



Saving face

The skin is the human body's largest organ, accounting for close to 16 per cent of the total body weight.

Shefali Srinivas learns from the experts how best to care for your skin.

Knowing the right way to care for your skin is quite a challenge in these days of product explosion. Is it better to use a cream-based cleanser or oil-based one? Should one use a cleanser at all? Face scrub or foaming face wash? Do SPF 15 foundations and lip balms actually work?

The skin is the human body's largest organ, accounting for nearly 16 per cent of total body weight.

It is not just a simple flat sheet, but is made of several layers.

The topmost layer, which is quite tough and thin, is our "hide". It is called the epidermis, and is being constantly worn down and replaced. It plays a vital part in protecting

protection factor (SPF) of 15 is recommended for daily use, though it is best to consult a dermatologist to decide the appropriate strength for specific skin types. If you are a sun seeker, then choose one with a high SPF of 50-60.

Doctors say that people shy away from sunscreens because they don't like the oily feel. "Some sunscreens can give you a white sheen like in Chinese *wayang*," Dr Wong says, referring to the actors' painted faces in traditional Chinese opera. But there are sunscreens which are non-oily, says Dr Giam Yoke Chin, senior consultant dermatologist. The non-oily ones usually have the ingredient Mexoryl XL.

Many products protect against only UVB rays. You should look for

SKIN REJUVENATION

If you've managed to avoid using sunscreen for years, generally neglected your skin and now want to make amends, Dr Giam suggests using creams with hydroquinone and kojic acid, as these help in lightening skin pigmentation.

Skin that sags with age will usually respond to AHA (alpha hydroxy acids) and Tretinoin (vitamin A1 acid) creams as they stimulate collagen growth and rejuvenate the skin. They exfoliate dead skin and give a glow to it.

Tretinoin cream is proven to regenerate collagen and increase the thickness of the epidermis, thereby decreasing wrinkles, says Dr Giam.

ORAL SKIN PRODUCTS

There are numerous oral rejuvenating products available on the market that claim to add shine to lacklustre skin. But are they medically sound?

Dr Leow Yung Hian, senior consultant dermatologist at NSC, says: "There is very little available concrete evidence in conventional Western medical literature to support or refute the claims. They are not registered as medications and are essentially registered as over-the-counter health supplements."

To cleanse the skin from inside, doctors recommend natural sources of antioxidants like fruits and vegetables

plays a vital part in preventing excessive loss of moisture from the body.

This is why drinking at least six to eight glasses of water is essential to keep your skin hydrated.

The deeper layers of skin contain all the structures that give skin its strength and elasticity.

Damage to these deeper layers will tell on the skin as one ages. Expensive creams may claim to restore youth but, at best, they preserve what we have.

Experts at the National Skin Centre (NSC) offer a few simple tips for an effective regime to maintain healthy skin.

SUNSCREEN

Experts say the most important thing you can do for your skin is to wear sunscreen every day, whatever your age. There is a downside to all that good sunshine that tropical Singapore enjoys, and it's called photoaging.

This term refers to skin changes induced by exposure to invisible rays of sunlight, such as ultraviolet rays, over a period of time.

Seriously photoaged skin is dry, deeply wrinkled, yellow and rough. It may be marked with darkly pigmented or whitish spots.

Dr Wong Su-Ni, associate consultant dermatologist at NSC, says that a good sunscreen is absolutely essential to protect the skin from the harmful effects of UVA and UVB rays. Even those working indoors, if they sit near a window, should wear sunscreen, as glass does not protect one against UVA rays.

For sunscreens, a minimum sun

UVB rays. You should look for ingredients that protect against UVA as well. These are: avobenzone, titanium dioxide, zinc oxide and mexoryl.

Many women use foundations and compact powders with SPF 15 to protect their skin. "This may not be enough, because it is a very thin layer. They need to use a sunscreen as a base and apply the powder on top of it for adequate protection," Dr Wong says.

SKIN HYGIENE

Hygiene is essential, because it is one of the factors that determines how fast the skin ages and how it looks.

Inadequate washing can clog up the pores of the skin causing pimples and acne. Your grandmother was right: Do not squeeze and pick your pimples as this aggravates them and will leave scars on the face. Dr Giam says that washing the face regularly goes a long way in maintaining skin hygiene.

But excessive face washing with harsh soaps or cleansers can damage the skin, by stripping it of its natural oils. Dr Giam suggests using a mild face wash preferably with a moisturising effect. He also advocates the use of a moisturiser, especially as most people now work in air-conditioned environments that tend to dry out the skin.

Some people may develop allergies to the perfumes used in moisturisers and may need to seek a dermatologist's advice for their skin type.

Dr Giam says it is best to avoid greasy, heavy camouflage makeup. This does not mean foundation is out. It all boils down to finding the one that fits your skin type best.

decreasing wrinkles, says Dr Giam.

Tretinoin cream is available on prescription and costs can range from \$7 to \$26. Hydroquinone, kojic acid and AHA creams are available over the counter in pharmacies and cost anywhere between \$16 and \$32.

to boost skin health.

Avoid bad fats, but make sure to get your Omega 3 and 6 fatty acids from whole grains, nuts, seeds and oily fish such as sardines, mackerel and salmon as these promote healthy, shiny skin.

Fitness Fun	
11 - 12 March (Sat/Sun)	
Yoga	1.00 - 1.30pm
Fitness Walk & Cycle	8.30 - 9.30pm
13 - 14 March (Mon/Tue)	
Yoga	1.00 - 1.30pm
Fitness Walk & Cycle	8.30 - 9.30pm
15 - 16 March (Wed/Thu)	
Yoga	1.00 - 1.30pm
Fitness Walk & Cycle	8.30 - 9.30pm
17 - 18 March (Fri/Sat)	
Yoga	1.00 - 1.30pm
Fitness Walk & Cycle	8.30 - 9.30pm

FIT AND NO FLAB

Fitness demonstrations took centre stage at Novena Square over the weekend at a Body & Fitness Fair organised by the mall and its anchor tenant St Gregory Therapeutic Spa.

The event, which runs from March 11 to 20, is targeted at working executives and aims to get more people to lead a healthier lifestyle. Visitors can look forward to health screenings, offers on fitness equipment, as well as attractive spa membership packages. Those who are more adventurous can take part in a mass aerobics workout tomorrow evening.