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The Vegan Diet and Healthy Skin: Everything You Need to Know

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Charlotte has an upper second class honors in History from Oxford Brookes University and a postgraduate certificate in Cultural Heritage from Winchester University. She loves music, travel, and animals. Charlotte resides on the South coast of the UK.

It's no secret that loading your plate with fruits and vegetables and eschewing processed meat products is good for your insides. But is a vegan diet good for healthy skin, too?

Many celebrities say that it is; Natalie Portman and Billie Eilish have noticed significant improvements in their skin since going vegan and cutting out dairy.

Portman told the Cut a few years ago, "I'm vegan and I found my skin is much, much better than when I was a vegetarian. I cut out dairy and eggs, and I never had a breakout after." Eilish—who went vegan for ethical reasons—said in a Tumblr post in 2018, "I'm lactose intolerant and dairy is horrible for your skin and my skin is VERY aware of that."

But it's not just celebrities who think veganism is good for your skin, experts agree that they're onto something. Blade Tiessen—a medical aesthetician who owns the Ontario-based Anti-Aging Clinic and has worked in skincare for 33 years—believes that ditching animal products for a healthy vegan diet can have a "dramatic effect." "I say this from both personal and professional experience. I suffered from acne since my early teens until months after going vegan at 35, being in the industry I had every treatment and product at my disposal over the years," he told LIVEKINDLY. "Some helped to keep breakouts under control but nothing solved the issue permanently until shortly after becoming vegan."

Multiple studies say that ditching dairy could help acne-sufferers. Acne is the most common skin condition in the United States; it affects around 50 million Americans every year.

There are a few different theories on why dairy can cause an acne flare-up; some studies suggest that hormones in cow's milk are the culprit. These hormones are intended to stimulate growth in calves. When humans ingest them, they release insulin, which can trigger breakouts.

According to a medically-reviewed article on Healthline, "sometimes the hormones in milk can also interact with our own hormones, confusing our body's endocrine system and signaling breakouts."

Nonprofit PlantPure Communities (PPC) recently launched a social media campaign called "Ditch Dairy for Clearer Skin." The campaign aims to educate the public about the link between acne and dairy consumption.

In a supporting article, pediatrician Dr. Jackie Busse, MD, FAAP, says, "removing dairy is the first and most important dietary change you should make to prevent and treat acne."

A vegan diet could also help people who suffer from eczema—a condition where patches of skin become inflamed, itchy, and cracked. According to Healthline, a handful have studies have shown that a raw, vegan diet, in particular, can be very beneficial, although there isn't conclusive evidence.

Plant-based foods have also been linked with easing psoriasis, an immune-mediated disease. Similar to eczema, it causes raised red flaky patches to appear on the skin.

Eating a whole food plant-based diet can help psoriasis sufferers because it is naturally low in inflammatory foods, says dietician Deirdre Earls, RD, LD. She was once hospitalized with psoriasis as a child, but switching to a plant-based diet helped her manage the condition effectively.

She told Everyday Health, "I drastically changed my diet. I took all of the diet coke, all of the ultra-processed stuff out, and then I replaced it with simple, whole, mostly plant-based foods. Within six months, my skin had cleared." She added, "psoriasis is an inflammatory condition, so anything you can do to cut down on inflammation should help."

Reality TV personality and entrepreneur Kim Kardashian-West has suffered from psoriasis for more than a decade and was recently diagnosed with psoriatic arthritis. She opened up on sister Kourtney Kardashian's website Poosh about her battle with the disease, and how switching to a plant-based diet has helped her.

"I love a healthy life and try to eat as plant-based as possible and drink sea moss smoothies," she said, adding that she also tries to keep her stress levels to a minimum. "I hope my story can help anyone else with an autoimmune disease feel confident that there is light at the end of the tunnel."

Eating vegan foods can help with painful conditions, but they can also just make your skin glow too.

According to Tiessen, patients who follow a vegan diet achieve superior skin results to those who do not. They also have more energy and they sleep better. He says, "eating a healthy vegan diet free of inflammatory foods along with drinking lots of water, sleeping well, exercising, reducing levels of stress, taking care of and protecting your skin will help ensure beautiful glowing skin that will last a lifetime."

He also recommends using cruelty-free vegan skincare products. "Skincare should be looked at as nutrition and protection for the skin," he added. "Supplying the skin with nutrients from organic plants can offer benefits that are unavailable from chemicals and or animal-based ingredients."

If you want to opt for cosmetic intervention, Tiessen's clinics—in Orillia Ontario and Port Severn Ontario—offer many cruelty-free and vegan treatments, including microneedling. The chain is also an ambassador for vegan medical skincare brand ElaSpa.

If you prefer to stick to just consuming whole foods, here are seven of the best plant-based foods to eat to keep your skin looking glowing and healthy.

Eating spinach regularly can benefit your skin. It's rich in vitamins and minerals, including vitamin A, vitamin C, and vitamin E, which are particularly good for your skin. It's also a great source of iron, as well as folate and magnesium.

Blueberries are packed with skin-beautifying antioxidants. Stephanie Clarke—co-owner of C&J Nutrition—told Self, "that deep blue/purple color that makes blueberries so gorgeous translates to helping your skin look young too. This color is a result of compounds called anthocyanins, powerful antioxidants that shield the skin against harmful free radicals that can damage the collagen that keeps your skin firm."

Eating avocados is good for your skin, as they're rich in vitamins C and E. You can also apply them directly to your face and feel their benefits that way. Registered dietician Maureen Eyerman told Elle, "the hydrating properties may reduce fine lines and wrinkles, help keep skin smooth, and boost skin's immunity against stress and other environmental factors."

Sweet potatoes are rich in vitamin E and vitamin C, which helps to boost collagen. They're also rich in anthocyanins, which can help to prevent blemishes and dark spots. Sweet potatoes are also a source of fiber, iron, calcium, and selenium.

Walnuts contain omega-3 fats, which, according to Clarke, "strengthen the membranes of your skin cells." They also contain "nourishing fats" which attract soothing moisture from the air and reduce inflammation, helping to avoid breakouts.

Carrots are associated with good eye health, but they're good for the skin, too. According to Healthline, vitamin C-rich carrots can help skin recover from conditions like psoriasis and rashes. They can also help you heal faster from cuts and other wounds.

Kiwis have more vitamin C than oranges, and they're packed with vitamin E. You can also place them over the top of your eyes, which can help to reduce the appearance of dark circles.

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