

BYRDIE

The Skincare Ingredient Japanese Women Swear By (That You Haven't Heard Of)

by Audrey Noble

The hunt for firm skin is fervent and one of the most sought-out side effects when looking for a good skincare product. Many ingredients claim to increase cell turnover rate and improve skin's elasticity, but as of late, we've been noticing a certain name popping up more and more when it comes to our skin's firmness. You've probably seen it, if not given it a second thought, as well. We're talking about CoQ10. According to Refinery29, CoQ10 is nothing new. In fact, it's been a hero ingredient in Japanese beauty for years. So what exactly is it?

We asked Kayo Better Body Care co-founder Christine Bullock; Union Square Laser Dermatology dermatologist Shereene Idriss, MD; HiQ Cosmetics owner Patrick Pickens; and plastic surgeon Michelle Yagoda, MD, to break it down for us. Scroll down to see what they had to say.



Photo: Stocksy

What is coQ10?

According to Bullock, coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10 for short) is a naturally produced bodily enzyme and one of the most fundamental antioxidants. "It produces around 95% of your body's energy, neutralizing free radicals that age the skin and keeping cells health," she says. When we're younger, she explains, we're able to produce as much CoQ10 as we need for energy. As we get older, aging and stress slow down the CoQ10 creation process, and our supplies diminish.

Yagoda explains that as an antioxidant, CoQ10 neutralizes free radicals and reduces the effects of external stress factors like sunlight and pollution.

The ingredient has been around in the U.S. for a while, actually, but is having its moment now because consumers are getting smarter about skincare. "Many ingredients initially gain popularity in Japan prior to achieving the same status in the U.S. because Japanese consumers demand more research and development from manufacturers and lawmakers, they are more educated about products' effects, and consumers are more confident about efficacy at the time of purchase," says Yagoda.

"Asian markets tend to be on the cutting edge of skincare, with star ingredients being more readily accessible, earlier on, as the Asian consumer is better versed when it comes to skincare and the ingredients that go into their routines," says Idriss. "As a matter of fact, Asian beauty brands invest heavily in research and development alone, allowing them to come up with innovations faster than their U.S. counterparts."

What are the skin benefits?

While naturally occurring CoQ10 can be digested for energy, it can do a number of things in skincare products, including the below:

1. Energize cell activity: "This energy is needed to repair damage and make sure the skin cells are healthy," says Bullock. "Active skin cells get rid of toxins easily and can make better use of nutrients. When your skin ages, all these processes slow down, causing dull and sallow, wrinkled skin."

2. Reduce sun damage: "The skin is damaged by exposure to the sun's UV rays, which provides a source of free radicals, which can be damaging to the cells' DNA," says Pickens. "The potent antioxidant function of CoQ10 helps it to protect the skin at the molecular level from the damaging effects of the sun and from damage by free radicals."

3. Even out skin tone.

4. Stimulate collagen and elastin production. "CoQ10 supports the bodies ability to produce collagen and elastin," says Bullock.

5. Improve hydration.

How do you incorporate it into your skincare?

The good news is that it is pretty safe to mix with other ingredients. "We have found that CoQ10 works great with a lot of other ingredients and products," says Pickens. "We have countless clients that apply our CoQ10 facial serum after prescription retinoids (Retin-A, etc.). In addition, as aforementioned, we believe it is great to apply before and after sun exposure."

Yagoda says to mix with similar ingredients for best results. "Because CoQ10 is fat-soluble, it mixes best with like ingredients," she says. "It may be broken down more quickly when combined with retinol or glycolic acid."

While topical application is generally suitable for all skin types, you might want to take caution if you have certain skin conditions. "If you have a history of vitiligo, approach topical CoQ10 products with caution," says Idriss. "CoQ10 has been shown to block an enzyme known as tyrosinase, which is necessary for creating pigment. By blocking it, it may lead to worsening of depigmentation in those who suffer from vitiligo."