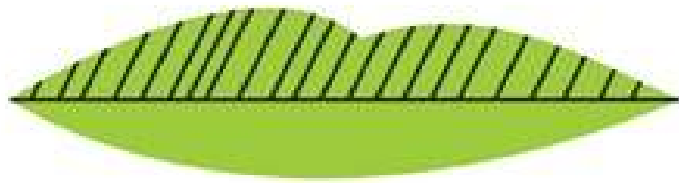


# SKIN CLEANSE



*The Simple, all-Natural Program  
for Clear, Calm, Happy Skin*

## ADINA GRIGORE

*Founder of D.W. Basics*

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# Skin Cleanse

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THE SIMPLE, ALL-NATURAL PROGRAM  
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Adina Grigore



HARPER WAVE

*An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers*

# DEDICATION

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DEDICATED TO YOU, BECAUSE YOU'RE AWESOME.

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# INTRODUCTION

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I've been sensitive my whole life. I have a sensitive belly and sensitive skin and I cry at sad commercials. When I was little, I was plagued by mysterious stomachaches after every meal and headaches that had no apparent cause. By the time I was thirteen, my parents rotated picking me up from school and taking me to different doctors to try to figure out what was wrong. No one ever could and my symptoms kept getting worse. I moved to New York City for college and by that time I was scared of every food; I was getting migraines every week; and I was covered in itchy, rashy skin. As you can imagine, it was pretty awesome.

After I graduated, I went back to school to study holistic health and nutrition. I also became interested in fitness and exercise science and got a job as a personal trainer at a local gym. By that point, I had learned enough about different nutritional theories that I was able to calm my stomachaches and migraines by making small tweaks to my diet. It felt really empowering to be able to fix myself when doctors had only been scratching their heads and prescribing me pills. Helping people take better care of themselves and teaching them how to be healthy all on their own—without having to pay expensive “experts”—became a passion of mine.

As for my skin? Nothing had changed.

I was in my early twenties, and I was dealing with a horrific trifecta: constant breakouts; itchy, dry scalp; and an undiagnosable body rash that wouldn't go away. I was already using two different heavy-duty medicated treatments for my breakouts and rash, and my dermatologist had just given me a new shampoo for my scalp. But when I started to use it, I quickly and painfully realized that my new shampoo made my leg rash freak out.

So I did what any person driven completely insane would do: I started showering upside down. Normal, right? I'm not kidding. I would flip my head over to wash my hair and rinse really well, make sure that the suds from the shampoo wouldn't drip onto my itchy legs.

Luckily, it didn't take too many showers for me to realize how completely ridiculous my skin-care routine had become. I had studied holistic health and nutrition for years and had learned so much about my internal health, but I had somehow managed to ignore my skin completely. I was treating it as if it wasn't a part of my well-being at all. I had finally gotten healthy enough to need a doctor on a regular basis, but I was addicted to dermatologists. As I said before, I was on actual prescription medication for my skin problems. I was like an addict, but instead of being hooked on pills, I was hooked on creams, baby.



Those miserable, painful, upside-down showers were my rock bottom. I just felt so ugly and itchy and frustrated, and I couldn't do it anymore. I couldn't keep using these products that were meant to help but were turning my life into a nightmare. So I quit. I stopped using every single skin-care product and medication. Cold turkey. I thought to myself, *Maybe I'll be single forever and people will avoid standing next to me, but at least I won't be itchy anymore.* It was my last, desperate attempt at finding some relief.

And, shockingly, relief did come. It was pretty much instantaneous. That whole first day of using no products whatsoever, all of my symptoms improved. And the next day, I felt even better. Every day, I waited for proof that this was too good to be true. How was it possible no one had told me to try this miraculous cure?

Then came the research. Reluctantly, the first place I went to was my kitchen cabinet. I knew a lot about holistic health and nutrition and the amazing things that eating good food could do for my body, and I wondered if it was possible to use on my skin the same ingredients I was eating. But if it was soooo great, why wasn't everyone doing it? I tested my theory anyway, and watched as my rash improved after using olive oil—straight up extra-virgin olive oil, the same kind you use as salad dressing. I tried shaving my legs with coconut oil (after even going so far as to peel the moisture strips off my razors because they were making my rash worse) and didn't get razor burn for maybe the first time in my whole life. I rinsed my scalp with apple cider vinegar and noticed that not only was my scalp not itchy the next day, but my cheeks were rosy and clearer, too. So then I put it straight on my face, and voilà! Breakouts gone.

If this sounds completely insane to you, you are not alone. But think about it: we've been spending *years and years* shifting our conversation about food. I work with clients to teach them how to eat healthy and work out to feel better. They already know to think of good food and fitness as medicine. Yet somehow this idea still has not crossed over into our conversations about skin care. Ingredients like preservatives and artificial chemicals that have become hugely infamous in food do not have the same reputations when they are in our face washes. And most simply and most importantly, no one really talks about how the olive oil that lowers our cholesterol and provides our bodies with healthy fat is the same exact olive oil that can cure psoriasis and fight stretch marks.



So, awkwardly, painfully, and sometimes upside down, I found my mission: to tell you and every human on the planet that healthy skin must be nourished in the exact same way as a healthy body—and with the exact same ingredients.

I launched an organization called Sprout Wellness dedicated to this idea and taught workshops about what I had learned. I developed DIY skin-care recipes and gave long speeches about the magical, skin-calming powers hidden in your kitchen cabinet. I eventually turned those recipes into a full line of products called S.W. Basics (“S.W.” stands for “Sprout Wellness,” so that our company never forgets its roots in education and wellness). I still can’t get over the fact that S.W. Basics products—which are still made using my original DIY recipes—are now sold in boutiques and retail chains all over the world.

To this day, my favorite thing to do is work one-on-one with clients and talk to people about the changes I made that gave me clear skin. Through my work and the work we do at S.W. Basics, thousands of people have started ditching their junky skin-care products and cleaning up their routines.

My ultimate goal is to get everyone to think of mainstream skin-care products like they think of packaged food: full of preservatives, unnecessary ingredients, and nasty chemicals. I want to lower the average number of products you use on your skin each day from twelve to one or two. To vastly reduce the even scarier number of individual ingredients the average woman is applying to her skin each day from hundreds to just a handful. To push the skin-care industry to get rid of the chemicals in their products that have been linked to cancer, reproductive disorders, asthma, and severe allergies. To make you understand that most of what you have been told and sold is not true, and the ability to have healthy, happy skin is totally and completely in your hands.

In baby steps, though. I don’t want you to feel as if you *have* to stop doing anything you like, but I want to help you not *need* any of it. I want you to feel like an expert by the end of this book. An expert on *you*, *your* body, and *your* skin. To feel like you’re the boss and in control and, best of all, like you can stop stressing over how to have good skin once and for all. How nice would that be? The best part is that it’s not even going to be that hard. This entire book is about things that you intuitively know. You’re going to read through everything and think, *Ohhhhh, duh*. I’m a testament to the fact that you can find out what’s best for you with a little bit of guidance, and so are all of the people I’ve worked with, and all of the people I’ve never met who have figured out that going back to the basics is the best thing you can do for yourself.

So, here’s how it’s gonna go. We’re going to discuss why your skin is already amazing all on its



own, before you ever put any products on it. I mean, no one else is saying that, definitely not the antiaging-serum and zit-cream commercials. But it's about time they did. Your skin is a truly incredible and efficient organ, and we're going to show it the respect and care it deserves. Next, I'm going to teach you how to put your skin's health and overall well-being into context so you can get a big-picture view of the many factors that affect it. The tiny little "skin type" boxes that we assign ourselves to don't really help us achieve healthy skin—they're just helping us buy more products. So I'm going to show you how much more complex you are than marketers would have you believe. Then, we're going to talk a *lot* about food, because a clean diet is the number one way to have a lifetime of great skin. We're also going to talk about your products and unveil the dirty underworld of the cosmetic-industrial complex. After that, I'm going to offer you a little challenge to get you back on track, and finally, we're going to make some beautiful DIY products together.

Sound good? Great! This book is the program that I offer to people who work with me because they're frustrated and fed up and want answers. I hope you find all of your answers in here, too!

## YOUR AMAZING SKIN

Here's what you've probably learned about your skin from a lifetime of reading lady magazines and watching television:

Zits are the worst thing your skin can do to you, and if you get them, people will no longer talk to you, they'll only talk to your zits—and they'll be horrified. To get rid of zits, you have to *stop them before they start*<sup>™</sup>. Once you've taken care of the zits, you have to start worrying about your collagen production and your skin's elasticity. If you don't, you will get wrinkles and signs of aging way before you should, which is basically anytime ever, even if you're 150 years old. If that's not enough, you also have these huge ugly things called pores, and you should do your absolute best to shrink and hide them. You need to keep out of the sun at all costs, wear multiple layers of sunscreen at all times, and wear long sleeves and a hat, even in the summer. Above all, your skin is helpless without you. The only way you can stop the zits, stop the aging, up the collagen and elasticity, prevent sun damage, and minimize those ugly pores is to use products. Lots and lots of them.



Think about it. Of all the information you have about your skin, how much of it came from someone trying to sell you something? In what other context have you ever heard the words *collagen* or *pigmentation* or *rejuvenation*? When you close your eyes and imagine the layers that make up your skin, do you see a bright, cartoonish illustration with some squiggly lines and polka dots differentiating the layers? Can you hear a voiceover describing some face wash that is going to “penetrate” your pores to give you a “deep clean”? Gross.

And you probably don't even know what a lot of those words really mean. What, exactly, is

pore? What's the difference between your dermis and your epidermis? What is collagen, and why losing it so terrifying? Most of us, even if we're experts in skin-care products, know very little about our actual skin. Why? Because we haven't been properly educated. We've been sold a bunch of catch slogans and advertising graphics.

## THE BASICS

So, let's take a look at the facts.

Your skin is your largest organ. Wait, wait, let me back up. Your skin is an *organ*. Like your heart or your liver. Meaning, it is a specialized set of tissues that works together to perform necessary biological functions. Your skin keeps water inside your body, regulates your temperature, protects your internal organs from the outside world, turns sunlight into vitamin D (a nutrient you need to stay alive), and flushes toxins out of your body. You are made up of almost ten pounds, or twenty square feet, of skin.

Your skin is part of a group of organs known as the integumentary system, which also includes your hair, nails, and sweat glands. Most of us think that our skin operates completely independent from other systems in the body, such as the digestive system, endocrine system, nervous system, and so on. We treat the skin as if it's just a shield protecting our insides from the outside world—a shield we want to keep looking beautiful, glowing, and smooth, but a shield all the same. The truth is, your skin belongs to the incredible, interconnected whole that is your body. Its health is as much a part of your general well-being as the health of your brain, your liver, or your heart.

SO LET'S TAKE A moment to understand and appreciate this outer covering of yours!

Your **epidermis** is the top layer of your skin, and it contains four types of skin cells. Keratinocytes produce keratin, a fibrous protein that guards your body against heat, bacteria, and chemicals. Melanocytes produce melanin, which is responsible for the color of your skin and protects you from the sun by absorbing UV light. Langerhans cells function like the immune system of your skin by helping produce antibodies that fight infection. And then there are Merkel cells, which connect to your nerve cells and allow you to experience the sensation of touch. Your epidermis is about a tenth of a millimeter thick, except on your palms and feet, which are layered with an extra two millimeters of cushioning. Because, you know, they work pretty hard.

The **dermis** is right underneath your epidermis, and it is made up of proteins you've heard many times: elastin and collagen. They make your skin strong, stretchy, and, as you may have guessed, elastic. When you cut your skin, your dermis produces extra collagen to fill and heal the wound. Your dermis also produces hyaluronic acid, a chemical that helps hold hydration in the skin, making you look youthful. The constant activity in your dermis is what we correlate with "healthy skin: it's doing all of the behind-the-scenes work to make your skin look soft and vibrant.

Beneath those two layers is your **subcutaneous fat**, which, as its name suggests, is a layer of fat that connects the nerves from your dermis and epidermis to the rest of your body, while also protecting your insides with a really sexy cushion.



Skin-care commercials probably don't want you to know this, but your epidermis, dermis, and subcutaneous fat actually work together to give your skin a set of natural superpowers.

Skin is capable of regenerating itself. You are constantly shedding dead skin cells (no big deal, just 30,000 to 40,000 every minute) so that healthy, fresh ones produced by the epidermis can replace them. This is happening regardless of what you apply topically. And as you get older, this regenerative process slows down, no matter how great your plastic surgeon is. With age, your body not only produces less of these proteins, but their quality also diminishes. This is why your skin changes. Age spots happen (so does gray hair) because your melanin weakens over time. Wrinkles and sagging skin are the result of your collagen and elastin becoming stiffer and more brittle, making your skin crease (or wrinkle) and become less plump (sag). These are just normal results of aging. But here's the secret: the healthier you are internally, the longer you can produce youthful skin cells.

Your skin is also a powerful barrier. Thanks to a sealant created by keratinocytes, our skin is nearly waterproof. When you hold water in your hand, it doesn't soak in. (The only part of your body that isn't waterproof is the inside of your mouth.) But this barrier is not impenetrable, which is why your fingers get pruned after being in the pool too long. The same is true for other chemicals you put on your skin. Absorption does occur, and most of what soaks in will make it to your bloodstream and circulatory system, sometimes within seconds. The amount of any substance you absorb depends on the level of your exposure: how much, for how long, and how often.

Another amazing property of skin is that it is naturally self-protecting. The oil that your skin produces is a good thing. It's called sebum. It keeps your hair from drying out, it stops too much water from evaporating off your skin, it keeps your skin soft, and, perhaps most importantly, it kills bacteria. In other words, it is not an evil substance that only makes you break out. Sebum also creates what is called an acid mantle, which neutralizes the effects of chemicals and environmental toxins by keeping your skin slightly acidic. This is crucial because the pH of your skin has a lot to do with its health. Skin that is too alkaline will become dry and itchy, while too much acidity will make you prone to inflammation and breakouts. Most outside contaminants make us more alkaline, so your acid mantle keeps them from throwing you out of balance. You've been taught to think of "oily skin" as the worst thing in the world, but that's confusing the issue. Your skin's oil is important, and you shouldn't think of it as an enemy.

Get ready for another shocking idea those skin-care commercials would never tell you: your skin

cleans itself . . . whether or not you use a fancy exfoliant. One of the ways the integumentary system works with the body's other organs is that waste toxins are expelled through sweat, and your skin contains a whole ecosystem of healthy bacteria that are responsible for eliminating them. This ecosystem is called your **skin flora**, and not only does it get rid of the bad stuff in your sweat, it's constantly fighting outside organisms to keep them from entering your body. The reason you stink when you sweat is because the bacteria on your skin is eating the toxins in your sweat. It may sound super-gross, but it's actually kind of incredible when you think about it. In addition to the barrier your skin already creates against invaders, this army of bacteria provides a second defense system.

None of these natural superpowers require you to use skin-care products. When you stay out of your skin's way by maintaining a good diet and a healthy lifestyle, it has the ability to function as its own mini-immune system, fighting invaders like dirt and bacteria. It can protect itself in the face of the elements, and it has the power to keep itself in check. The only time it stops working efficiently is when its natural balance gets disrupted: hormone changes can cause an overproduction of sebum, and toxins cause an overproduction of skin flora, and so on.

So, don't you think your skin deserves some love? We spend a lot of time resenting how much attention we have to pay to our skin, and how much time and money it can take. But think about how important it is to your body and how many different functions it serves. On top of that, it's exposed to all of the horrors of the world: sunburns, ski slopes, hot tubs, hot tubs on ski slopes, a sharp blade that removes your hair over and over, face paint you put on every single day, and chemical products that are the technological equivalent of your car's gasoline.

It's a wonder our skin even puts up with us.

Skin is also a window to what's happening inside your body. Just because you topically soothe its symptoms does not mean you've corrected the issues causing them in the first place. Think about it this way: we know that eating oatmeal helps to lower cholesterol naturally and, therefore, may help to prevent heart disease. But smearing oatmeal on the outside of your heart wouldn't exactly have the same effect, right? In other words, it is not the \$300 serum that "anti-ages" you, it's how you treat the inside of your body that ages or anti-ages your skin.

But unlike your other organs, your skin is totally exposed! It's not neatly tucked inside your body and protected. In fact, it is *the* protector. It is taking all of the hits so that the rest of your organs don't have to. This makes the way you treat it massively important. Your skin is getting nourished or harmed from the inside, *and* nourished or harmed from the outside! So if you expose your skin to poison ivy, you will hurt it. And if you eat a food you are allergic to, you might break out in a rash that looks and feels something like a poison ivy reaction.

## SKIN TROUBLES

How often do you visit your dermatologist? In my experience, most people don't go nearly enough, if at all. You get regular physicals for your insides, so why not for your outsides? First of all, skin cancer is incredibly curable if it is caught early, so that should be reason enough to have an annual appointment. But a visit to the dermatologist is also a way to check in on the health of your skin and, therefore, the health of your insides, with a *professional*. (Meaning, not your eyebrow threader or bikini waxer.) At the very least, a dermatologist is going to remind you that you're not taking care of your skin and that you'd better start, fast. I'm all for that.

That said, I get frustrated when clients tell me they leave their dermatologists with a new prescription every time they visit. Prescriptions aren't the answer, or, at least, the only answer, for the

vast majority of people who are dealing with skin issues. I've seen people experience the same symptoms over and over again and not be able to get answers from anywhere, including the dermatologists' prescription pads. At my nutrition school, skin ailments weren't on the syllabus at all and it was only after dealing with my own chronic skin problems that I made the connection between my overall health and my incurable rashes. In my experience of talking to frustrated people who say exactly the same things time and again, medications have never been able to solve all of the ailments, and, in some cases, they've spawned new ones. Sadly, that's partly because the science of skin care isn't quite as advanced as we want it to be, or assume it is.

Don't believe me? Well, even dermatology isn't able to offer concrete causes of—and solutions for—many skin conditions. Here are a few examples:

**Acne** results from your pores getting clogged by dead skin cells and too much sebum, and then aggravated by bacteria. The reason you get acne as a teenager is because your oil glands are growing in size and producing more oil than your skin actually needs. This also happens when you're pregnant. According to the science, acne *may* also be related to hormones, or to skin flora, or even inflammation in the body. The treatments recommended for acne by the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) include antibiotics, birth control, lasers, and chemical peels. <sup>1</sup>

**Psoriasis** is what we call it when your epidermis produces too many cells, which leads to a condition that feels scaly but is really like having too much skin. Psoriasis is a result of a struggling immune system—possibly you had a virus in your past and your system has not completely recovered . . . possibly not. According to the AAD, “Scientists are still trying to learn everything that happens inside the body to cause psoriasis.”<sup>2</sup>

**Dermatitis** is itchy, red skin that can either be caused by something internal (atopic dermatitis, eczema) or from something that touches your skin and aggravates it (contact dermatitis). The reaction following exposure to poison ivy is contact dermatitis. Lots of different things can cause contact dermatitis, including soap. And water. Incidents of both types of dermatitis are on the rise, and no scientific cause has been found.

**Eczema**, or atopic dermatitis, doesn't really mean anything. It's a catch-all term that means, very simply, skin ailment. A million unexplained symptoms have been grouped under eczema. You should think of it more as code for “Something weird is going on with your skin and we don't really know what it is.” The AAD, again: “Doctors don't really know why some kids and adults get eczema, and others don't.”<sup>3</sup>

**Rosacea** is bright-red flushing of the skin on your face. As you may have guessed, scientifically, no cause has been linked other than inflammation and possibly bad bacteria in the gut. (Amen to that discovery, at least!) Rosacea can make your skin bumpy and swollen, and it makes you extremely sensitive to many topical ingredients.

**Hyperpigmentation** is when your skin has a darker pigment, or color, because you are producing too much melanin. Hyperpigmentation has been linked to hormones, viruses, too much sun exposure, and

(here it is again) inflammation.

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**Sunburn.** Okay so maybe we know what causes this one. But the interesting thing about all the hair we have for the sun is that a *mild* amount of sun to completely bare skin is not only significantly better for synthesizing vitamin D, it also forces your skin cells to produce more melanin (that's why your skin gets darker), which actually ends up protecting you from the sun and from future sunburns. So overexposure is bad, but a little natural light on your skin is actually good for you. Also, this is amazingly, the one area that science has found a solid correlation with diet: the better you eat, the less likely you are to get burned.<sup>4</sup>

So while your dermatologist is definitely your friend and ally when it comes to calming the symptoms of chronic, sometimes miserable skin conditions, I believe it's a mistake to rely too much on a symptom-soothing approach. Hopefully, you noticed some of the common denominators in all of those vague definitions of various ailments: things like hormone imbalance, inflammation, and a struggling immune system. When you think in those terms, it's easy to feel as if the health of your skin is out of your control, and only a cream or spot treatment can help. But hormones can be more or less balanced, inflammation can be made better or worse, and an immune system can be improved or weakened based on what you eat and how you treat your body. The way to get healthy skin is to create a healthy body, and you get a healthy body by making smart food and lifestyle choices.

YOU JUST *CAN'T* THINK of your products and medications as the one and only way to take care of your skin. If you have a recurring skin problem, it is almost definitely the result of something going on internally. If you heal it topically, it will be a temporary solution, a bandage. Until you correct whatever is causing the flare-up internally, you are simply masking the symptom. In some ways, it's amazing that topical ingredients can help to heal an inside problem from the outside. It's so cool that a little aloe will relieve your itchy or burned skin, a dab of vinegar will even your skin tone, and a spot of baking soda will diminish a zit. But none of these will soothe your upset digestive system, your stressed-out nerves, or your depleted blood cells.

## RETHINKING SKIN HEALTH

The fact that we pay attention to our skin only when it freaks out is a problem. Dermatologists, like other doctors, can help us one symptom at a time, which means that, to take *real* care of our skin, we have to take *real* care of our bodies generally. And what do I mean by that? Let me introduce you to a concept I call your *ideal everyday health*.

Ideal everyday health is the best *you* you can be. It's not trying to look like Megan Fox or Channing Tatum. Instead, your ideal everyday health is completely unique to your background, your lifestyle, and your diet. If you're a sixty-year-old Korean woman who's been active her whole life, your ideal everyday health is going to be very different from that of a thirty-year-old Irish woman who hates exercise, or a sixteen-year-old black girl feeling the stress of teenagerhood. Each of us can be healthier or less healthy in our unique circumstances, and, honestly, it's not our doctor's job to ensure our ideal everyday health—it's *ours*.

Which brings me back to how all of those advertisers and articles have taught you to think about your skin. I call it *skin shame*. You are paranoid, obsessive, and ashamed of your skin every waking minute of every day, right? Who could blame you? And what's worse, hating yourself and being

stressed just perpetuates the problems, causing you to pile on too many products full of chemicals. ~~Women hate their skin even when it's perfect and glowing. I'll tell you a secret: none of my clients~~ ever really have the skin they think they see in the mirror. But as far back as they can remember they've been told they do. And you have, too. We all have. This book is about stopping skin shame.

Don't worry, you can keep going to the dermatologist, keep getting facials, keep using products, keep reading those lady magazines, keep living the life you want. But I want you to walk away from this book feeling calmer about your skin and more in control of it. I'm here to give you the skin-care lesson you should've gotten a long time ago. By nourishing your skin from the inside, with the kind of healthy, individualized diet I'm going to help you develop for yourself, and from the outside, with the easy, gentle DIY products I'll teach you how to make, you'll discover that you actually already have the amazing skin you've always wanted.



# YOU ARE WHAT YOUR GREAT-GRANDMOTHER ATE

Nine times out of ten, when new clients come to me looking for answers about their skin, they bring a self-diagnosis with them. Maybe they've convinced themselves they have a gluten intolerance, even though their doctor says they don't, or perhaps they're positive their hormones are out of whack, but that everything wrong with them is a result of stress—but what can they possibly do about stress? Arr—ugh—don't even get them started on their oily T-zones . . . that's like a whole thing, too.

Here's the problem: people believe that everything they've ever heard or read about skin or diet applies to their individual bodies. When they hear that gluten is “bad” for them, they begin to search for “gluten-intolerance” symptoms. When they hear that stress and hormones can negatively affect the skin, every pimple becomes a sign of being overstressed and hormonal. I appreciate people trying to educate themselves about their health, but this outlook gives people skin hypochondria. Every food and bodily process is suddenly viewed with suspicion, and they get a kind of throw-your-hands-in-the-air resignation that good skin isn't even within their control.

Additionally, the easy, one-size-fits-all self-diagnosis isn't helpful because it doesn't actually help you get to the bottom of what is going on with your skin. Hormones act up, yes, but their effects can be made worse or better through lifestyle choices. Same with stress. It can be handled well or poorly. Gluten may not be your friend, but chances are, eating bread isn't the worst thing you are doing to your skin. Women with clear, healthy skin are not Paleo-eating stress-free robots who never get their periods. Skin is just like any other organ in the body; it is only as healthy as the rest of you.

## **THE WHOLE PICTURE**

In order to really understand what's going on with your skin, you need to look at the whole picture of who you are. Your health is *your* health. Until you tune into you, into what makes your *particular* body your own, you cannot attribute one blanket cause to your symptoms. So get away from Google and WebMD. They are not your friends.

We're going to look at the three main factors that do affect your skin: background, lifestyle, and diet. These three elements are exactly what I mean when I say “the whole picture” of who you are. Where you came from, where your parents came from, where their parents came from—that's your background. Where you live now, what you do for a living, how you spend your free time, your fitness level, your habits, and the overall state of your health—that makes up your lifestyle today. How you eat now, how you ate five years ago, how you ate growing up—that's your diet. When you understand how these three areas relate to one another, you can have good skin almost all of the time. When you ignore or cause an imbalance in one of these areas, you will not. It's as simple as that. (But it's almost never just as simple as “I'm stressed” or “I'm hormonal,” and, sorry, ladies, it's almost never “just gluten.”)

Before we go any further, I want you to take five or ten minutes and answer a few questions. Write them down if you want, but it's not a pop quiz. I won't ask you to show your work. I just want you

have your individual background at the front of your mind before we drill down into more details.

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1. Think about your genetic background. What is your ethnicity? Is it related to where you currently live? (For instance, if your family is Puerto Rican, do you live somewhere with a climate similar to Puerto Rico's, like southern Florida, or are you in Minnesota?)
2. How did your parents approach their health when you were young? Were they fitness fanatics or couch potatoes? Consider the way you ate as a kid. Was yours a no-sugar-allowed household or was it PopTarts and Bagel Bites all the time?
3. Are there diseases that run in your family like diabetes, heart disease, or obesity? What about allergies?
4. Describe where you live now. What's the climate like? Is it urban or rural? How is the air quality?
5. Think about your average day. What's your job like? Your family life? Do you have stressful days but healthy ways of relaxing and unwinding, or do you feel as if you can never get off the stress roller coaster?
6. What is your mom's skin like? What about your grandmothers' skin? What do you know about their skin-care routines?
7. Think honestly and with as little judgment as you can about your body. (Easier to say than to do, I know, but try your best.) If you didn't feel pressure to look a certain way, if there were no *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issues or Beyoncé videos, could you be happy and comfortable with the way it actually feels to have your body? Meaning, your weight, your strength, your energy, your flexibility—are they about right, or does something seem off? (You'll need to take some time with this question, it's a tough one.)

## YOUR BACKGROUND

The first step in planning how you can have better health and better skin is to understand where you came from—your background. Ethnicity, geography, and your childhood are all crucial in shaping how your health manifests today. Think about the ways that your genetic past and your actual present might or might not match. Does your family tree have narrow roots, or do they spread all over? Did your parents move across the planet, and then, as soon as you grew up, did you move again?

Any session with a new client begins with these questions. When you go to the doctor he or she takes an extensive history, right? Well, so do I. That's because your history and background affect everything about you. You don't need to become a geneticist, just do a little bit of digging and ask a few questions. Did your mom have insane breakouts at your age? Were your ancestors born in the tropics and now you're living in North Dakota? Is every single woman in your family super-curved, including you? Here are some principles you can expect to find true based on your background:

**You have a body type . . .** and it's probably very similar to that of someone else in your family. You can shift it a bit, but you will not change its structure. When you think about your body, does it match what you generally see in your family, or are you an outlier? What are your family's eating and exercise habits today, and are yours similar or different? How physically active were you growing up? Just thinking through these kinds of questions probably reveals a few glimmers of insight into why you have an easy time—or a tough one—maintaining the body you want.

My sister is a tiny, tiny human. She has been that way her whole life. She was a size 0 well into h

twenties. I was like her until I was about . . . ten years old. I hit puberty and got super-curvy. I used to be really mean to her and say things like, “Just wait till you turn my age, it’s gonna happen to you too!” But I was wrong. That day never came. We have completely different bodies. I am curvy, with a tendency to bulk up when I lift weights. She can eat and do whatever she wants and continues to look like a tiny ballerina. If you see photos of my mom at her age, you would mistake them for twins. If you see my dad at my age, the same is true for us. My sister and I are never going to swap places, no matter how much my thirteen-year-old self wants us to. The same is true for you.

People slightly shift their body shapes by working really, really hard for years and years and being insanely diligent about their eating. The better thing to do is to accept your shape. That doesn’t mean to give in to your cravings, it means to pursue a version of health that is appropriate to your body type. If you don’t, you will waste a lot of time yearning for something that simply isn’t going to happen. Even if you’re the healthiest version of you possible, but if you’re rocking Kardashian curves, you have no business aspiring to look like Kate Moss. You will end up with unhealthy habits and an unhappy life. And vice versa. I honestly think it can be harder for a naturally tiny person to understand this point because our society has done such a thorough job linking skinniness with health. That’s a big mistake. Body weight is generally not an indication of health, and both unhealthy and healthy come in any size.

**Your ancestry matters.** A million and one dietary theories have been built on this concept. The Paleo Diet encourages you to eat like your ancestors. The Blood Type Diet claims your blood type influences how your body processes foods. Ayurveda is a holistic system of medicine that suggests even your moods and disposition are influenced by your ancestry. While the jury is still out on just how much of an impact our ancestry has on our current health, it certainly is a factor.

According to biologist Rob Dunn, the author of *The Wild Life of Our Bodies*, “If you want to eat what your body ‘evolved to eat’ you need to eat something different depending on who your recent ancestors were.”<sup>5</sup> It makes sense: different people adapted to eat the foods that were available to them and they passed those adaptations down to later generations.

For example, if your ancestors are Asian, African, Indian, or Hispanic, you are more likely to be lactose intolerant than if they’re European. It doesn’t matter where you live now or whether you are experiencing symptoms—chances are, you are not processing dairy as easily as someone of Caucasian descent. Similarly, the blood of some Japanese immigrants living in the United States shows extremely high levels of cholesterol compared with other immigrant groups, indicating that the Japanese have a harder time processing American foods than do other immigrant groups (and that where you came from affects how you digest foods in new locations).<sup>6</sup> Different ethnicities have varying amounts of the enzyme needed for processing alcohol and therefore feel its effects very differently. There is a whole world in your ancestry, so it’s extremely helpful to learn a little about it. It’ll often lead to a couple of tweaks that will make you feel better quickly.

## So much in common, head to toe...



**It takes time to change.** Many of my clients have vastly different lifestyles as adults than they had when they were growing up. Maybe they've moved far from home or they no longer play a sport, maybe they grew up in a meat-and-potatoes household and now they're vegan. All of these changes are part of our health backgrounds and factor into the overall picture of our current well-being.

It's important to be patient with your body and to understand that it takes a huge amount of time to adjust to drastic changes. You know those bowls of Froot Loops you ate every single morning until you graduated from college? Sadly, in a way, they're still inside you. You can't eat one salad and then be outraged that your skin isn't immediately better.

Physical activity is another important area to consider. So many of us played sports or took classes when we were younger and moved our bodies regularly, all the time. For me, it was dance. I danced every single day after school and for hours on the weekends. During summers, we'd sometimes have eight-hour rehearsals. And now when I'm busy or lazy, I get frustrated that I can't feel as good by just running twenty minutes a day. But of course I can't. It's not what my body thinks of as normal based on my history.

Retraining your body to expect something new takes time. When you move from a warm place to a cold one, you will probably want to wear five sweaters every winter for the first few years. Meanwhile, your Canadian friends will be able to wear T-shirts when they come to visit you. The same concept applies to your metabolism and your skin. Every time you move to a new climate (or you travel a lot), or make changes in your diet or your routine, remember this. Be gentle with your skin and your body as they get comfortable in your new surroundings.

**You have a skin type, but not in the way you think.** Every day, customers worried about their skin issues send e-mails to my company. And they almost always start out in the same way: "I have combination skin. My T-zone is really oily, but I'm dry everywhere else, and I break out on my chin and forehead. But if I use any products, then I peel and crack like a zombie." What these people think

they're doing is describing their skin type. In other words, they believe this is what their skin is *promised* to, no matter what they do.

But terms like “combination skin” and “T-zone” are purely marketing hype. Porcelain skin—that’s a skin type. Very dark skin. Skin that always looks sun-kissed. Freckles. Being redheaded. Albinism. Those are all skin types. Oily skin, dry skin, blemishes—those are all symptoms. They may be temporary or long-term symptoms, but they are symptoms with solutions.

Honestly, skin type—your actual skin type—doesn’t amount to much as far as products go. It doesn’t influence how sun exposure affects you. It does influence whether you are prone to developing wrinkles at a younger age. But the products themselves don’t really matter; the way you use them matters. African skin is less prone to sunburn but needs more moisture. Fair skin is very quick to burn in the sun and will generally be more sensitive to overcleansing. Mediterranean skin rests somewhere in the middle and should really be what we call “combination” skin. It needs regular moisture and regular cleansing. And, in America, at least, most of us are at least some mixture of all of the above, so our routines really do have to be completely individualized.

Just like your body type, you’re not going to change your skin’s natural appearance with a product or anything else . . . and you shouldn’t try to. You will just have a slightly different routine to manage the symptoms that arise from your background, lifestyle, and diet.

## LIFESTYLE

Now that we’ve gotten through your health past, let’s move on to your present. Where you live, where you work, what your family life is like. Do you love your job or hate it? Do you work an insane number of hours? Do you have children? Do you exercise a little, a lot, or not at all? Do you take lots of supplements? Are you on medications? Birth control? Do you smoke cigarettes? Every little detail about your life affects you and your skin. Sometimes I marvel at how much our bodies and skin are actually handling (I know, I’m weird).

### Nurture Your Nature

Scientists are learning more every day about the ways in which our lifestyle choices influence our DNA. Epigenetics, an emerging field of genetic research, focuses exclusively on how environmental and lifestyle factors affect the expression of our genetic code. And what these scientists are learning—that the quality of the food we eat and the ways we live our lives factor into whether or not we develop diseases—is amazing. For example, let’s say you were born with genes that elevate your risk for heart disease or cancer. Just because you have the genetic disposition to develop these illnesses doesn’t mean you’ll definitely become sick. The gene could be triggered or not triggered depending on other factors that affect cell health. What you do, where you live, and what you eat matters.

Even more interesting is the notion that you might “turn on” a gene through your lifestyle and then pass it on to your children and even grandchildren. In one study, the grandchildren of men who went through food shortages between the ages of nine and twelve had higher-than-average life spans, while the grandchildren of men who had plenty to eat during those years had life spans that were drastically shortened by heart disease and diabetes.<sup>2</sup> Fascinating! The possibilities for this research (and for the impact of your lifestyle on your future) are huge.

## Where You Live

Let’s start with your actual physical environment. You already know that your health can be affected by big geographical moves, like when your parents or grandparents left their homeland to start a family in an all-new culture and climate, but where you live now, regardless of your background, also has a huge impact on your body and your skin.

If you live in an urban area, pollution and poor air quality can wreak havoc on your skin by causing inflammation and premature aging. When you live in a big city, your skin is constantly overdrive trying to fight the elements. Urban areas tend to have very low rates of skin cancer (probably because those who live in urban areas usually get way less sun exposure and have better access to doctors) but high rates of basically every other skin-related ailment.

On the other hand, growing up in a rural area can have amazing benefits for your body's immune system because, as a baby, you get exposed to more kinds of bacteria (think dirt, animals, pollen, plants, etc.). Your body develops antibodies in response to contact with these various microbes that help to boost your immune system for the rest of your life. Unfortunately, though, you can't just pick up one of these supercharged, country immune systems later in life. City dwellers who move to rural places as adults may experience rashes and allergic reactions.

Dry climates tend to dry out your skin (I know, big surprise), especially when the humidity is lower than 30 percent. And because dry climates tend to make your skin crack and peel—making the skin's barrier function weaker—you also become more susceptible to allergens. For example, eczema, psoriasis, and dermatitis tend to flare up more easily in these climates. In humid places, skin is able to retain more of its natural moisture, though sometimes this can result in an overproduction of the oils that leave skin shiny and clog pores. High humidity can also increase the risk of many bacterial and fungal infections that thrive in moist environments. And you will obviously sweat more, which, if you don't take proper care of your skin, can also clog your pores.

Hot climates tend to induce irritating skin conditions like rashes and itchiness, and to also have more intense, direct sun; people who live in hot areas have a higher risk of sunburn. Cold temperatures are generally also very dry, so you are dealing with double the effects. Cold wind results in skin chapping and windburn, and if you use harsh soaps and detergents, you will experience significant more sensitivity and irritation in the cold. And finally, if you're living at a high altitude, you're dealing with a very combative environment. The sun is strong, the cold is strong, and the wind is strong. Your skin will be more susceptible to burning, chapping, and sensitivity.

## **Where You Work**

Isn't it interesting that any discussion about how work affects health is really a discussion about stress? I so wish it wasn't like that! Stress can exacerbate acute skin conditions such as hives, psoriasis, and rosacea. Nerve endings in your skin relate emotional responses from your brain in actual, physical effects in the skin. For example, sudden fear causes blood to withdraw from the skin as a protective mechanism so that, if you're being attacked by a bear, let's say, you don't bleed as much. That's why your skin feels cold and clammy when you get scared. Crazy, right? But really isn't surprising when you consider how much of human emotional life plays out physiologically in our skin: blushing from embarrassment, turning red from anger, becoming pale from grief.

So it should also make sense that stress has real effects on your skin. For example, when you are tense, your body releases stress hormones that increase oil production and make you more prone to breakouts. And you've maybe heard of cortisol, another stress hormone that triggers an elevation in blood sugar, damages collagen and elastin, and creates what we call worry lines and wrinkles. During stress, there is also an unhealthy increase in blood flow that causes your capillaries to expand and turns your skin red in the not-cute way.

Feeling unfulfilled has a subtler effect on your health, but it can be equally devastating. The problem with being unhappy with your life isn't just that it usually comes with an increase in the

stress hormones; it also makes you significantly less likely to take care of yourself. You know the days when you are just not having it? The days when all you want to do is sit on the couch with a bag of chips and catch up with the *Housewives* and the newest *Bachelor*? Those are not really the days when you get a nice workout, eat a healthy dinner, and whip up a nourishing DIY skin-care treatment. If you are in a rut, or if you hate your job, your home, or another aspect of your life, it can create the prolonged effect of feeling too down to do anything about it. People who have gorgeous skin usually don't hate their lives, and they spend more time taking care of themselves.

I'd say about three out of four of the clients who come to me feeling devastated about their skin work at jobs they can't stand. They feel unfulfilled, unappreciated, uncreative, and—surprise, surprise—ugly. As a person who quit a good, full-time job in the middle of the Great Recession and started my company in her apartment's kitchen, I always want to shake these beautiful, smart, talented women and say, "Leave that job! Be brave, I promise it'll all be fine." But I know that everybody's circumstances are different, and it's not always that easy.

## Your Stress Level

The good news is that, whether or not you make a total life change, combating stress and lack of fulfillment is much easier than you think and equally as powerful. When you reduce stress, you prevent your body from releasing the hormones and chemicals that cause inflammation. One way to do this is by meditating regularly. I know you've heard it before, but it's really true: meditation reduces stress and increases happiness within one twenty-minute session, even if you've never done it before.<sup>8</sup> And if you're not into meditation, consider that your view of stress is actually part of what makes you stressed! In a recent study of 30,000 people, it was discovered that people who perceived stress as bad for their health were significantly more negatively impacted by it than those who perceived it as a normal part of life.<sup>9</sup> So stop stressing about your stress because it only produces more stress!

For the parts of your life that feel gross—an unfulfilling job, lazy habits, a bad relationship, toxic friendships—try setting what are called "implementation intentions."<sup>10</sup> An implementation intention is the conscious declaration (don't worry, you can say it silently in your head) to actually take the steps that are needed to make a big life change. So if you want to leave your soul-crushing job, but you feel that you can't just up and quit, decide, "I'm going to quit my job," and you'll find ways to make it possible. It can be that simple.

One way to begin incorporating healthier habits into your life is to start super-small. Dr. B. Fogg, a psychologist at Stanford University, developed a theory of behavior change that is the foundation for his popular method of incorporating "tiny habits"<sup>11</sup>—sometimes as tiny as flossing one tooth, getting into a push-up position, or opening a book. So if you wish you were meditating for twenty minutes a day, decide that you're just going to make a habit of closing your eyes and breathing for one minute. Next, place that tiny habit after some other habit you already have. Maybe you'll do your one-minute session after you brush your teeth in the morning. Doesn't it sound much easier to make a habit of meditating for *one* minute at a set time every day rather than for twenty? It is. And before you know it, the habit will naturally happen. If you want to stop sitting at your desk so much at work, just make the decision to stand up and sit back down after every task you finish, and then make this a habit. Don't forget to be proud of yourself for doing it. According to Dr. Fogg, that's important, too!

So close your eyes, take a deep breath, and tell the stress to back off. Your skin will get better! B

if that sounds too tough for now, at least apply a DIY mask while stalking your ex on Facebook. Cool

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## Your Level of Physical Activity

Remember how stress can cause an unhealthy increase in blood flow? Well, exercise causes the kind of increased blood flow that is great for your skin. Exercise helps bring oxygen and nutrients to your skin cells and helps you eliminate waste (through sweat).

One study on the benefits of exercise on skin had sedentary people over the age of sixty-five begin a light workout regimen: two days a week of thirty minutes of moderate cardio, no heavy weights or anything hard-core, just jogging and cycling.<sup>12</sup> Within three months they had regained skin quality normally seen in people in their twenties and thirties. The stratum corneum, which is the visible layer of the skin, tends to get thick and saggy with age, and the dermis layer tends to become thinner. But the participants in this study saw the stratum corneum thin and become firmer and the dermis layer thicken. That, ladies and gentlemen, means exercise is the only real anti-ager. Too bad it doesn't get its own slick packaging and marketing team.

On the flip side, a sedentary life will age your skin. I find the recently popularized motto "Sitting is the new smoking" to be incredibly motivating. It came about because of a study that showed that sitting for too many hours a day was as bad for your long-term health as smoking. If that's not a reason to get up and move, I don't know what is. Working out also lowers cortisol levels (in other words, it combats stress) and therefore helps to balance the amount of sebum your skin produces. And in some studies, exercise has been shown to be as effective as antidepressants on mental health.<sup>13</sup> So . . . exercise has a physical impact that improves your skin, and it also improves your mood, which prompts you to take better care of your skin. Not to overdo it here, but exercise is practically a cure-all for your skin. That magic elixir we've all been looking for is actually a dumbbell.

If you are having trouble motivating yourself to exercise, two tricks that have worked well for many clients are finding a fun activity and taking along a workout buddy. Do not make yourself do a workout that you hate. You won't keep doing it, and you won't get much benefit from it when you do exercise. Do not feel pressured by the latest fitness trend: there is no one right way to work out. The one just isn't. Some people love yoga; others love CrossFit. One is not a better or healthier option than the other. While all of us couch potatoes sit around and argue about which form of exercise is technically superior, those who are actually out there doing it are living the best life ever, with perfect bottoms and glowing skin. The point is that they have found workouts that work for them. They love it, and you should love what you're doing, too.

If you don't love any workout at all, then drag someone along with you. I promise you the number one reason a good personal trainer is effective is because he or she is there to keep you company and hold you accountable. A buddy does the same thing. Next time you have a happy-hour girlfriend date, go to yoga first. Or if you are meeting for brunch, take a spin class before. Together. Even the hottest/hottest/hottest/hottest teacher will be easier to deal with if your friend is there suffering through the class with you.

The only downside to lots of exercise is that you need to be careful about cleaning your skin. Dirty pores will lead to breakouts, and sweating a lot can also make your skin itchy and sensitive. That doesn't mean you need to be using harsh detergent cleansers—especially since they will strip your skin of its natural protective bacteria. But it does mean you'll need to be more diligent about gentle cleansing.



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