

The Beautiful Organ

Skin, our largest organ, provides the outer world with a reflection of our health. I work to make this point to many of my clients who tend to consider the health of the skin as separate from the health of the rest of the body; that all the creams and treatments in the world cannot deliver skin health unless it is understood that internal and external health are inexorably linked.

The best thing you can do for your skin is to keep the rest of your body in good health. And although people often do go about skin health the wrong way (or at least in an incomplete way), they do have the right idea in valuing the good health of their skin.

Letal esthetician and owner of Cielo Spa Boutique, **Roxanne Zbinden**, says most people underestimate the full importance of skin health. "It's the body's first line of defense against infections and potentially harmful environmental irritants such as allergens and pollution," says Zbinden. Our skin is more than the depth of beauty, as commonly expressed, it is also the medium through which we interact with the world.

"Proper skin care," she says, "is essential for your health and appearance."

While some things like sun exposure cause obvious and violent damage to the skin, Zbinden warns that there is a lot more we do to inflict negative effects on our outermost organ. The greatest factors that affect skin health, she explains, (aside from



Cielo Spa Boutique owner, Roxanne Zbinden, has advice about skin care



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sun exposure) are diet and exercise.

Diet has a direct correlation to skin health. Drinking alcohol and caffeinated soda actually do a great deal to harm our skin. Alcohol has a destructive effect on the body's supply of Vitamin A. This vitamin is a vital component in the production of collagen, which is the key component in skin's elasticity and repair. Both alcohol and caffeine have the effect on the skin of robbing from it the tools it needs to keep itself healthy.

Smoking, too, can lead to issues in skin health. It is not a wives' tale or misinformation that smoking causes wrinkles, says Zbinden. "The nicotine in cigarettes causes narrowing of the blood vessels in the outermost

layers of your skin," she explains. "This impairs blood flow to your skin. With less blood flow, your skin doesn't get as much oxygen and important nutrients such as Vitamin A."

She points out that in addition to nicotine, cigarettes are full of chemicals that damage collagen and elastin, which are both vital to skin's strength and elasticity.

Green Tea, Berries, & Exercise

The good news is that your diet can also help your skin protect itself. Foods like Green Tea, berries and plums are full of antioxidants which protect skin at the cellular level. Free radicals formed within the skin by sun exposure contribute to cell disintegration and premature aging if left unchecked.

three things for you:

It flushes impurities out of your skin that accumulate through sweat, dirt and environmental pollutants.

It facilitates the production of sebum, the skin's natural moisturizer.

Exercise improves blood flow to the skin. Your blood carries oxygen and valuable nutrients to help maintain skin health.

Finally, though it should be common knowledge to most of us, taking sun exposure seriously is the only way to ensure the efforts expended trying to keep the skin healthy. That glowing tan you worked so hard for and take such pride in is in fact a visible sign of skin damage, a kind of fashionable scar tissue. When UV rays enter the skin, the skin tries to protect itself by producing more pigment and melanin, which gives the skin a golden or red color. Too

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Antioxidants serve as a guard against these effects by combating free radicals and helping skin retain its youth. Foods full of antioxidants as well as vitamins A, C, E and healthy omega-3 fatty acids are: whole-grain cereals, fish, citrus fruits, berries, tomatoes, carrots, sweet potatoes and green leafy vegetables such as spinach and broccoli.

"Aside from diet," advises Zbinden, "the best way to promote proper skin health is exercise."

There is no specific exercise that affects the skin greater than another; rather it's important for people to exercise regularly. Exercising does

much sun can cause the following: premature wrinkles and skin aging, freckles and age spots, skin texture changes, dilated blood vessels and skin cancer. Although these changes won't show up for many years, the damage starts when you're young.

Skin is not something we should be taking for granted. We need to be mindful of how our skin's condition can affect our overall health, as we need to be mindful that our overall health will be displayed in our skin. We need to respect the fact that while beauty lies within the skin, the organ's connection to the body is far greater and more complicated.