

CODE RED

How stress messes with your skin

The connection is clear – and your complexion will be too with the help of these simple strategies.

You know those times when life feels like a runaway train? You're way too busy, you feel anxious, there's a zillion thoughts whizzing through your head, you're eating badly, sleeping poorly. You're super-stressed and before long it shows on your face and skin – even though you thought those days were over!

Unfortunately, no matter your age, daily stress can cause levels of the hormones cortisol and adrenaline to surge, creating an inflammatory cascade in the body that can cause a slew of side effects. Among them: aggravated skin conditions such as acne and eczema, psoriasis, dermatitis and rosacea. It's also why we're prone to develop a breakout spot before a big event.

"Stress upsets the fine balance of immune mechanisms," explains dermatologist Dr Adam

Sheridan. "It also increases susceptibility to infectious processes such as herpes simplex, viral warts and bacterial infections."

All of which is bad enough. But it turns out that chronic stress – consistently heightened levels for a few weeks or months – accelerates skin ageing. An increase of cortisol on a regular basis contributes to the depletion of collagen, which gives skin its elasticity. And all that tossing and turning that is robbing you of sleep means that melatonin, which helps protect skin from UV-induced and free radical damage, isn't being produced to the same extent.

Basically, all those 'fight or flight' chemicals are putting your body on red alert internally, while externally you're probably not taking care of yourself or skin, missing out on healthy meals and hydration while upping your intake of sugar and alcohol.

But there are fixes. For one, adopting a more positive attitude. (This was a common factor in super-agers, women who looked 10 or more years younger than their actual age, according to an Olay study.) Also, ensuring you eat plenty of fresh fruit, veggies and protein, which keeps the balance of good bacteria in your gut, can also help us manage stress.

"Also, remember what you don't do is just as important as what you do," explains Dr Sheridan. "Be mindful that while some stress is imposed upon us and unavoidable, our reaction to it is an active choice." **P**

Strategies to help skin stress less

Apply these simple tips every day to help ward off some of the effects of stress on your complexion:

- Use a pH-neutral cleanser that's unscented and non-foaming.
- Invest in an antioxidant serum with vitamins A, C and E as well as resveratrol and use it each day before you moisturise.
- Apply a moisturiser that's appropriate for your skin type.
- Drink plenty of water throughout the day.
- Use a broad-spectrum 50+ sunscreen whenever you're outside.

"It will not only repel oxidative damage and keep pollutants out, it will also work to retain skin hydration," Dr Adam Sheridan explains.

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Digital detox

All that scrolling through Facebook posts can increase stress levels, so have a screen-free day once a week.