

Eating For Total Well-being

The role nutrition
plays with regard
to skin care and
hormones.

by Pat Lam

As estheticians become more involved in the "wellness" industry, more people are turning toward them not only for improving skin conditions, but also as a source of nutritional advice.

This expectation should force the esthetician to upgrade his/her nutritional education in order to validate his/her credibility as a health care expert. The mandate of the American Dietary Association for the millennium is to implement nutrition education as an essential component for all health care professionals. There are three primary life changes that occur during a female's life span: adolescence, pregnancy and menopause. During these periods, hormonal imbalances affect not only the skin and body but behavior as well. Some health experts propose that certain foods may help to alleviate the effects of hormonal changes. The following article offers some nutritional advice with regard to skin for women when they experience hormonal troubles at the different stages of their lives. It does not offer medical cures and will work best if used in conjunction with skin care regimens or in salon-treatments that address the esthetic condition at hand.





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Pre-menstrual syndrome

This is a socially constructed label that cries a negative connotation in modern society. It is characterized by mood and behavioral changes that may affect women in their daily functioning during the two weeks preceding the onset of menstrual flow.

A client may come to you during this time seeking your help with skin eruptions, massage for lower back pain or hydrotherapy for tension. While many women have menstrual symptoms, relatively few suffer from severe PMS. A number of myths abound PMS including its direct link to increased food cravings, headaches, irritability, insomnia, fatigue, depression and abdominal cramps. Many health experts believe that PMS results from hormonal imbalances between estrogen and progesterone hormones. It has been postulated, however, that certain nutritional deficiencies are responsible for the symptoms of PMS, and many treatments including proper nutrition can go a long way to alleviate the symptoms of PMS.

Some researchers have stipulated that certain dietary factors may contribute toward exacerbating PMS symptoms. These include changes in appetite, abnormal carbohydrate metabolism, and reduced levels of vitamins and minerals such as calcium, iron and potassium through blood loss. These variables may be causative factors for the resulting irritability and depression. Food cravings may indicate the body's need for a particular nutrient and some women experience hypoglycemic-like symptoms during this time. This reduced blood sugar level may likely be the cause of increased appetite and food cravings, and is attributed to be the source of the irritability, fatigue and depression experienced during PMS. While it is OK to respond to the body's cravings, watch out for high-fat or salty foods that will contribute to weight gain and water retention in the body. Recommendations during PMS are:

- Try eating smaller, lighter meals to appease food cravings instead of a large amount of carbohydrates at one meal.
- Increase high fiber foods that will help you reduce excess estrogen levels (whole grains, legumes, vegetables).
- It is highly recommended that one should curtail salt intake in one's diet in order to reduce water retention and bloating. Be careful of hidden salt content in processed foods. Natural diuretics are recommended, e.g., one lemon in a glass of water daily or an application of evening primrose oil. These also help in the relief of dysmenorrhea (painful cramps).
- Switch to fresh or frozen foods instead of canned ones, which may contain hidden salt.
- Limit caffeine intake, i.e., less coffee or chocolates because it can increase anxiety and tension.
- Vitamin B6 has also been proposed to reduce the production of essential fatty acids due to altered liver metabolism of estrogens during this time. They also help to reduce the levels of the hormones dopamine and serotonin which are believed to cause depression.
- Eat less red meat and dairy products because they contain arachidonic acid, which can make PMS worse.
- Reduce usage of refined sugars.
- Magnesium deficiency has been linked to PMS symptoms. Foods high in magnesium include seafood, whole grains, vegetables and legumes.
- The herb, St. John's Wort has been described in the *Wellness Let-continues*

ter from the University of California to be useful in helping to relieve depression. However, caution is recommended because there may be some possible side effects such as dry-mouth, fatigue and dizziness. It can also cause photosensitivity in individuals who are on tetracycline medication.

Estheticians who are empowered with the necessary nutrition knowledge will play a significant role in helping their clients lead a healthy lifestyle and achieve a total sense of well-being.

- Regular aerobic activity of at least half an hour can help to reduce PMS symptoms by reducing fluid retention and increasing endorphin levels which can lead to an improved sense of well-being and therefore help to reduce depression.

Pregnancy

Estheticians should *not* give nutritional advice to pregnant or lactating women, but should possess some basic knowledge about dietary intake during this important time of a woman's life. While a healthy diet is very important at all times, it becomes even more pronounced before, during pregnancy and during lactation. It is necessary to consume more nutrients during pregnancy in order to feed both mother and fetus and some women may have difficulty meeting the nutritional demands of both pregnancy and breast-feeding, therefore supplements may be required, and usually are recommended by the woman's obstetrician.

The old notion of "eating for two" does not refer to quantity of food, but rather to the quality of food intake. It has been recommended that most women should gain about 25 to 35 lbs for normal-weight women during pregnancy. While it is essential to eat more meals, small frequent meals may be best to meet energy needs without excess weight gain. Some specific nutrients are particularly important to note during this period. They include folic acid, protein, calcium and zinc, iron and vitamin D.

Folic acid is a B vitamin found in green leafy vegetables, whole grains, liver, and eggs, and should be plentiful in potentially pregnant females. It is very important in the diet before the embryo is formed because deficiency in this vitamin can lead to a neural disorder called spina bifida. Folic acid is now being added to many foods in order to ensure adequate intake for the potential pregnant female.

Menopause

The last stage of a woman's life that is affected by hormones is menopause. Degenerative diseases such as osteoporosis and hip fractures are the main health concerns of the huge population of aging baby boomers.

From the esthetic perspective, factors such as wrinkles, dry skin and aging spots may cause depression in some women. Like pregnancy, the minerals calcium, magnesium, and vitamin D are particularly important in post-menopausal women to maintain strong bones. Without this bone strength, the skeleton can break easily and hip fractures are common in the elderly population. Post-menopausal women require at least 1500 mgs of vitamin D daily in order to help maintain bone density and prevent weak or brittle bones, which nutrition scientists believe are the result of insufficient calcium intake and physical exercise in earlier years.

Bones grow to optimal density around the woman's early 30s and loss of bone mass accelerates after menopause. Calcium-dense foods such as low-fat milk products also provide other nutrients such as vitamin A, phosphorus, magnesium which also contribute to the health of the bones. If however, the daily calcium intake cannot be met with natural foods, then calcium supplements are necessary. As we age, we may accumulate larger amounts of medication, which tend to impair calcium absorption. The elderly are also less likely to exercise although this is beginning to change recently. They should be encouraged to exercise and take more control of their lives in order to ward off the degenerative diseases that are associated with aging. This includes walking instead of driving, and participation in low-impact aerobics. Zinc is another nutrient that has been given much notice in the older population lately because it helps to improve immunity and reduce blood pressure.

It can therefore be seen that during these periods of hormonal imbalance, proper dietary intake in combination with esthetic treatments and home-care regimens can be monitored to prevent or control skin disorders or emotional behaviors. Estheticians who are empowered with the necessary nutrition knowledge will play a significant role in helping their clients lead a healthy lifestyle and achieve a total sense of well-being. ■



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