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skin & beauty

The Truth About Beauty Beverages

Do certain drinks deliver beauty benefits -- or is that wishful thinking? Experts weigh in.

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WebMD Feature

Reviewed by [Louise Chang, MD](#)

"Beauty beverages" have flooded the market in recent years, promising to transform humble water into a powerful anti-aging, skin perfecting potion.

According to market research firm Mintel, nearly 300 new food and drink products with "functional beauty benefits" launched in 2008, about double the number in 2007. Products like Borba, Glowelle, Crystal Light Skin Essentials, BeautyScoop, and Noah's Naturals Anti-Aging Beauty Elixir all claim to improve appearance and fight the signs of time on your skin.

Beauty is in the Eye of the Drink Holder

"Drinks with beauty benefits usually contain vitamins, amino acids, or botanicals that possess antioxidant activities," says Francesca Fusco, MD, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine in New York City. "A person should usually get enough of these nutrients through diet, but drinking them is a reasonable way to supplement."

Without any official definition or regulation about the use of the term, the field of beauty drinks is wide open for interpretation, Fusco says. New York nutritionist Keri Glassman, MS, RD, CDN, author of *A Nutritious Life* and the *O2 Diet*, agrees. "Just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, a beauty drink is in the perspective of the consumer," Glassman tells WebMD. "I think a beauty drink is anything that hydrates you, and thus your skin."

Can Sipping Save Your Skin?

When it comes to beauty drinks' effectiveness, experts say the glass is half empty and half full. The dermatologists and nutritionists WebMD spoke to agree that there are nutrients that can improve skin health, but the jury is out on how effective a beauty beverage can be at shuttling this nutrition straight to your skin.

Feeding your skin from within does have sound scientific reasoning. "The dermis [skin] and subdermal fat make up over 80% of the skin, and that's where the blood flow is," says Los Angeles dermatologist Howard Murad, MD, founder of Murad Skincare and associate clinical professor of dermatology at UCLA. "So skin is more what you eat than what you put on."

But Scott-Vincent Borba, founder and CEO of skin product company Borba, says that "a lack of vitamins and dehydration can cause skin problems." He says that "a drinkable supplement can be an effective way to treat skin because it can contain vitamins that are more bio-available and easier for the body to absorb."

Supplements in a powder or liquid may be absorbed more efficiently than those in food or pills, Fusco tells WebMD. "But a person could probably get the same ingredients at a significantly lower price with an over-the-counter bottle of supplements," Fusco says.

With regard to price, Borba can cost \$4 to \$6 a day (that's up to \$180 a month); a 30-day supply of Glowelle powder is \$89; BeautyScoop runs \$95 for a 21-day kit, and Crystal Light and Noah's Naturals cost about \$1 a day.

Healthy Diet a Beauty Key

Ideally, we'd eat a healthy diet packed with raw fruits and vegetables, easily digestible proteins, good fats, and whole grains, says Murad, who sells supplements as part of his skincare line. He sees supplement as a good back-up plan. "I have tried to put adequate amounts of supplements in drinks, but they aren't palatable at the levels required to see benefits," Murad says. "Plus, to make a supplement drinkable, you need to add preservatives, emulsifiers, and sweeteners -- things that aren't ideal to ingest."

The makers of beauty drinks say that sometimes eating well isn't enough. "Even people who eat a healthy diet have problems with their skin, hair, and nails," says plastic surgeon Michelle Yagoda, MD, creator of BeautyScoop. "So absorption can be a problem and liquids tend to be more bio-available to your body."

"Certain nutrients do help the skin, but that doesn't mean putting them in a drink will have the same effect as eating a well-balanced diet," says New York dermatologist Neal Schultz, MD, founder of DermTV.com and clinical professor of dermatology at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine. "The body is too smart for that."

Good nutrition, in general, benefits your skin. But just as doing thousands of crunches won't burn fat from your waistline, adding high levels of vitamins to your water won't yield increasing returns.

"You can't load the circuit nutritionally," Schultz says. "If you press on a light switch harder, it doesn't come on any faster or brighter and the skin is the same way." The body makes or takes what it needs as it needs it, and the excess is just sent down the drain. So drinking ingredients to benefit the skin doesn't mean they will end up there.

"A bottled beauty drink should be in addition to, not instead of, water," Glassman says. Her only caveat: Make sure it contains less than 15 grams of sugar.

How to Quench Your Skin's Thirst

The experts interviewed for this story say that staying hydrated is key to skin health, so a plain glass of water is a beauty drink. Don't feel pressured to down eight glasses a day -- that's a health myth. Avoiding thirst is enough to keep your body happy.

Your skin can also become dehydrated from within.

"As we age, skin becomes more porous, like a tire with hundreds of miles on it," Murad says. "Skin cells need stronger walls to hold water, keeping it healthy and full." He says fruits and vegetables deliver more benefit because, besides hydration, they also deliver nutrients.

"The idea is to eat better if you want to improve your skin, but that can be difficult," Murad says. "A juice or drink that's mostly water is a good option." Glassman says. "When eating for skin beauty, it's important to pick foods high in antioxidants because they help counter free radicals, which can lessen the deterioration of collagen and elastin."

How to Quench Your Skin's Thirst continued...

If you're looking for a do-it-yourself beauty beverage, here are some options:

Tea. According to research from Dartmouth Medical School, people who drank at least two daily cups of green or black tea showed a 20%-30% reduction in nonmelanoma skin cancer risk. Tea contains polyphenols, plant chemicals that help fight sun damage -- the No. 1 skin ager. Other studies have shown that polyphenols may help sunscreens reduce UV damage. In addition, polyphenols also help reduce inflammation, another enemy of skin.

Water with a lemon slice. It's an inexpensive, easy way to add antioxidants to plain water, Glassman says.

Sparkling raspberry soda. Glassman's recipe: Steep two raspberry tea bags in 8 ounces of boiling water for 1-3 minutes. Add 6 ounces club soda and ice.

What's on the inside matters to your skin, but it's also important to work on the skin's surface, too.

"Topical products have a much better chance of making improvements because they have a better chance of getting where you need them. Skin application has a better possibility of getting the ingredients into the skin," Schultz says.

Fusco agrees. "When applied directly to the skin, ingredients like vitamin C, vitamin A, and peptides show better results, and faster," she says.

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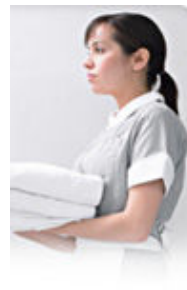
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