

Nourishing and Repairing *the Effects of Age*

Is there a connection between diet and aging? “Of course, there is,” says Cary plastic surgeon Dr. Cynthia Gregg. “Because our nutritional health is a critical foundation of our overall health. Poor diet—especially over a long time—contributes to many health problems and to the natural aging process. These all show up on the skin.”

Repairing and revitalizing aging skin is a principal focus of Dr. Gregg and her team at Cynthia Gregg Face and Body Specialists. They offer what Dr. Gregg calls a comprehensive “buffet of options” for addressing the aging process—ranging from medical grade skin care to surgery.

“One thing all skin has in common is that we all lose certain components as we age—including collagen, elastin, the ability to hold hydration, and hyaluronic acid,” explains Dr. Gregg. “The rate at which this

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happens is largely genetic—but it eventually happens to us all; and our lifestyle choices—especially our diets—play a critical role.

“The most basic anti-aging action we can take,” notes Dr. Gregg, “is to nourish our skin—throughout our lives. And ‘nourishment’ includes dietary choices, daily skin care, sun protection, hydration.

“Moreover, nourishing regular skin care is the essential foundation for any of the many options we offer for repairing aging skin. Coming in for a laser treatment or a peel once a month is pointless if you’re not faithful about your regular, every-day skin care. Which is why—before moving forward on any

Nena Clark-Christoff, RN, offers a rejuvenating skin-care treatment for a patient with Medical Aesthetics Jennifer Quigley looking on.



procedure—we have our patients work with our medical aestheticians to develop a quality skin care regimen.” (see box)

DIET, HEALTH, SURGERY

Dietary issues are also among the factors that must be considered when preparing for facial plastic surgeries, notes Dr. Gregg. “When evaluating a patient for a surgical procedure,” she says, “we’re concerned about anything that might interfere with the effectiveness of the surgery or that might affect the healing process.

“Inflammation is one example. Just as a poor diet may lead to weight gain, it can also increase inflammation. What’s interesting is that—in the context of plastic surgery—inflammation is actually helpful; as a response to the surgery, inflammation promotes healing and the development of new collagen. But chronic inflammation—often the result of poor diet and excess weight—is not healthy for the body or the skin. It can accelerate aging, and it can interfere with the healing process.”

Excess weight is also an issue, particularly with lower facial surgery. “I ask all my patients to be within about five to seven pounds of their ideal weight before surgery,” says Dr. Gregg. “Because, if I did a face lift or a neck lift for someone tomorrow, and then they lose over 10 pounds in the next 12 months, I can guarantee you that they’ll come back in here in a year and complain: ‘My jowling is back. My neck looks bad.’ And, of course, they would be right—because they deflated. So I want people to deflate as much as they can beforehand, so that I can give them a better result.”

Weight loss is just one pre-surgery recommendation offered by Dr. Gregg. “Look at surgery as though you’re getting ready to run a marathon; you’ve got to get in

shape. Any surgery is a traumatic event for your body, so you want to prepare for it and support the healing process.”

Here, too, diet plays a role. “In addition to a healthy diet,” she says, “we recommend supplementing with arnica, bromelain, vitamin C, and zinc before surgery to help with wound healing and to minimize bruising.”

AFTER SURGERY

Other nutritional issues play a role after surgery. “Patients with good support at home tend to recover faster, but they still need energy and nutrition to heal well,” says Dr. Gregg. “A well-balanced diet with ample protein is extremely important for the healing process. Equally important are the things you shouldn’t eat. Excessive sugar and sodium, for example, can drive infection and swelling and slow healing.

“A good example of this,” she recalls, “is a patient who had had an upper eyelid procedure. Following the surgery, she had a terrible experience—her eyes were practically swollen shut. When asked about her diet, it turns out just about everything had a lot of salt in it. So, we had her stop the high-sodium foods and drink lots of water, and six days later she looked and felt completely different.” *h&h*

MEDICAL AESTHETICS: THE SCIENCE OF NOURISHING THE SKIN

Among the many offerings in Dr. Gregg’s “buffet of options” is the development of an individualized skin care plan by a medical aesthetician—a task aesthetician Jennifer Quigley is passionate about. “By investing time and money into good medical treatment and product, you’re going to improve the integrity of your skin,” says Ms. Quigley. “But you don’t want to undo that progress with what you eat or drink.”

She cautions patients to avoid more stimulating consumption, for example, which can include smoking, junk food, sugar, caffeine, and more. “Some of my acne patients can be affected by dairy,” she says. “Alcohol can be another negative, specifically for conditions like rosacea, but also by dehydrating the skin.”

Ms. Quigley encourages patients to listen to their bodies when considering what to eat. But in general, she recommends fresh foods—veggies, fruits, clean meats or proteins, foods high in healthy omega-3 fatty acids, and ample water. “You’ve got to have a good diet to start with,” she urges, “because even the best topical products just don’t work well when people are living on junk food.”

And she also advises patience. “Any diet change, any supplement change, any new skin care regimen, or any new topical skin care product takes time to work. Basically, it takes about six weeks—the life cycle of a cell—for any such change to take effect on the body.”

PRODUCT DESIGN AND QUALITY MATTER

Ms. Quigley notes a key difference between over-the-counter skin care products and the medical grade ones she recommends. “Over-the-counter technology cannot penetrate the top layers of your epidermis,” she explains. “Spoiler alert: most of our damage is deeper than the epidermis.”

And Ms. Quigley is particularly savvy about the ingredients in skin care products. Sulfates are one no-no, for example, as they exacerbate problems for every skin type. Ingredients that do feed the skin, she explains, are hyaluronic acids, which hydrate the skin rather than simply moisturizing the surface layers. “We can provide hyaluronic acid either with topical medical-grade products or by injectables. Injectables are just putting back your volume in a different way,” she says, “whereas medical products are like giving your skin a drink of water.”

Another essential treatment for slowing environmental aging, says Ms. Quigley, is topical Vitamin C. “Everybody needs that,” she says, “and it’s needed in addition to oral vitamin C—only 10 percent of which reaches the skin.

“Anti-aging is a big umbrella,” she says. “It can mean loss of volume in the skin, or it could relate to tone or texture—the size of the pores, fine lines, deep wrinkles, or scarring. And we offer a variety of methods to address these. Laser treatments can help with tone, while microneedling or DiamondGlow dermabrasion can assist with both texture and pigment. And peels serve as preparation for and maintenance between treatments.”

Ms. Quigley notes that, as they age, patients may find different options more beneficial, but good skin care and nutrition form a healthy foundation for everyone.

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