

Face Your Emotions

Can being stressed or happy really affect your skin? Welcome to the new world of skin positivity, where gratitude is beauty's hottest new ingredient. Better still, it costs nothing and feels great...



You may be at peace with your frown lines, and feel zen about your crow's feet, but when was the last time you thanked the universe for a good skin day because you thought it might keep breakouts at bay? Our guess is approximately never. And yet some dermatologists now believe that beautiful skin is just a positive affirmation away. Rather than rely purely on the beauty counter for your feel-good fix, the idea is that a sunnier outlook and taping positive intentions to your bathroom mirror can have wide-ranging skin benefits. At a time when the compass has swivelled toward self-care through skincare, it's no wonder gratitude is having a moment – and it could serve up tangible results.

THE POWER OF POSITIVITY

Your face has an uncanny knack of being able to tell the world exactly how you're feeling. "Your skin is a reflection of your state of mind," explains psychodermatologist Dr Amy Wechsler. "The brain and skin are formed from the same layer of cells. They are essentially connected so emotional responses

affect the skin and vice versa." So, if you're feeling angry, expect even angrier red patches on the cheeks. In love? The opposite is true, as oxytocin, the 'love' hormone, is anti-inflammatory.

The upshot of all this is that for a growing number of skin experts, optimism is as essential as water in their skincare routines. Olay's principal scientist Dr Frauke Neuser believes that having a positive mental attitude is just as important as daily SPF for looking younger. Meanwhile, both Emily Weiss, CEO of Glossier, and Summer Fridays' co-founder Lauren Gores Ireland document what they are thankful for in a journal before their nightly routines.

It's a sentiment echoed by dermatologist Dr Howard Murad, whose Inspirations app sends you a daily affirmation to repeat when applying products like his Vit-C Eyes Dark Circle Corrector ('why have a bad day, when you can have a good day?' is a favourite). In a clinical study conducted on 40 patients, he found that after just four weeks of reading note cards with positive statements and journaling thoughts, they scored lower blood pressure and stress levels and higher levels of skin hydration.

DE-STRESS FOR SUCCESS

Fixing our gaze on positivity-centric rituals is a smart move. But, so too, is being mindful of what experts like Dr Amy Wechsler have coined 'stress ageing'. Hormones like cortisol surge when we're stressed, setting off a string of reactions in the skin. "Cortisol weakens the skin barrier and causes water to leak out of cells," explains Dr. Howard Murad. Add collagen loss and it's a recipe for wrinkles and skin that slips into papery territory. Plus anyone who's experienced acne knows that nothing is more stressful than a poorly timed breakout.

So if stress contributes to the worsening of skin conditions, is it plausible that the reverse could be true, and positive thinking could heal our skin? That's the question at the heart of the gratitude movement – and there's evidence to suggest the answer is yes.

A study published in the *Journal of Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* shows that affirmations increase brain activity in areas associated with reward. By proxy, "gratitude and other

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Dr Amy Wechsler

positive emotions relieve stress," says Dr Howard. "Without the impact of cortisol, your skin has a better chance of staying hydrated and looking brighter."

Dr Amy notes that better sleep is a side effect, too – a vital cog in the wheel of glowing skin. "When we are sleeping well, healing molecules, like beta endorphins and growth hormones, are at their highest, allowing skin to produce collagen and rejuvenate."

HAPPY-SKIN HACKS

A multi-pronged approach is clearly what's called for to push the balance back in favour of healthy skin. Fortuitously, a raft of targeted de-stressing skincare has hit beauty counters – products with plush textures that calm the mind, cleanse the skin and offer a little 'me-time'.

Given that stress saps skin of its moisture reserves, products rich in hyaluronic acid and ceramides are like an invisible coat of armour. "Applied topically, hyaluronic acid hydrates the skin's surface, but also reaches collagen and elastin fibres where it binds them with water," says Dr Barbara Sturm, an aesthetic doctor beloved by the likes of the Hadid sisters, whose Hyaluronic Serum is a bestseller. Ceramides in Kate Somerville's DeliKate Recovery Cream then seal all this goodness in.

Meanwhile, the benefits of Chanel's Sublimage Les Grains de Vanille face scrub extend far beyond a renewed glow. The comforting scent of vanilla huddles together with exfoliating jojoba beads, making you feel immediately grounded. And since the body needs to drop 4 degrees to shift into sleep mode, lean on a gel moisturiser like Kiehl's Ultra Facial Oil-Free Gel Cream to keep skin cool and dewy before bed.

For those more inclined to holistic solutions, Shiffa's cult Healing Balm contains lavender oil, which is proven to have a sedative effect. And Charlotte Tilbury's latest serum is hooked to the idea that crystals can promote healing. While this can't exactly be scientifically proven, Charlotte's Magic Serum Crystal Elixir contains powdered ruby, rose quartz and amethyst to slough away dead cells and refract light, making skin look more luminous. And who can deny the all-round, feel-good benefits of that? ■

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