

SHAPE

The Only Ingredient You Need In Your Beauty Routine to Transform Your Skin

What does it take to look truly radiant? The latest studies point to one ingredient in particular: hyaluronic acid

The brightest star in the skin-care cosmos – the one sparking excitement in beauty aisles and doctor’s offices – is unlike any It ingredient we’ve seen before. For starts, it’s not new. It was probably the first lotion you ever applied. It wasn’t dreamed up by a Nobel Prize winning white coat. It can’t even qualify as rare since it’s abundant throughout the body in the skin cells, joints, and connective tissue. Yet hyaluronic acid – a sugar that can hold 1,000 times its weight in water and its able to heal wounds, fight free radicals, and hydrate skin so that it looks smoother – is suddenly elevating creams to cult status. What gives? Having recently undergone a molecular makeover, hyaluronic acid is more effective than ever. Here, experts explain its function and how to make it part of your regular routine.

Unmatched Moisturizer

“Hyaluronic acid is sometimes referred to as a goo molecule,” says Lara Devgan, M.D., an attending plastic surgeon at Manhattan Eye, Ear, & Throat infirmary. It’s an undignified nickname for the humectants that’s responsible for imbuing skin with bounce, dewiness, and radiance. The sticky stuff is made by our fibroblasts – the same cells that crank out collagen and elastin. **“Together, hyaluronic acid, collagen, and elastin minimize wrinkles, folds, and sagging,”** says Michelle Yagoda, M.D., a clinical instructor of plastic surgery at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. Throughout life, however, they’re subjected to free radicals unleashed by the sun and pollutants. (Here’s how to protect skin from free radicals.) And by our late 20’s, as our cellular machine downshifts, we start producing less of all three.

How to Harness Your Own Hyaluronic Acid

You can easily replenish your natural reserves and fortify what you’ve got. “It’s all about a basic skin-care regimen, since robust hyaluronic acid production is a reflection of healthy skin,” says Joshua Zeichner, M.D., the

director of cosmetic and clinical research in dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital in NYC. That means using sunscreen and antioxidants. (But sunscreen may not be enough to protect your skin.)

Another thing you can apply: retinoid. A prescription Vitamin A cream “not only reverses sun damage, clears pores, and speeds collagen growth but stimulates hyaluronic acid synthesis,” says David E. Bank, M.D., director of the Center for Dermatology, Cosmetic and Laser Surgery in Mount Kisco, New York.

And here’s a sweet surprise: “Many studies have shown that have exercise increases hyaluronic acid production,” says Dr. Yagoda. Serums can also help, albeit temporarily. Unlike hyaluronic acids of old, today’s potent versions contain molecules of various sizes and weights that penetrate skin better and stick around longer. “They can significantly improve the way skin looks by hydrating in,” says Amy Forman Taub, M.D., an assistant clinical professor at Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University in Chicago. Plus, “they’re great to pair with anti-aging retinoids and exfoliants since they curb the drying side effects.” Try Neutrogena Hydro Boost Hydrating Serum (\$20; ulta.com) or PCA Skin Hyaluronic Acid Boosting Serum (\$115; pcaskin.com).

The Hyaluronic Acid at Your Derm’s Office

Nearly 2.5 million Americans got hyaluronic acid injections (such as Juvéderm or Restylane) in 2016, so you may already know their magic. Here’s the appeal: Gels (\$600 to \$3,000 per syringe) do everything from restoring the light-catching curve of a cheek to perking up a deflated lip line, erasing shadowy under-eye hollows, and plumping fine lines. In the pipeline are thinner gels to “boost radiance in a way we’ve never been able to,” says Dr. Bank. (We may see the approval of one called Volite in 2018.)

Beyond substituting what has been lost with age, these shots “trigger the formation of new collagen and hyaluronic acid in the skin,” Dr. Bank says. The needle poke also causes a tiny amount of trauma, kicking the skin into repair mode and further activating those cells. Similarly, “lasers, microneedling, and chemical peels can also stimulate hyaluronic acid and collagen production,” says Dr. Devgan. (Yep, microneedling is the new skin-care treatment you should know about.) Some doctors will spread an injectable hyaluronic acid gel over the top of freshly needled or lasered skin to get you glowing even faster.