

A clutch of face-firming and line-smoothing serums. For details, see The Good List, pg 107

Original skin

What would you give for baby-smooth skin? *Good's* indomitable **LYNDA BRENDISH** takes a closer look at anti-wrinkle creams and separates the facts from the hype

PHOTOGRAPHY **TONY BROWNJOHN**



The quest for beauty concerns us more than many like to admit, and in their eagerness to take advantage of our desire to preserve a youthful appearance, skincare companies make some fairly bold beauty claims. Because there is no pharmaceutical component in their products, the companies' claims are barely regulated, much less tested for accuracy. And wading through mountains of hyperbole about supposed miracle ingredients is seriously brow-furrowing - enough to give any woman wrinkles before her time.

Wrinkles, sagging skin, dark spots and yellowing - most of us would do anything to escape these telltale signs of the march of time. But what causes our skin to sag in the first place? The good

news is, though genetics and gravity each play a part, there are other, more controllable, factors in the mix. By far the leading cause of visible skin ageing is exposure to the ultraviolet (UV) rays of the sun. Besides that, our diets, the amount of water we drink, whether we smoke cigarettes and even repetitive facial expressions all contribute.

So what's a woman to do? With a myriad of ingredients in over-the-counter creams, it's easy to get confused about what's good and what's not, what works and what doesn't. Especially when cosmetic companies seem partial to giving fancy - and trademarkable - names to everyday ingredients.

Listing every ingredient ever claimed to have a beneficial effect on skin would take all year, so here

One thing is for sure, and that's an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure when it comes to fighting off wrinkles

are a few of the ones you're most likely to encounter in the beauty aisles.

Retinol is a vitamin A compound and antioxidant. In its various forms, vitamin A is the most widely-used ingredient in anti-wrinkle creams. Tretinoin, a much more potent concentration, is available only by prescription and should not be used by pregnant women because of its potentially harmful effects on unborn children. Even in small doses, vitamin A can irritate sensitive skin and should always be used in tandem with a sunblock.

Hydroxy acids are both naturally-occurring and synthetic versions of natural fruit acids. These acids are exfoliants that are often used in chemical peels, and may cause irritation.

Copper peptides are trace elements found in the body. Peptides are said to aid wound healing and collagen stimulation.

Coenzyme Q10 is another antioxidant. A University of Hamburg study found it helps prevent "many of the detrimental effects" of ageing due to UV exposure.

A swag of natural anti-ageing face creams. For details, see The Good List, pg 107



Rosehip seed oil is a natural source of vitamin A. It is also high in essential fatty acids, which act on the cell membranes of the skin to help it retain moisture.

Glycosaminoglycans (GAGs) are natural skin moisturisers. Hyaluronic acid (a type of GAG) is associated with collagen repair and hydration.

Sunscreens offer the best protection against wrinkles and many creams include an added SPF. But be aware that sunscreens combined with other products may not be as effective as a dedicated sunblock (see *Good #16* for more information on choosing the best sunscreen for you).

Antioxidants are known to prevent or inhibit free radicals, which can damage cells.

Common antioxidants used in face creams include vitamins C and E.

What we really want to know is if they work. The answer is yes – sort of. “The only ingredient that has been shown scientifically to reverse photoageing is medically active retinoids – vitamin A-based preparations,” says Dr Nicholas Birchall, principal dermatologist at the Auckland Dermatology clinic. In Birchall’s opinion, preparations with the retinoid concentrations needed to produce an effect are available only on prescription. The effectiveness of non-prescription creams containing vitamin A is less certain.

All other ingredients in the mix – antioxidants, peptides, GAGs and hydroxy acids – do

Serum vs cream – what’s the difference?

There isn’t a regulated distinction between serum and cream – so definitions vary between companies. According to Snowberry’s general manager Greg Billington, serums do not contain the heavy load of emollients (moisturising ingredients) that creams do. Trilogy’s Catherine de Groot agrees. She says serums “are often more targeted treatments for particular skin concerns than moisturising creams”. De Groot recommends using serums under a moisturiser or in conjunction with a regular day or night cream.

Snowberry’s Smoothing Eye Serum uses peptides and South American Canon Wood bark extract to help repair leaking capillaries, reduce fat deposits and help prevent the process known as glycation.

Well oiled

Rosehip seed oil is the 'it' ingredient of the moment. Trilogy founded a business on it and countless women swear by it. It is a natural source of retinoids (vitamin A) and high in essential fatty acids. Trilogy's co-founder Catherine de Groot says the oil is clinically proven to improve the appearance of wrinkles, scars and stretch marks.

Nada Mills, founder and owner of Nada Cosmetics, a Wellington-based natural cosmetics company, says users of her certified organic rosehip seed oil report benefits ranging from decreased wrinkles to lightened age spots and even improved eczema and psoriasis. On the other hand, Elizabeth Barbalich, director of Antipodes skincare, says her company has chosen not to use rosehip seed oil in its products. Antipodes uses avocado oil instead, which Barbalich says is "significantly better" than rosehip seed oil because of its rich concentrations of omega 3, 6 and 9, antioxidants and vitamins A, B, C and E.



A pod of natural rosehip oils and other oil blends. For details, see The Good List, pg 107

have some beneficial effects on the skin, but just how much of an effect is arguable. A 2007 test by American *Consumer Reports* magazine found that, after 12 weeks of use, top-rated creams did smooth some fine lines and wrinkles - but by less than ten percent. The improvement was so small it was invisible to the naked eye, but it was an improvement nonetheless. *Consumer Reports* also noted the results of application were inconsistent: a cream that worked wonders for one person might have no effect at all on another and, furthermore, price had no bearing on effectiveness. The best-performing cream, even better than the \$100+ products, cost around US\$20. It's not all bad news. A

2009 report in the *British Journal of Dermatology* found that a common brand of anti-wrinkle cream did in fact visibly improve the appearance of wrinkles after 12 months of use. The cream contained a combination of ingredients, including retinyl palmitate and peptides. Trouble is, the study's authors could not say which ingredient, or combination of them, had produced the positive outcome. There are two important things to note about these results: according to the study, the improvement was still "markedly less" than the effects of prescription tretinoin and, importantly, the study was funded by the manufacturer of the product being tested. One thing is for sure, and

that's an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure when it comes to fighting off wrinkles. "The first thing is to put on a broad-brimmed hat and some high-quality sunblock," says Dr Birchall, as exposure to sun is the leading cause of photoageing. Skin experts also recommend plenty of sleep, plenty of water and no cigarettes. It's also worth following a few simple tried-and-true beauty tips. Take care to never rub your eyes or drag skin with your hands when tired. Avoid using overly hot water or rubbing skin too vigorously when washing or drying your face. Chilled tea bags, cucumber slices or even teaspoons kept in the freezer overnight can combat under-eye bags. Other natural

remedies include a diet rich in B complex vitamins and antioxidants, gently massaging your freshly-washed face each evening with light upward strokes and applying natural fruit oils or olive oils to it before bed. So far, so simple. As for more extreme measures such as Botox injections or chemical peels, Dr Birchall says both are temporarily effective, in moderation. The most important thing, says Dr Birchall, is "not to expect miracles" - an assessment that could just as accurately be applied to the creams in your bathroom cupboard. **The verdict?** To get the most out of your anti-wrinkle beauty routine, stick with formulations that

Ethical, eco and healthy choices

Preservatives

Controversy surrounds the use of certain chemicals in common brands of beauty products. Preservatives like parabens and phenoxyethanol are prohibited by several eco-certification labels because of doubts about safety, though both are approved for use in New Zealand in low concentrations.

Health concerns

Despite some concerns about potential links between sodium laureth sulfate (SLS) and cancer, it is used widely in common beauty products. If you are concerned about the safety of the products you use, the Environmental Working Group runs a website (www.cosmeticsdatabase.com) which assigns a hazard level and provides information on various skincare ingredients.

Packaging

A tube of cream, cocooned in hard plastic wrap and enclosed in a glossy cardboard container ... we've all seen them, and probably used them too. Keep the environment in mind and look for products with minimal, preferably recycled, packaging.

Animal testing

It's unfortunate that some common brands on New Zealand shelves are still tested on animals. Safe bets include Trilogy, Snowberry, Dr Hauschka, Weleda and most Kiwi organic cosmetic companies. PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) helpfully maintains a list of companies that do and do not test on animals (www.peta.org).



Collagen is a naturally-occurring protein that forms part of the structure of the skin, and several types of collagen pills aimed at preventing the signs of ageing are now on the market. Some studies have shown that hydrolysed marine collagen can protect the skin against signs of ageing.

include vitamin A derivatives, but be sure to wear adequate sunblock and stop using any cream that irritates your skin. Pregnant women should avoid prescription-strength vitamin A altogether. It's debatable how much benefit ingredients like antioxidants, essential fatty acids and copper peptides actually provide – but they won't do any harm to the skin. And don't forget to moisturise!

Prevention is better than cure and any improvements are unlikely to be sudden, so perseverance is key. Face creams can have a different effect on different people, so choose one that keeps your skin soft and with a fragrance you like. All else being equal, price is no guarantee of the best result.

The Good List

So many products ... only one face

Here's a selection of quality anti-ageing creams and serums from brands we've picked for being free of problematic ingredients, for being locally-made, or for using skin-enriching natural and organic ingredients:

Serums

Absolute Essential Rejuvenating Face Serum
Antipodes Joyous Protein-Rich Night Replenish Serum
Aveeno Positively Ageless Rejuvenating Serum
Dr Hauschka Regenerating Serum
Living Nature Firming Flax Serum
Snowberry Intensive Renewal Face Serum
Weleda Pomegranate Firming Face Serum

Oils

Absolute Essential Organic Rosehip Oil
Living Nature Radiance Night Oil
Nada Organic Rosehip Oil
Natrاليا Nourish Skin Oil
Trilogy Certified Organic Rosehip Oil

Creams

Apicare Manuka Natural Rich Day Crème
Aveeno Positively Radiant Tinted Moisturiser
Dr Hauschka Regenerating Day Cream
Evolu Daylight Firming Eye Cream
Living Nature Nourishing Night Cream
Oxygen Hydrating Night Cream
Trilogy Eye Contour Cream
Weleda Pomegranate Firming Day Cream

Supplements

Radiance Ageless Beauty New Zealand
Marine Collagen

Stockists

Absolute Essential www.absoluteessential.com
Antipodes www.antipodesnature.com
Apicare www.apicare.net
Aveeno www.aveeno.co.nz
Dr Hauschka www.drhaushcka.co.nz
Evolu www.evolu.com
Living Nature www.livingnature.com
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Oxygen www.oxygenskincare.co.nz
Radiance www.healthandherbs.co.nz
Trilogy www.trilogyproducts.com
Weleda www.weleda.co.nz

Want more? For individual reviews of these and other anti-ageing creams and serums, trialled by Good readers, see good.net.nz/antiwrinkle