

# The Visible Effects of Stress

## Get a Grip on Anxiety and Clear Your Complexion

Barbara Hey

Eons ago, back when humankind's main activities for the day were evading predators and foraging for food, stress was essential to survival. The body's fight-or-flight response to stress in the face of danger set off a chain reaction of physiological changes, priming the body for action and increasing the likelihood of escaping physical harm.

These days stress is more often induced by threats of the psychological or emotional kind, but the physiological response is the same. While stability-shattering events such as divorce, illness, or job loss take their toll, it's the low-grade, chronic stress--commuter traffic, rebellious

between you and a clear complexion.

### Your Face Says It All

"Stress is a major deterrent to having good skin," according to Howard Murad, a dermatologist and CEO of skin care company Murad, Inc. "Even if you eat a perfect diet, if you're under stress you're not going to like the way it looks on you."

The link between stress and skin is becoming clearer all the time. "There are many studies that show the direct connection between the brain, endocrine system, and your skin," Murad says. One such study found that

*Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life*

-Steve Jobs



Managing the low-grade, chronic stress of modern life can brighten your complexion.

computers, overbooked schedules--that does the greatest damage to body, mind, and even appearance. In addition to the well-documented stress-related illnesses such as heart disease, insomnia, and backaches, chronic stress can take a toll on your skin by increasing oil production and exacerbating acne, eczema, atopic dermatitis, and psoriasis. In other words, anxiety may be standing

stress causes deterioration in the skin's permeability barrier, which is the body's front line of protection against the outside world and essential to our survival. According to Peter Elias, a professor of dermatology at the University of California, San Francisco, who led the study, when that barrier

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#### Office Hours and Contact

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breaks down, there is havoc: The release of molecules, whose job it is to shore up the barrier, initiates inflammation in deeper layers of the skin, causing irritation and dryness.

"When you're stressed, the barrier function of your skin gets damaged, and there's transdermal water loss," Murad says. This means fluid is lacking in all layers of the skin, which causes a dull complexion and exacerbates wrinkles.

Furthermore, stress throws the body's biochemical balance out of whack. The fight-or-flight response in the brain sends a message to the body to get ready for action. Then the adrenal glands produce adrenaline and noradrenaline, as well as the stress hormone cortisol, activating the metabolism and keying the body to respond to the threat, whether truly life-threatening or just being late for an appointment.

In regular, peaceful circumstances, the stressor goes away and hormones return to normal levels. But chronic stress--the scourge of modern life--can have long-lasting, chaotic effects on the body's biochemistry. Instead of dissipating, cortisol lingers in the body, which depresses the immune system and brings on hormonal imbalances, causing increased sebum production. Skin gets oilier and breakouts occur.

## Erasing the Fallout

The good news is, plenty can be done to ease stress, minimize its effects, and benefit skin and all-around health. In addition to stress-reducing practices (meditation, yoga, massage, exercise, vacations, etc.), nutrition supplements play an important role. "There are several important nutrients for skin that few get in sufficient quantities, particularly when under stress," according to Ann Louise Gittleman, Ph.D., clinical nutritionist and author several natural health books, including "The Fat Flush Plan" (McGraw Hill/Contemporary Books, 2002) and "The Living Beauty Detox Program" (Harper San Francisco, 2000).

No. 1, she says, is essential fatty acids. The most important for skin is gamma

linolenic acid (GLA), found in borage oil, black currant seed oil, and evening primrose. "Roughly 33 percent of all adults are deficient in GLA, which supports the skin cell membranes," she says. "It's been shown to be an effective treatment for inflammation and moisture loss associated with dry skin and aging, and a potent anti-inflammatory. Studies have shown that borage oil applied topically has a very dramatic healing effect on eczema, psoriasis, and contact dermatitis."

So, apply it topically or take it internally? How about both? "I love the concept of beauty inside and out," Gittleman says. That is to say, apply and consume it. As for internal consumption, Gittleman recommends a daily, high-quality GLA supplement of 500 mg.

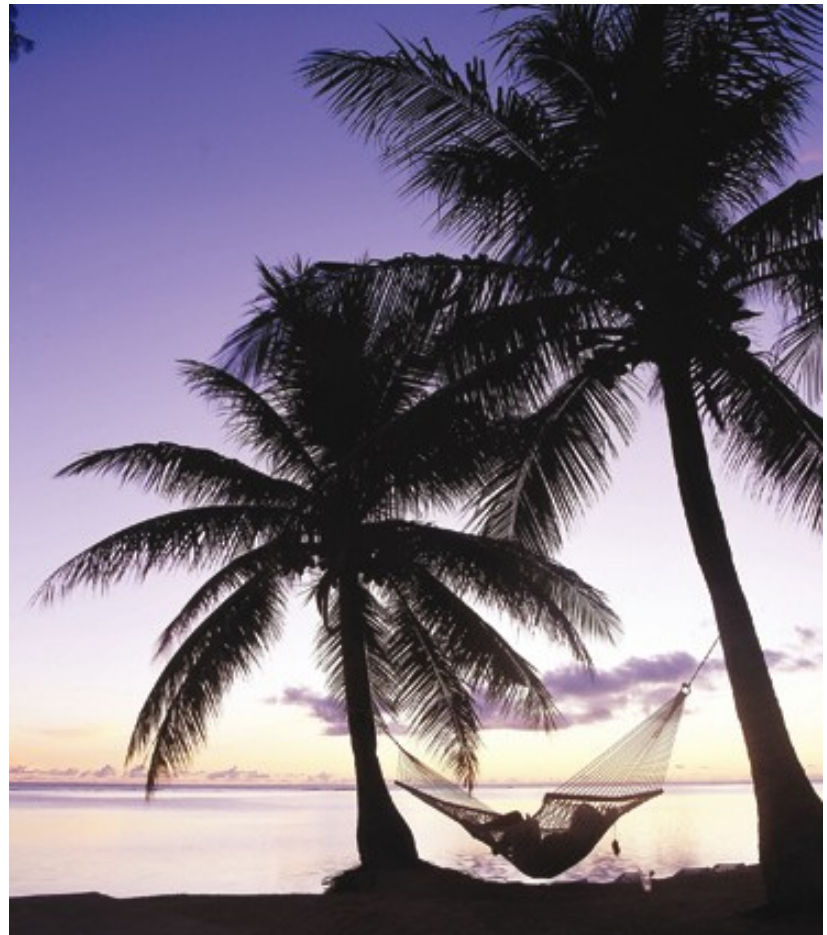
Internal organs also need support in times of stress, particularly the adrenal system. "Pantothenic acid, a B vitamin, is the best support for the adrenals," she says. "It balances out the cortisol." Gittleman's recommendation: 500 mg,

three times a day.

For those under maximum stress loads, Gittleman suggests an adrenal support supplement that includes zinc, tyrosine, and vitamin B6, three tablets in the morning and three more before 4 p.m. (But always check specific dosage directions, and confer with a healthcare practitioner for the most appropriate remedy and dosage.)

She also notes that when stressed, the body tends to secrete magnesium, and recommends 400 mg in the morning and 400 mg right before bed. "That can help with sleep," she says. (For more information, visit Gittleman's website, [www.fatflush.com](http://www.fatflush.com).)

Stress can wreak havoc with your complexion and be the obstacle standing in the way of clear skin. Addressing this root cause can be pivotal in achieving clarity--on your face and in your soul.



Relaxation can help dissipate stress hormones that contribute to wrinkles and a dull skin tone.

# Sleep and Your Skin

Shelley Burns

We have all encountered a sleepless night or two. Upon waking, we look in the mirror and are traumatized by what we see: puffy eyes, dark circles, droopy eyelids, and sallow skin. To add insult to injury, more wrinkles may be visible due to tossing and turning. Poor sleep can wreak havoc on your skin.

There are three hormones affected when we don't get adequate amounts of sleep. They each have a direct effect on how our skin ages.

- Cortisol is our stress response hormone. When we are not sleeping well, we're like a battery that does not have the chance to recharge. Our body identifies this as a stressful situation and starts producing cortisol. Like a jolt of caffeine, this spike in cortisol keeps us moving, but at a cost. Elevated cortisol levels break down collagen, resulting in less skin elasticity.

- Growth hormone is responsible for building muscle, bone, and tissue--including skin. It is one of our antiaging hormones that replenishes as we sleep, rehydrating the skin and allowing for cellular repair.

- Melatonin is our sleep hormone, and it also plays a role in the immune system. It is a significant contributor to the functional and physical integrity of our skin.

Without quality sleep, growth hormone and melatonin are not produced in sufficient quantities, while cortisol is overproduced. The result is overall poor skin condition, including dryness, dullness, fine lines, and wrinkles.

Even how you position your face on your pillow affects your skin. Some dermatologists say women who sleep on their side tend to develop wrinkles in their cheeks, while men will tend to

develop wrinkles on their forehead. Sleeping on your back will avoid the risk of "sleep lines."

So, get your beauty sleep--at least seven or eight uninterrupted hours every night--to achieve radiant and healthier-looking skin.



**Sleep is important for healthy skin**

## Here Comes the Sun

### Updated UV Index Shines Light on Rays

A crucial warning system has been recently updated for your skin's protection. In compliance with the World Health Organization, the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Weather Service revamped the UV Index, a system created to alert people about the level of harmful ultraviolet (UV) light rays from the sun. Overexposure to UV rays can cause wrinkles and premature aging, skin cancer, cataracts, and immune system suppression.

Many factors influence the strength of UV rays: UV light is stronger in the summer, at higher altitudes, and in areas closer to the equator. It's also stronger at midday, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., when the sun is directly overhead.

The new UV index ranges from 0-II with guidelines as follows:

0-2: **LOW.**

Minimal exposure for the average person, but watch for reflected UV from snow and water.

3-5: **MODERATE.**

Stay in the shade during midday. Cover-up outside.

6-7: **HIGH.**

Wear a hat, sunglasses, and a sunscreen with a minimum sun protection factor (SPF) of 15. Avoid midday sun.

8-10: **VERY HIGH.**

Take extra precautions, and avoid midday sun. Wear protective clothing.

11: **EXTREME.**

Take all precautions, seek shade, and avoid midday sun. If possible, stay indoors.

As part of its daily forecast, the National Weather Service publishes the UV index for each area of the country. Go to [www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvindex.html](http://www.epa.gov/sunwise/uvindex.html) and enter your zip code to find your UV index for the day. The Weather Channel, as well as most local TV stations, include the UV index in their weather forecast. It can also be found at [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com).

For a detailed description of the UV index, or for more information on sun protection, visit [www.epa.gov/sunwise](http://www.epa.gov/sunwise).

*Go confidently  
in the direction  
of your dreams.  
Live the life you  
have imagined.*

-Henry David Thoreau

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