



essential beauty Feed your face

From fruit acids to skin-brightening exfoliants, your kitchen could be a storehouse of goodies for your skin.

Words Natasha Hughes

Oatmeal face packs, honey hair conditioners, milk-bath skin softeners: generations of old wives couldn't be wrong, surely? Beauty treatments using fresh and pantry ingredients are a rite of passage, even in these sophisticated times of cosmeceuticals and non-surgical enhancements. And now plastic surgeons and natural skin specialists agree there is some basis to the conventional skin care remedies. Those old wives had the right idea. But their recipes' effectiveness depends on the quantity and quality of the active ingredients.

"There's a basis of truth in the mythology that has been passed from grandmother to daughter to granddaughter from observation of nature," says plastic surgeon Dr Peter Dixon. "There's no doubt that for a simple problem and good skin there's no harm whatsoever in giving a regular [application] of tomato pulp or milk. But with acne or pigmentation, don't expect them to be much of a miracle cure."

Dixon says some fruit can provide alpha-hydroxy acids, which help to remove dead skin cells from the surface layer of the skin, but only in weak concentrations and with nothing to enhance the penetration.

"Modern-day cosmetics deliver targeted amounts of acid on to the skin," he says. "There's not a lot of activity with the acids in pieces of fruit."

Fellow plastic surgeon Dr Mark Edinburg goes further: "It's a fad and a lot of people use them [fridge ingredients] but they do not have a medically proven effect on skin – otherwise we'd all be using them."

Naturopath David Lyons says only when high concentrations of active ingredients are used can positive, lasting changes be made to the skin. "It was only when I started making my own [herbal] formulations using medicinal-quality ingredients that I began to notice a dramatic difference in my patients' skin," says Lyons, the founder of Simplicity Face & Body Nutrients. Lara Deutsch of Stem Organics skincare says it is possible to DIY from the fridge but certified natural products provide "more convenience, a few more ingredients and a lot more benefits".

Fresh is best, however, if science has proved a natural ingredient's effectiveness. "And there is a huge body of evidence behind this," says Will Evans of the Purist Company, another natural cosmetic house.

"With a fresh remedy, everything there is fully active; nothing's been done to destroy the delicate enzymes. The whole herbal extract in the original form is most effective," Evans says. "A fresh aloe vera leaf has better efficacy than a reconstituted product. If heat's involved in any of the process, it's not going to be good."

Evans says a commercial cucumber face wash will probably have only a minuscule amount of cucumber enhanced with an artificial cucumber smell. "A slice of cucumber is 100 per cent in its original and most active form."

Barbara Gare of Y Natural Skincare says: "In the good old days people might not have known why but they were often – not always – on the money when they thought something was good for them [and their skin]."

Some ingredients from the fridge and pantry can benefit the skin through

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being applied rather than eaten. "Yoghurt and honey have natural antibacterial action, sweet almond oil is a great lip balm, coffee can stimulate and revitalise the skin, lemons and other fruits can work as exfoliators and skin brighteners due to fruit acids, and foods that are high in antioxidants help protect the skin from free radicals that damage skin cells and speed the ageing process."

But just because something is natural doesn't mean that it is good for your skin, Gare says. "One of the risks of using certain ingredients such as citrus and various fruit peels with a low pH is that you can end up damaging your skin."

And the produce used by our grandmothers and their grandmothers was of course not grown with pesticides and herbicides. "So if you are going to use things from your fridge or pantry, choose to use certified organic produce," Gare says. "[Our grandmothers also] weren't liv-

ing with the same level of day-to-day pollution, car exhausts, air-conditioning and other environmental air pollutants ...

"We need more to counteract the attack on our skin, which is why we need more than just soap and water or whatever concoctions your grandmother and those before her used."

Gare says it is important to love your skin and enjoy treating it well. "Do take time out to treat yourself to a night in with a mango, cucumber, oatmeal, yoghurt, strawberries and various other goodies," she says. "Divide into half. Apply half to skin in whatever way you've been instructed - don't use too much, don't leave on too long. And eat the other half. Your skin will thank you for it."

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