our skin. That is what gives humans their unique color palette. Even with those natural colorations, there are some that are not so natural. Let's discuss a few.

What comes to mind when someone says that they have “yellowing of the skin?” Jaundice is a condition of the liver that leads to yellowing of the skin and the white portion of the eye. The liver enzymes are off for some reason.

What about a dark bruise on the skin? Even bruising is an outward sign of an internal problem. When blood vessels under the skin are injured, they break open and bleed into the layers of the skin. That is how we get a bruise. When someone bruises easily it can be a sign of a blood clotting problem, clumsiness (which can be a symptom of yet another condition) or poor nutrition.

The sun even causes changes in the skin. Most sun bunnies call it tanning but discolorations on the skin can be due to skin cancer formation from too much exposure to the sun without proper protection. Most skin cancers are treatable when caught early.

What about bluing of the skin? This is referred to as cyanosis. It demonstrates a lack of oxygen in the blood. Blood that returns to the lungs is blue in color because it needs to replenish its oxygen supply. The oxygenated blood then delivers oxygen to the cells of the body including the skin. A lack of adequate oxygen reaching the tissues will be evident on the skin.

#### **Lack of Sleep**

Sleep is important for many reasons. The biggest reason is that the body uses that time to repair itself. As we go crashing and thrashing through the day, we are exposed to a variety of conditions

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that we don't even think about. Free radicals, that damage our internal organs and lead to premature aging, are introduced into our bodies via smog-filled air, car pollution, smoking, stress, chemicals found in the foods we ingest and the chemicals we apply to our bodies.

During the cycle of sleep, the body goes about fixing the damage and also getting our bodies ready for the next day. Each person has a different sleep requirement. Children, for instance, need around nine hours of sleep a night. Babies sleep an average of sixteen hours a day. Teenagers have erratic sleep patterns due to growth spurts but when they need sleep they get it (even on their desk at school). Adults vary with their sleep depending on age but most need between six and eight hours of unbroken deep sleep for optimum cellular health.

When we don't get enough sleep, it shows. Cramming for exams or staying up late when you are out with friends is not a regular occurrence. Your body can recover without any telltale signs. Chronic sleep deprivation is a different story.

So how does your skin look without sleep? Most people notice the dark discolorations under the eyes first. Skin seems to lose its elasticity resulting in fine [lines and wrinkles](#). Puffy eyes or "bags" are also common in sleep-deprived people. No matter how much someone protests that they are okay, their skin is saying otherwise.

### **Smoking**

Most health professionals would agree that smoking is bad for you. It is not only bad for your lungs and other internal organs it is also bad for your skin. You can probably tell how long someone has smoked and even the fact that they are a smoker by the look of their skin.

Smoking deposits particles of nicotine and other particulates into the lungs. The more you smoke, the more your lungs fill up with this stuff that fills the air spaces, making it harder for you to breathe. Some of it is removed but over time more and more of it stays behind.

For your skin, smoking gives it a lackluster look. Some may even say that smokers have ashen or gray skin. It certainly doesn't glow like the picture of health. Why is that?

Skin is nourished by a network of blood vessels, including the smallest, capillaries. The smoke can literally choke you and limit the healthy blood supply to your skin. The supply is restored after you [stop smoking](#) but not right away. If you are a chain smoker, the effects can be worse.

Also, smoking can lead to wrinkles and lines. The next time you look at a smoker, examine their lips. They purse their mouth to puff on the cigarette and then squint to avoid the smoke they are blowing out. Over time, this "drawing" of the face can prematurely age it.

### **Sun Exposure**

The sun provides light for our bodies and vitamins for your skin. After all, if you need a little bit of vitamin D, spend about fifteen minutes in the sun and absorb it through your skin. Many people in

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the sun are not concerned about filling their daily allowance of vitamins but to have fun and [get the bronzing tan](#).

Excess tanning and time spent in the sun without protection has led to an increase in skin cancers. Remember that skin is an organ so it is susceptible to cancer. Cancer is, in a word, an over proliferation of cells which is abnormal. But, if not treated, it can spread and kill you.

Exposing our bodies to the sun without protection bombards our skin with harmful ultraviolet radiation. The rays that can penetrate the outer skin layer are zapping us. Sunscreen lets some radiation in but how much depends on the SPF factor. What does get in can still be harmful. Sunblock stops all rays but doesn't provide the tan that many people want.

These rays can change the look, feel and makeup of your skin. For one, overexposure and constant sun damage through sunburn has led to leathery skin. That's when you see someone with brownish skin that is shiny and hard like worn leather.

Skin also [wrinkles](#) faster from too much sun exposure. You'll see age spots develop. No they are not freckles because they are too big and you weren't born with them. These skin discolorations can also change color, shape and size on you. If that happens, the cause may be skin cancer.

Moles are also affected by sun exposure. They can develop irregular edges and a darker color. Oozing or bleeding from these areas is another sign that cancer is present. Yearly skin mappings by your dermatologist can detect any skin cancers present.

Most common skin cancers are curable if caught right away. Melanoma is the exception. It is not as common as squamous cell or basal cell carcinomas of the skin but it is definitely more aggressive when present. It can be fatal if not detected and treated.

### **Poor Diet**

The saying "you are what you eat" seems to be proven more prophetic every day. What types of foods you eat or don't eat are reflected in the way that your skin looks to yourself and others. Consider the ramifications of not getting the nutrients your body needs through your food.

Eating a lot of fried foods and sugary snacks can lead to increased breakouts on the skin. If your skin is already prone to acne, these foods can make it worse. All of the excess oil is trying to escape your body via your face. Another food that is good for that is chocolate.

Skin can look dull if you are not drinking enough water. Sodas, fruit juices and coffee can show up as acne prone skin or dry skin that easily cracks. Your body needs water to properly hydrate the tissues and provide oxygen.

The foods that we eat provide vitamins and minerals our bodies need to perform certain functions. Without them, certain diseases and conditions may develop. Lack of vitamins like A and the B vitamins can manifest as dull skin that is dry and cracked. Along those same lines, the nails and hair become brittle and fall out or shed.

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A deficiency of potassium can lead to clotting problems. More widespread bruising under the skin may be a sign of this condition. Deficiencies in vitamin C can lead to skin rashes.

Most people will have to go a prolonged amount of time with these vitamin deficiencies to show the signs. Depending on how sensitive your body is to the changes and your age, they may appear sooner rather than later.

### **Diabetes**

Diabetes is becoming more common in our society as more and more people are overweight. Eating a poor diet contributes to the excess weight gain. Gaining lots of weight rapidly can cause early onset of diabetes. If diabetes is suspected, your skin can give you some clues.

Some people develop skin conditions as a result of diabetes. If you notice red, itchy skin on your knees, it could be an early warning sign of the condition. Also, darkened patches on the neck and face could signify diabetes. This is called acanthosis nigricans. It also shows up on people who are obese but may not have diabetes.

Another sign of diabetes is a wound or sore that won't heal properly. The skin is still open and infections may set in. Lack of proper blood supply to the area can be a result of unmanaged diabetes. This condition can be serious because lack of a nourishing blood supply can end in amputation.

### **Auto-Immune Conditions**

Auto-immune conditions are present when the body begins to attack itself. For some reason the body no longer recognizes itself and the guardians of the immune system begin attacking healthy cells of the organs. Some auto-immune conditions can be fatal if they are not diagnosed and treated.

One such disease is lupus. It is a widespread condition where the body attacks cells of several different systems. Since your skin is an organ, it is also affected. A telltale sign of possible lupus is a butterfly rash that spreads across the face.

Discolored patches can appear on the skin of the face and hands. This could be a sign of lupus of the skin. By itself, the condition of the skin may be attributed to other diseases. But, in conjunction with other signs, your doctor may suspect lupus.

Another auto-immune disease is alopecia areata. Alopecia refers to baldness. It can happen in men and women. Losing patches of hair on your head or a widespread loss of hair on your body can be a sign that your body is attacking its hair follicles. With treatment, the hair may grow back.

### **FIXING WHAT IS WRONG**

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### **Changing your Habits**

While the skin can tell us what may be happening just below the surface, it is not the main problem. To take care of what you see on the outside, some changes need to be made that correct the underlying condition.

If caught early, most conditions predicted by your skin may be treated or reversed. Some skin signs are warnings of a progressive nature and it may be too late to totally combat the damage. The key here is to bring attention to any skin conditions when they happen.

Let's take poor nutritional habits as an example. We've already discussed the fact that the skin becomes dull and lifeless looking when certain elements of our diet are missing. Mostly this involves the vitamins and minerals the cells need to carry out their everyday functions.

Also eating fatty foods and processed sugary snacks and sodas can aggravate skin conditions that you already have. Too much saturated fat can lead to obesity which can bring on metabolic disorders like diabetes.

The key here is to change your lifestyle to transform your body from the inside out. As long as you are still breathing, your body can be reshaped by what you put into it. Eating more natural foods that contain whole grains, unsaturated fats, healthy oils and the essential vitamins can get your body back on track.

What are these foods? Here is an abbreviated list: fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes, beans, cold water fish like salmon, lean meat, seafood, low fat dairy products and grain breads and pasta. That is the entire food pyramid in one sentence. In essence, if you give the body what it needs to survive, it will do the rest.

Over a period of time, your skin will regain its color and tone. With sufficient vitamin K, any bruising due to clotting problems may clear up. Drinking plenty of water rehydrates the body and the skin leading to a healthy glow.

Even diabetes can be affected by your change in diet. Many people, who were obese and developed diabetes, may be able to reverse this condition when they lose weight and choose better foods. With the body working properly again, wound healing will benefit and not lead to gangrene. Other skin symptoms of diabetes may disappear also.

Other conditions like cancer, lupus, and alopecia also affect the skin. In these cases, early detection can lead to better management of the condition. Your skin condition may not go away but on the inside, your body will be getting the treatment that it needs to fight back. Early detection improves the outcome for many conditions that are forecast on your skin.

### **CONCLUSION**

The skin is the largest organ of the body. It is designed to protect the internal environment from the harshness of the outside environment. Your skin retains moisture, promotes homeostasis, regulates body temperature and gets rid of waste toxins. It has to be all things to all systems.

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But, did you know that your skin can also be an internal alarm? When problems arise inside, they are manifest on the skin in the form of rashes, bruises, raised bumps, moles, discolorations and the like. Investigating these skin changes just may save your life.

If your skin is trying to tell you something, listen.

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