

les nouvelles esthétiques & spa

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by Sondra Miles

If you quickly skim the labels of your favorite skin care products, you'll find that many of them contain vitamin A. As a skin nutrient, vitamin A is used to improve the appearance of skin and reduce wrinkles.

Naturally found in eggs, whole milk and meat, vitamin A is a fat-soluble vitamin. Carrots, as well as many other fruits and vegetables, contain beta-carotene, which can turn into vitamin A when it is broken down in the body. Though most people have sufficient amounts of vitamin A in their diets for the body to properly carry out normal functions, for which the vitamin is essential, studies show that topical vitamin A can be beneficial for the skin.

Defining the vitamin

Vitamin A goes by many different names, which can be confusing. Retinol, retinyl palmitate and retinoic acid all refer to different forms of vitamin A. Retinol is a natural form of vitamin A. However, retinol is more unstable in topical formulations so over-the-counter topical products may use other, more stable forms of vitamin A, such as retinyl palmitate. Topical prescription products, such as Retin-A®, often contain retinoic acid.

Topical retinoic acid, a drug approved by the Food and Drug Administration, has been shown in many clinical trials to reduce fine wrinkles and brown spots associated with photoaged skin, i.e. skin damaged by UV exposure, and is routinely prescribed by dermatologists to treat wrinkles and other skin conditions.

Unfortunately, however, people using retinoic acid experience a fair amount of skin irritation and side effects including photosensitivity and burning.

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The research is in

A recent study published in the *Archives of Dermatology* tested the effectiveness of retinol on improving naturally aged skin. Naturally aged skin, i.e. skin not exposed to the sun, becomes wrinkled, thinner and more fragile, though not as dramatically as photoaged skin. In this study researchers applied a .4 percent retinol lotion to the upper arm for 24 weeks, and a placebo lotion to the other arm. At various points during the study, dermatologists evaluated the skin of the volunteers. The retinol treatment significantly decreased wrinkles and reduced the roughness of the skin. Although most volunteers did experience some irritation with the retinol, which usually causes moderate to severe irritation, the discomfort was mild.

Collagen, hyaluronic acid

When analyzing the skin biopsies, researchers found an increase in both procollagen and hyaluronic acid, two important components of skin structure that



decrease as skin ages. Collagen helps give skin its strength and structure while hyaluronic acid binds water, smoothing skin. The study's results suggest that vitamin A can reduce wrinkles and improve skin texture by helping to renew the skin's cellular architecture. ■

Note: Users are encouraged to check with their physician before using vitamin A, as it can be harmful in large dosages.

Sondra Miles holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. As a member of derma e® Natural Bodycare's formulation team, she helps design innovative natural anti-aging skin care solutions. For more information, visit www.dermae.com or call 800.933.9344.