

The Zen of great skin health

Great skin doesn't often come naturally – it requires hard work!

DR VERNON CHING

My 76-year-old mother-in-law went overseas last year to visit her younger sister in the States.

While out at lunch, a stranger came up to her group and exclaimed, "What a beautiful family – mother, father, and daughter," pointing to my mother-in-law last. Her much younger sister was not impressed. On questioning by her sister as to why she looked so much younger, my mother-in-law stated she just used a special cream range and nothing else. Now, her explanation may not have been entirely accurate, but great-looking skin goes a long way to making one look and feel younger.

Great skin, for the majority of us, does not come naturally. Only those that are truly genetically gifted have this biological advantage. This does not mean that the rest of us are doomed, merely that we need to work a lot harder to achieve our goal.

The ideal skin is smooth, tight, firm, of even color and tone, well hydrated, tolerant, contour rich and free of disease. Over time, the inevitable happens, and chronological ageing – combined with photoageing – occurs. The skin is not diseased, but some changes occur. These range from the skin feeling dry, with a dull, weathered look, to the appearance of wrinkling, jowling, laxity, hypertrophy, and easy bruising.

The principles of skin health

The path to great skin starts with three basic principles:

- 1 Improving skin barrier function
- 2 Regulating the keratinocyte maturation cycle (KMC)
- 3 Reducing skin inflammation.

Skin barrier function is important to maintain skin health, protection, hydration and epidermal renewal and repair. In many instances, excessive moisturising causes a down-regulation of epidermal cell regeneration, slower epidermal cell turnover, and an impaired skin barrier function – resulting in an acquired skin sensitivity.

The KMC takes 40 days to complete and is the cornerstone to restoring compromised skin health. The KMC describes the amount of time it takes a keratinocyte to mature and transform into a corneocyte, reach the stratum corneum and exfoliate. Without adequate epidermal exfoliation and the subsequent replacement with fresh, active cells, skin health is compromised. By restoring normal maturation cycles, one restores normal skin barrier function and increases skin tolerance. This is necessary before undergoing any skin-rejuvenating procedure.

Skin inflammation is a natural response to any form of trauma to the skin. Acute inflammation usually settles in two to three weeks. If it continues, it becomes chronic and much harder to treat. Chronic inflammation of the skin presents as dryness, sensitivity, impaired healing, erythema, seborrhea, rosacea and acne. As an example, if sebum – a potent inflammatory agent responsible for acne, rosacea and seborrhea – is not reduced, treatment of these conditions fails or is only temporarily effective.


The restoration of skin health

Doctors often treat only the symptoms and not the cellular dysfunction causing skin disease. As a result of this, the results are often variable, with some patients showing vast improvement, others less and some none at all. Taking this into consideration, the following skin protocol was formulated by Dr Zein Obagi:

- **Hydration and calming:** This reduces skin dryness, irritation, and the severity of skin reactions. This contains anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, hydrating and DNA repair and protective agents.
- **UV light protection:** This is achieved by improving the skin's own tolerance to UV through epidermal stabilisation, and also by using physical and

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- **Preparation:** Involves oil and sebum control, toning and mechanical exfoliation.
- **Correction:** Repairs and enhances epidermal renewal, restores and maintains epidermal skin barrier function and normalises skin colour and pigmentation. This includes the use of tretinoin, hydroquinone (HQ) and alpha-hydroxy acids.
- **Stabilisation:** This regulates, stimulates, repairs and controls epidermal and dermal cellular function. DNA repair agents, antioxidants, anti-inflammatory agents, and tretinoin are used.
- **Stimulation and pigment control:** Tretinoin is used to improve the dermis and epidermis. If pigmentation is present, then HQ is added to the tretinoin to even skin tone and must be utilised in a pulsed manner.

chemical agents with a plant-derived melanin. Plastic surgeons, dermatologists, and aesthetic doctors treat many patients in their offices. Some may need only a basic skincare programme, others prevention, while there are cases that need medical treatment and skin health restoration. Patients treated with Botox^(R), fillers or even a surgical facial operation who have poor skin quality do not derive the full benefits of their aesthetic intervention. Use ZO to improve your patients' outcomes and follow the zen circle of good skin health innovated by Dr Zein Obagi, to integrate the maintenance of a normal healthy skin with the management of skin disorders, using a single skincare system. 



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