

The Truth About Beauty Beverages

Do certain drinks deliver beauty benefits -- or is that wishful thinking? Experts weigh in.

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WebMD Feature

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"Beauty beverages" have flooded the market in recent years, promising to transform humble water into a powerful anti-aging, skin perfecting potion.

According to market research firm Mintel, nearly 300 new food and drink products with "functional beauty benefits" launched in 2008, about double the number in 2007. Products like Borba, Glowelle, Crystal Light Skin Essentials, BeautyScoop, and Noah's Naturals Anti-Aging Beauty Elixir all claim to improve appearance and fight the signs of time on your skin.

But can what you drink really make a difference in how you look?

What Are Beauty Beverages?

"Just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, a beauty drink is in the perspective of the consumer," says New York nutritionist Keri Glassman, MS, RD, CDN.

"Drinks with beauty benefits usually contain vitamins, amino acids, or botanicals that possess antioxidant activities," says New York dermatologist Francesca Fusco, MD. "A person should usually get enough of these nutrients through diet. But drinking them is a reasonable way to supplement."

How Well Do They Work?

There are nutrients that can improve skin health, but the jury is out on how effective a beauty beverage can be at shuttling this nutrition straight to your skin.

Ideally, everyone would eat a healthy diet packed with fruits and vegetables, lean protein, good fats, and whole grains, says Los Angeles dermatologist Howard Murad, MD, who sells supplements as part of his skincare line. He sees supplements as a good back-up plan.

"I have tried to put adequate amounts of supplements in drinks, but they aren't palatable at the levels required to see benefits," Murad says. "Plus, to make a supplement drinkable, you need to add preservatives, emulsifiers, and sweeteners -- things that aren't ideal to ingest."

The makers of beauty drinks say that sometimes eating well isn't enough. "Even people who eat a healthy diet have problems with their skin, hair, and nails," says plastic surgeon Michelle Yagoda, MD, creator of BeautyScoop. "So absorption can be a problem and liquids tend to be more bio-available to your body."

"A drinkable supplement can be an effective way to treat skin because it can contain vitamins that are more bio-available and easier for the body to absorb," says Scott-Vincent Borba, founder and CEO of the skin product company Borba.

However, experts such as New York dermatologist Neal Schultz, MD, disagree. "Certain nutrients do help the skin, but that doesn't mean putting them in a drink will have the same effect as eating a well-balanced diet," Schultz says. "The body is too smart for that."