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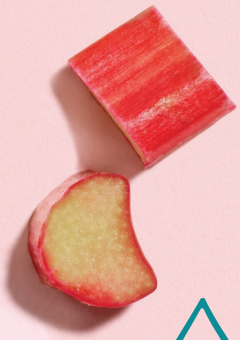



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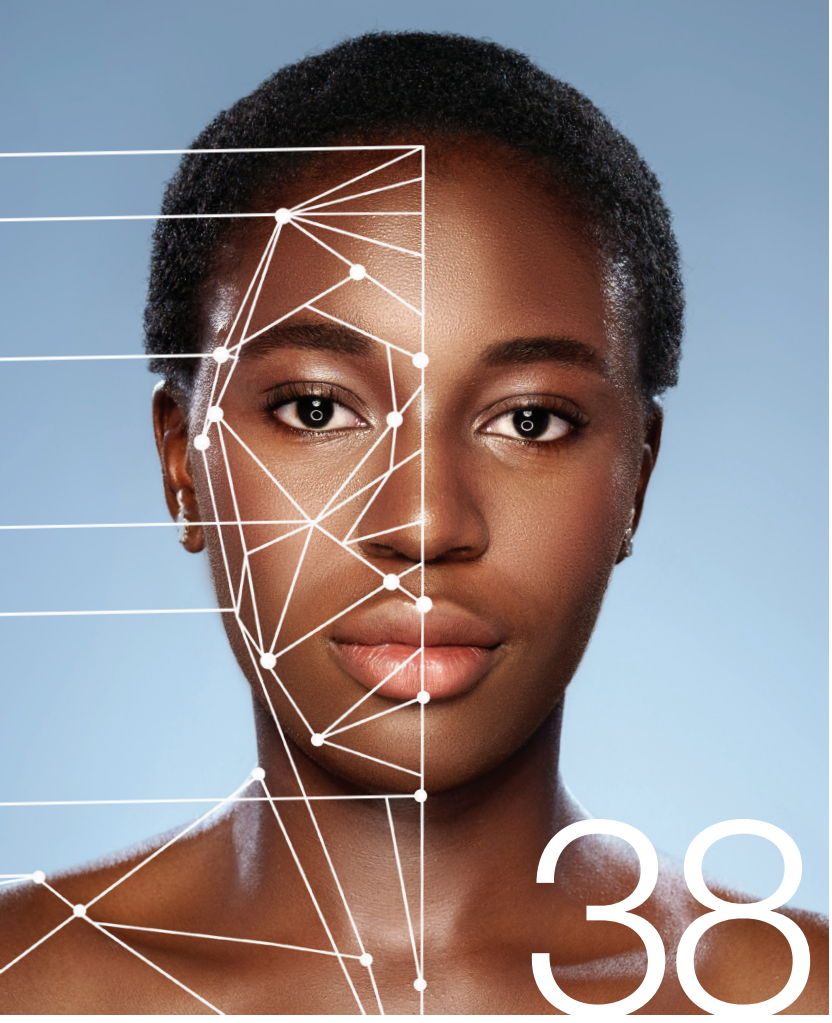





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TIA JONES
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Leading with Trust and Expertise

Skin Inc.'s Associate Managing Editor Tia Jones shares what's on her mind.

The landscape of the esthetics industry is changing. Practitioners are trying to keep up with the trends while staying true to themselves and why they got into the industry in the first place. Clients are educating themselves because they want to be more savvy. They are looking to professionals as trusted messengers to help steer them to the right treatments and products. The expertise practitioners possess is more valuable than any outside noise.

Clients are looking for more sensorial experiences in the treatment room, so that they come out looking and feeling more refreshed and relaxed. Practitioners can help with that by creating warm, welcoming environments that make the client want to come back.

There are a lot of conversations happening around longevity, healthy aging and what treatments and products can support a person's skin health as it ages. Practitioners have a unique perspective and can position themselves as trusted partners in client's longevity journey, while also educating clients on the best skincare routines based on their needs and desired outcomes.

Wishing you all the best,

Tia Jones



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Healing is Having a Moment

By Tia Jones

Today's skin care heroes are going beyond surface level ingredients to get deep and ensure optimal healing.



1 Skinification of Hair and Makeup

Companies are using elements of skin care in their products. Products are being developed using ingredients that people commonly associate with skin care to use on the scalp and for primers for their makeup. The Hydra Source Moisture Method Serum from Biolage provides hydration and preserves the scalp moisture barrier.

www.biolage.com

2 Patches

Beyond patches that are placed on the skin to reduce the appearance of a pimple, companies are developing patches for wellness and relief from skin flares. Transdermal patches are being used by people for lactose relief, nausea relief and eczema flare relief in place of taking a pill. Mind the Skin has a system of skin patches for people who have eczema and experience flares.

www.mindtheskinlabs.com

3 Medicinal Botanicals

Plants that have therapeutic properties and healing benefits are being included in skin care to provide additional benefits to scientific active ingredients. The Super Flower Nourish Cream from Ficus uses medicinal botanicals and modern actives.

www.itsficus.com

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Skin Streaming Is In—Why Less Is More



Kathleen Hamilton

By Kathleen Hamilton,
Lead Esthetician and Trainer at Woodhouse Spa

As a licensed esthetician and education director at Woodhouse Spa with over a decade of experience, I've witnessed countless skin care trends come and go, but few have made as meaningful an impact as skin streaming. This emerging movement, centered around simplifying routines and streamlining product use, is transforming how people care for their skin.

More than a viral buzzword, skin streaming reflects a deeper consumer shift toward quality over quantity, barrier health and sustainable self-care.

In an industry once defined by 10-step routines and product overload, the new beauty standard is clear: do less, but do it better.

The Rise of Skin Streaming: Why Consumers Are Simplifying

Consumers today are walking into spas with a very different mindset than they had even a few years ago. Instead of asking for lengthy product recommendations or complex routines, many are seeking guidance on how to pare down their regimen to just the essentials. At the spa level, we're seeing more guests express fatigue over overcomplicated routines and an eagerness to better understand what their skin actually needs.

Skin streaming answers that call. It's about minimizing steps without sacrificing results, and tailoring skin care to be both purposeful and personal. This shift has been especially popular among Gen Z and Millennials, who are leading the charge for "anti-overwhelm" wellness across all areas of their lives. They're asking questions like, "What are the three most important products for my skin type?" or "Which ingredients really matter?" This demand for simplicity is also rooted in a desire for transparency and trust. Simply put, guests want professional input, not marketing hype. Skin streaming isn't just a trend, but it's a reflection of how consumers are reclaiming control over their beauty routines with clarity and intention.

The Skin Barrier Takes Center Stage

One of the biggest drivers behind the skin streaming trend is a renewed focus on skin barrier health. After years of layering active ingredients and cycling through countless products, many consumers are experiencing irritation, sensitivity and inflammation, often unknowingly caused by overuse. In response, estheticians are seeing a surge in guests asking how to repair their skin rather than just treat surface concerns.

Skin streaming naturally supports barrier health by reducing product overload and focusing on a few key essentials like gentle cleansers, hydrating serums and barrier-repairing moisturizers. This simplified approach allows the skin to regain balance, retain moisture and protect itself more effectively from environmental stressors. With growing awareness of the microbiome, pH balance and inflammation triggers, guests are now prioritizing skin health over surface-level fixes. It's a shift from "more is more" to "nourish and protect," and it's transforming how professionals educate and treat their guests. Skin streaming is making space for products and routines that work with the skin, not against it.

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What Beauty Brands and Pros Need to Know

For skin care professionals and beauty brands, the rise of skin streaming is a clear signal to rethink how we educate and serve. Today's guests are no longer impressed by an overflowing shelf of serums; they want smart, streamlined solutions backed by real results. For spa professionals and estheticians, this means shifting consultations to focus on skin function, not just product sales, and guiding guests toward a focused regimen that fits their lifestyle. It's crucial to educate guests on ingredient compatibility, when less really is more and how to build a strong foundation before layering in more targeted treatments. Brands, in turn, should respond by prioritizing multifunctional products, transparent ingredient lists and barrier-supportive formulas. Consumers are looking for simplicity without sacrificing efficacy, and they're loyal to the professionals and companies that help them achieve that balance. Estheticians who embrace skin streaming as a personalized, education-first approach will not only build deeper trust with their guests but also stand out as leaders in this next wave of skin wellness.

As skin streaming reshapes consumer expectations, the beauty and wellness industry must be ready to evolve alongside it. This shift challenges long-standing norms around product variety and complexity, pushing brands and professionals to rethink what truly adds value. Instead of focusing on upselling routines, the future lies in empowering guests with knowledge and offering streamlined, high-performing solutions. By aligning with this more intentional approach to skin care, the industry can foster deeper trust, long-term guest relationships, and more meaningful results.

Kathleen Hamilton is the regional trainer and education director at Woodhouse Spa Cincinnati, Dayton and Liberty Twp.



Naturally Clearing Skin with Willow Bark

By Maggie Walker

Willow bark is easily a jack-of-all-trades ingredient with its host of benefits, especially when it comes to clearing the skin.

When it comes to natural remedies to skin concerns, willow bark is up there with some favorited ingredients. It has been used in traditional medicine, with records dating back over 4,000 years, for both medicinal and skin care benefits.[1]

This ingredient can be sourced from several species of willow trees including: white willow, black willow and purple willow.[1] Willow bark is made up of salicin, a compound of salicylic acid, tannins and polyphenols, which all aid in making it an excellent ingredient for the skin.[2]

With salicin providing anti-inflammatory benefits, tannins aiding with skin tightening and polyphenols delivering antioxidants, it's safe to say this one ingredient can provide a lot of benefits to the skin.

"Willow Bark or Salix Alba Bark Extract is a botanical source of salicylic acid. This versatile ingredient acts as a gentle exfoliator to promote cell turnover and is rich in antioxidants that help to clear pores and soothe irritated skin."
—Dr. Carl Thornfeldt, Clinical Dermatologist and Founder of Epionce



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Skin Benefits

For starters, willow bark is a great ingredient for sensitive, oil, combined and acne-prone skin. It is also great for clients who are showing premature signs of aging or are struggling with conditions like eczema, psoriasis and rosacea.

The combination of salicin, tannins, phenolic acids and flavanoids found in willow bark make it a great ingredient for soothing the skin while aiding in skin regeneration and providing exfoliating properties. Salicin specifically has been shown to help diminish wrinkles, reduce the appearance of pores and even out skin tone.[3]

Having both salicin and polyphenols in this ingredient make it excellent in both reducing acne and excess oil while keeping the skin hydrated. This ingredient really delivers so many benefits to the skin.

"Willow bark provides a mild exfoliation revealing a brighter looking complexion without any side effects of burning or itching. It's great to be used for all skin types whether dry or oily or even sensitive skin. I have been utilizing willow bark extracts since the 70s with great results."
—Lydia Sarfati, CEO/Founder of Repechage

In The Spa

You will most likely find this ingredient in a variety of skin care products. One most notably will be products for treating acne. A great example of this is the Eminence Organics Clear Skin Willow Bark Exfoliating Peel, which aids to clarify and refine the skin while reducing the appearance of acne.

When it comes to pairing this ingredient with others in the treatment room, rest assured that its exfoliating properties are something to take advantage of. The keratolytic properties in this ingredient make it great for pairing with alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs) for a boost in removing the damaged top layer of the skin while also stimulating fresh cells.[4]

This ingredient is also great for exfoliating in and out of the treatment room. This is shown in products like 1802 Beekman's Smooth Booster Willow Bark Exfoliating Serum, which is a great home care remedy, especially for clients with sensitive skin. Also Sorella's Lychee Willow Bark Deep Clean is a great product that both reduces oil production and gently exfoliates while providing a deep cleanse to the skin.



Why You Want It

Willow bark is an ingredient that can be used on a variety of clients suffering from a host of skin conditions. While it's most popularly called out for its benefits with acneic and oily-prone skin, it has a lot more to offer than just banishing blemishes. The anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory benefits helps to reduce redness and flare-ups that are great for acne, but are also amazing for conditions like eczema, psoriasis and rosacea.

Also this ingredients ability to be paired with AHAs like lactic and glycolic, make it an excellent exfoliator in the treatment room, that can deliver so many benefits to the skin. Whether your client is suffering from acne, sensitivity, pigmentation or aging, this is an ingredient that can help tackle those concerns.

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VIBRATIONAL LUXURY: HOW SOUND THERAPY DEEPENS RELAXATION & ENHANCES TREATMENT ROOM RESULTS

By Claudia Fabian

What if a simple, portable sound ritual could deepen client relaxation, improve perceived results, and turn first-time visitors into loyal guests?

I have long been a fan of sound therapy; I remember during my first sound healing experience I felt like I floated into another dimension and the calm and peace I felt was so memorable. And I have heard the same from other people who have had sound therapy as well. I enjoyed the various sounds used during the treatment, from sound bowls, gongs, chimes just to name a few.

Sound therapy has its roots in ancient practices. In ancient Egypt sound was used for healing practices, harps and flutes were used to create harmonious sounds for healing.

Cambridge Sleep Sciences note that Greek philosophers like Pythagoras explored mathematical relationships between sounds, suggesting that sounds can influence emotions, health and well-being.

Native Americans used the flute for sound healing, and you will find sound used for healing throughout every culture. Even lullabies have been used for centuries by almost every mom to get her child to sleep.

Modern science may say that sound therapy still needs more research and the benefits are anecdotal. However, as scientific inquiry into this field continues to expand, it is becoming increasingly clear that sound holds incredible potential for enhancing physical health and emotional well-being.

Sound healing fits naturally into esthetics. There's a connection between relaxation, skin health and enhanced client experience.

We have long equated a memorable facial spa experience with phenomenal healing touch, massage and relaxing music but adding sound therapy takes it to the next level.

The goal in any spa facial service is for your guests to feel relaxation and achieve their skin goals at the same time. One way to elevate this experience is to consider adding some elements of sound therapy beyond the relaxing music you may have chosen to play during your treatments.

Some of the benefits include stress reduction by helping to realign the body's natural vibration, and lower cortisol levels and help achieve a more restful sleep. When your guest truly relaxes during the facial it can help product absorption as well. Sensory rituals like sound therapy can leave a lasting impression and enhance the treatment experience and client recall.

In this competitive landscape it is important to think of ways to make your business stand out and to offer unexpected, elevated enhancements to your service. Whether you practice esthetics in your own studio, a spa or in a med spa, there is place for adding sound therapy to make you stand out.

Let's dive into the many benefits behind sound therapy and how it enhances your guests' skin treatment results.

There are physiological benefits as I mentioned regarding nervous system balancing and cortisol modulation which are both linked to calming inflammation in the body and skin. Elevated cortisol, the stress hormone, can aggravate acne, may increase skin inflammation, weaken the skin barrier and contribute to accelerating aging. As estheticians we may have topical remedies for these conditions, but adding sound therapy can help achieve quicker results with every treatment as well as improve long term results.

There are additional skin-related benefits; by using specific frequencies of sound, you can help to improve circulation, lymphatic flow and enhanced product absorption through relaxation.

Common modalities of sound therapy to consider for your treatment room would be tuning forks, singing bowls, crystal bowls and chimes.

The good news is that anyone can do sound therapy, there is no special license for this modality although you may want to invest in sound therapy certification so that you can fully understand and implement this modality most effectively.

I asked Michelle Kellogg MEd, RMT Reiki Master & Sound Healer from MindfulMystic.com about how she would advise a licensed esthetician to get certification for using sounds therapy if any?

Michelle said "I encourage estheticians to pursue training through established sound healing or vibrational wellness workshops that provide both

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hands-on experience and education in client safety, relaxation techniques, and proper instrument use. Even when certification is not legally required, professional training adds credibility and helps practitioners integrate sound into treatments in a skillful, intentional, and therapeutic way."

I went on to ask from her extensive knowledge in this area how can sound chimes, singing bowls help during a facial treatment? Michelle shared that,

"sound chimes and singing bowls can create a deeply calming environment that helps clients relax both physically and mentally during a facial.

The soothing tones help quiet the mind, reduce stress, and support nervous system relaxation, which can enhance the overall spa experience.

Many clients report feeling more grounded, peaceful, and receptive to self-care when sound is incorporated into their treatment."

Finally, I asked Michelle what impact has sound therapy has had on her client's lives?

"Sound therapy has helped many of my clients move from a state of stress and overwhelm into one of deep relaxation and inner calm. In today's fast-paced world, people rarely give themselves permission to fully slow down, and sound creates an environment where the

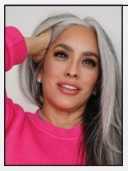
body and mind can soften, relax, and restore. Clients often leave sessions feeling lighter, calmer, more centered, and more connected to themselves.

Worldmetrics.org sites that 60% of consumers are interested in sound therapy with 68% of U.S adults visiting a spa once a year 52% say their main reason is for stress relief and 71% of Millennials prioritize "wellness experience" over material goods.

There are several ways you can add this into your current offerings. Consider a pre-session grounding, sound therapy while your guest is masking, or as a post session concluding ritual. Session duration can vary from 5-10minutes during any facial service. There are no wrong or right ways to implement this modality into your treatment, it can be as simple as starting or ending your treatment with some sound therapy.

You also will want to consider some safety and inclusivity considerations, some guests with hearing sensitivity, migraines or those with sensory processing differences. This can be remedied by adding a brief explanation of benefits, potential sensitivity and an opt in/opt out option on your intake and consent forms. Another thing to be mindful of is cultural sensitivity, honoring diverse sound traditions and avoiding cultural appropriation, and client autonomy: respect for personal preferences and boundaries.

As skincare professionals we truly hold tremendous power in how we can elevate our guest experience into one that delivers results and gain a loyal following. If you haven't added sound healing into your practice, I hope this article will pique your interest in how you can begin to take steps to add this extraordinary modality into your guest experience. If you have been offering sound therapy, I know you can testify to its healing power.



Claudia Fabian is a 30-year beauty industry expert. Her career as a makeup artist, esthetician and Instagram beauty influencer has really given her a deeper understanding of industry trends. Claudia has been an esthetician for many high-profile salons and spas throughout her career, as well as serving in executive positions with many skin care brands. Most recently, she's serving as Director of Sales and Education with Edgeless Beauty Pro, who is launching Ultraceuticals in the United States.

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MINDFULNESS IN THE TREATMENT ROOM: ELEVATING THE ESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

By Shawna Rocha

Mindfulness within the esthetic treatment room extends far beyond the application of products and execution of technique. It represents a comprehensive, intentional approach to care, one that considers not only the condition of the skin, but the experience of the individual. In a professional setting, mindfulness is expressed through attention to detail, awareness of client needs, and the ability to create an environment that supports both physical and emotional comfort. This level of care distinguishes a standard service from an elevated, results driven experience.

A foundational element of mindful practice begins before the client enters the treatment room. The health history form serves not only as a clinical requirement, but as a guide for personalization. Information regarding sensitivities, allergies, medical conditions, stress levels, personal preferences and lifestyle habits provides insight into how the client may respond to both treatment and environment. A thoughtful esthetician uses this information to adjust not only product selection, but also external factors such as fragrance, temperature, lighting, and overall atmosphere. This level of awareness ensures that each client feels considered, safe, and supported from the beginning of their experience.

The physical environment of the treatment room plays a critical role in shaping perception and comfort. A calm, peaceful setting should be intentionally curated, beginning with color selection. Neutral tones, soft hues, and minimal visual clutter help reduce stimulation and encourage relaxation. Lighting should be adaptable, offering both functional brightness for treatment accuracy and softer ambient lighting to support moments of rest and recovery during the service.

Fragrance should be approached with care and intention. While scent can enhance the experience, it must remain subtle and appropriate for each individual. Clients with sensitivities, respiratory concerns, or those undergoing medical treatments may require a fragrance-free environment. A mindful esthetician understands that scent is not a necessity, but an option that should always align with the client's needs.

Equally important are the tactile elements within the room. High quality linens, soft towels, and well maintained bedding contribute to a sense of luxury and professionalism. Heated beds or blankets can enhance relaxation, while fans or adjustable temperature controls allow for individualized comfort. These details communicate a level of care that clients can both feel and appreciate.

Attention to physical support within the treatment space further enhances the experience. Bolsters, pillows, stools, ergonomic positioning beds and tools ensure that the client remains comfortable throughout the duration of the service. Providing thoughtful additions such as clothing hooks, designated storage areas for personal belongings, and easily accessible surfaces helps maintain organization and ease. For clients with specific needs, such as those undergoing oncology treatments, offering accommodations like wig stands and additional privacy elements reflects a deeper level of empathy and understanding.

Sound is a critical yet often underestimated component of the treatment room. A mindful environment prioritizes minimal background noise and low external disruption. Traffic sounds, hallway conversations, or equipment noise can interrupt relaxation and reduce the overall quality of the experience. Efforts should be made to create a quiet, controlled space, whether through soundproofing, strategic room placement, or scheduling practices that minimize overlap and disruption.

Music selection should be intentional and consistent with the tone of the treatment. Soft, calming music can support relaxation, regulate breathing, and create a rhythm within the service. Volume should remain low and unobtrusive, allowing it to enhance rather than dominate the experience. Additionally, music preferences can be adjusted based on client needs; some clients may prefer silence, while others may respond positively to gentle background sound.

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Offering this level of customization reinforces a client centered approach.

Beyond the treatment room, the overall spa environment contributes to the perception of professionalism and care. An open, thoughtfully designed retail space that is clean, organized, and visually aligned with the brand enhances the client's journey. Furnishings should be cohesive and well maintained, reflecting the level of service provided. Cleanliness is essential at every level, not only as a matter of safety, but as a visible representation of standards and respect for the client.

Mindfulness extends into client communication, both before and after the treatment. Prior to the service, a thorough consultation allows the esthetician to understand the client's goals, concerns, and expectations. This establishes trust and creates a collaborative dynamic. During the treatment, communication should be minimal but intentional, allowing the client to relax while still feeling supported. After the service, clear guidance on results, home care, and next steps reinforce the value of the treatment and supports long-term success.

It is equally important to remain mindful of the client's time. Many individuals are balancing multiple responsibilities and commitments. Providing a service that is both efficient and thorough demonstrates respect for their schedule. When timing is managed effectively, the experience feels seamless, and the client perceives the service as both valuable and professional.

The environment and experience within the treatment room directly reflect the esthetician's level of care and attention. Every detail, from lighting and sound to cleanliness and organization, communicates a message about the quality of the service being

provided. Clients are not only evaluating results, but they are also assessing how they feel throughout the process. A well designed, mindful space fosters a sense of trust, comfort, and consistency.

From a business perspective, mindfulness plays a critical role in client retention and growth. Clients who feel understood, comfortable, and valued are more likely to return and refer others. The treatment room becomes more than a service space; it becomes a destination associated with reliability and care. This creates a sense of pride for the client, pride in where they choose to spend their time, money and invest in their skin health.

An elevated spa environment also offers something increasingly valuable in today's fast paced world: an escape. Clients are seeking moments of stillness and restoration, where they can disconnect from external stressors and focus on their well-being. A mindful treatment room provides this opportunity, combining results driven care with an experience that supports emotional and physical balance.

Ultimately, mindfulness in the esthetic treatment room is not an added feature, it is the foundation of an elevated practice. By considering the client holistically and designing an environment that aligns with their needs, estheticians can create experiences that are both effective and meaningful. This approach not only enhances treatment outcomes but also strengthens the relationship between client and professional.

In a competitive industry, it is this level of intentionality that defines long-term success. When the environment reflects care, the service reflects expertise, and the experience reflects value, clients return not only for results, but for the feeling of being truly considered.



Shawna Rocha is the owner and founder of Awaken Esthetics Retreat and Awaken Day Spa in California and Washington. A licensed esthetician, mentor and educational development consultant, Rocha is dedicated to elevating the esthetics industry through advanced education and community. Specializing in sensitive and compromised skin, she holds multiple advanced certifications, including Oncology Esthetics, Immuno-Esthetics and NCEA certification. She is an educational consultant for multiple skin care lines; Rocha was named Dermascope's 2024 Educator of the Year. Known for her expertise, passion and mentorship, she continues to inspire estheticians nationwide through education, collaboration and advocacy for skin health.

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BEYOND THE SURFACE: THE ESTHETICIAN'S ROLE IN NERVOUS SYSTEM REGULATION

By Dr. Sherrie Tennessee

The landscape of the esthetic industry is undergoing a profound transformation as we move through 2026, evolving far beyond the traditional focus on topical correction. Today, the treatment room is being reimagined as a nervous system sanctuary, a space where skin health is recognized as being inextricably linked to psychological well-being. This shift is driven by a growing understanding that the skin acts as a direct mirror of the nervous system. Modern clients are no longer just seeking a quick escape; clients are increasingly asking how their spa experiences will support their nervous system and overall mental health. To meet this demand, estheticians must bridge the gap between biological science and somatic practice.

The Science of Stress and the Skin Barrier

To understand the importance of this shift, we must examine the physiological effects of stress on dermal health. Research confirms that systemic psychological stress directly impairs the skin's barrier function. This occurs because stress increases the production of local cortisol within the skin's own cells. Specifically, psychological stress significantly elevates 11ß-HSD1 enzyme levels in the skin, which convert inactive cortisone into active cortisol. This local cortisol release is a primary culprit in compromised skin barrier function and heightened skin sensitivity.

When a client enters a treatment room in a fight-or-flight state, their skin becomes physiologically prone to increased transepidermal water loss (TEWL) and impaired keratinocyte differentiation. Consequently, a facial is no longer just about the products used; it is a biological reset intended to down-regulate the stress response and restore cellular health. By integrating mindfulness and relaxation techniques, practitioners can effectively interrupt these stress-induced changes at the source. This scientific reality elevates the esthetician's role from a beauty provider to a critical partner in the client's physiological regulation.

Mindfulness: The Human Art of Returning to the Self

Mindfulness in the esthetic setting is often misunderstood as an elaborate routine or a state of endless calm. With twenty years of experience in the wellness industry as a massage therapist, educator, and owner of Omaha Massage and Healing Arts, Tara Zin creates spaces centered on healing, restoration, and whole-body well-being while guiding others toward self-discovery, sustainable self-care, and a deeper connection to the self through mindfulness and embodied healing practices. Tara explained that mindfulness is often misunderstood as something reserved for quiet mornings, perfect routines, or people who seem endlessly calm. In reality, mindfulness is the practice of returning to the self and the body in small, intentional ways throughout the day. In a world that constantly pulls attention outward, mindfulness invites a person back inward to notice what is happening within the body, the breath, and the nervous system before rushing to fix, numb, or avoid a sensation.

Clients often carry subtle stress signals that manifest physically. These might include tight shoulders, a clenched jaw, shallow breathing, a racing heart, or even a feeling of heaviness in the chest. Some clients may experience stomach tension, restlessness, or a persistent urge to shut down. These signals are the body's way of asking for attention, care, and a pause. By integrating mindfulness, practitioners can help clients move through these stress patterns with greater awareness and compassion. Relaxation does not always come from emptying the mind; often, it simply comes from reconnecting with the body.

The Power of Dermal Co-Regulation

One of the most potent tools an esthetician possesses is the ability to facilitate co-regulation. This is the process by which a calm, grounded practitioner helps a client's nervous system shift from a state of high alert into a parasympathetic rest-and-digest state. This process begins before the treatment even starts. Through intentional grounding, practitioners are encouraged to take a 60-second intentional pause before beginning a service. By practicing deep, rhythmic breathing, the esthetician sets a calm energy

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for the room that the client's nervous system can naturally mirror.

This mirroring is a biological response that signals safety to the brain, allowing the client to let their guard down. Without this initial grounding, a practitioner may inadvertently transfer their own hurried energy to the client, negating the therapeutic benefits of the treatment. Co-regulation is an active partnership in which the practitioner's state of being serves as the foundation for the client's healing journey. It turns the treatment room into a sanctuary where the pace of life slows down enough for the body to begin its natural repair processes.

Practical Somatic Techniques for the Treatment Room

Integrating somatic practices into a facial does not require an overhaul of your protocol; it simply requires intentionality. One of the most effective ways to signal safety is through breath-aligned application. This involves coordinating product application with the client's breathing, applying product on the inhale, and performing massage strokes on a slow, elongated exhale. This simple cue prompts the client to pace their breathing, the fastest way to stabilize the nervous system.

Another accessible technique is box breathing, which involves inhaling for a count of four, holding for four, exhaling for four, and pausing at the bottom for four. Even one minute of this practice can interrupt stress patterns and create space for mental clarity. During periods of wait time, such as when a mask is setting, practitioners can utilize somatic anchoring. This guides the client to focus on a single physical sensation, such as the weight of a warm towel or the specific texture of a product. These anchors pull the

client out of the mental chatter of their daily lives and ground them in the present moment.

Sensory grounding is also highly effective when anxiety or overwhelm begins to build. Gently bringing awareness to what a client can hear, smell, or touch can help anchor them. Furthermore, movement can be a form of mindfulness. Gentle stretching, swaying, or even placing a hand over the heart can help release tension that a client may not even realize they are carrying in their jaw, shoulders, hips, or stomach. These intentional moments of release allow the body to soften and respond quickly to the care being provided.

The Practitioner's Own Sanctuary

It is essential to remember that the benefits of these practices extend to the service provider as well. The nervous system is constantly responding to the pace of our lives, and as practitioners, we cannot give from an empty cup. Relaxation is not laziness, and rest is not unproductive. When we create moments to slow down and reconnect with ourselves, we set ourselves up to provide care from a more grounded and powerful place.

Practicing mindfulness is not about perfection or meeting another standard; it is a relationship built over time. Some days it may look like a full meditation, while other days it is simply taking a deep breath before reacting to a stressful situation, stepping outside for fresh air, or allowing yourself a few quiet moments without stimulation. By consistently practicing these techniques, estheticians can improve their own emotional regulation, sleep, and focus, ensuring their longevity in a demanding field. Small moments of stillness matter more than we often realize, both for the guest and for the provider.

The Results: A Lasting Biological Glow

The shift toward nervous system regulation yields measurable results that surface-level treatments cannot match. Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) techniques, when paired with professional spa therapies, have been shown to reduce markers of anxiety. This creates a deeper and more lasting glow that stems from genuine cellular health rather than just temporary hydration. When the body is in a parasympathetic state, its ability to repair and regenerate is maximized, leading to better long-term outcomes for skin barrier health and sensitivity.

By positioning your practice as a form of preventative mental health support, you align with 2026 consumer trends that prioritize recovery and recharge. Locations that embrace this nervous system sanctuary model see higher client retention because offering a profound biological and emotional reset that clients cannot find elsewhere. In conclusion, the future of skincare lies in the delicate dance between advanced science and the human art of returning to the self. By understanding the impact of cortisol on the skin barrier and mastering the art of co-regulation, estheticians can provide a level of healing that transcends the epidermis, touching the very core of the client's well-being.

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Dr. Sherrie Tennessee began her career in the scientific world, where she served as a researcher at prestigious organizations, including Johns Hopkins University and MedImmune. With over 20 years of experience in beauty, spa, and wellness, she has expertly fulfilled roles as a massage therapist, nail tech, spa owner, speaker, professor, and educator. Her expertise in wellness technology and innovation has shaped her contributions to highly respected industry publications and speaking engagements at numerous public forums. Dr. Tennessee is a published author who has collaborated with distinguished organizations, including Johnson and Wales University, Sandals Resorts International—Red Lane Spa, and Mandarin Oriental. She holds a B.S. in Biology and is a Certified Integrative Health and Wellness Coach, along with a Master of Business Administration. Dr. Tennessee earned her Ph.D. in Hospitality Administration from William F. Harrah College of Hospitality, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where she specialized in wellness tourism, wellness technology, and innovation. She continues to bridge the gap between traditional hospitality and modern wellness approaches.



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LIP SERVICE: TREATMENT, CARE AND PRODUCTS

By Tia Jones

Lips can be the first thing people notice on someone's face. While people spend money on skin treatments, the lips are often overlooked. They need just as much attention as any other body part.

"What do you love about your lips?"

That's the question Victoria Syneck asks her clients when she does her consultations for lip treatments. Syneck, who is the owner of Aesthetics Temple in Northbrook, Ill., is a licensed esthetician and a nurse practitioner. Syneck has been in esthetics full time since 2018 and has been a nurse since 2010. Syneck established Aesthetics Temple in 2021.

Syneck also asks clients if they have had lip filler before and if they have photos of lips they like. She said people can come in with ideas of what they want to do with their face, but not every photo fits every face.

"Good filler shouldn't walk into the room before the person does," she said, adding that she uses more of a lip frame approach.

Syneck said the pillow lips are out and more personalized lips are in. When it comes to the golden ratio of lips, Syneck said the best look is when the lower lip is a little bit bigger than the top lip, a 1/3 ratio.

Catherine Cardon, APRN, DNP, is the Director of Clinical Operations at VIO Med Spa and a leading expert in aesthetics and wellness. She said patients are becoming increasingly interested in lip quality, including hydration, texture, elasticity, and overall tissue health, rather than simply adding volume. We're also seeing growing interest in regenerative treatments such as platelet-rich fibrin (PRF), growth factor therapies, exosomes, and collagen-stimulating approaches that improve overall lip quality. She said that the future of lip aesthetics is less about creating volume and more about maintaining healthy, resilient tissue that ages beautifully.

What to Consider

Syneck described the lips and the surrounding area is like the frame around a picture. She said she looks at the age of the person that is getting the filler and what their issue might be; if they are losing volume, and what kind of skin tissue do they have. She said ethnic background and facial shape also play into how the lips can be enhanced. She said the goal is to preserve a person's facial harmony and their expression.

"At age 22, how our mid-face volume lose or nasolabial folds or perioral aging or chin retrusion, because of the fat pad loss, is going to be as significant as somebody who is in their late 40s, early 50s, going through perimenopause, versus even somebody who is 65 to 80," she said. She added that she has patients who come in that are in their 90s who come in wanting filler and botox.

Syneck said the lips are developed at week four to seven when a baby is in a mother's womb, before fingers and toes. Because of that, she said it is very important to ensure treatments are patient specific. She said the lips and the surrounding area are like a puzzle piece and to avoid looking clownish, it is important to assess the lip tissue and the hydration of the lips. She said the best filler product will be a one that is thin, thick and firm. Hyaluronic acid is the injection that she uses to enhance lips.

Syneck said it is important to remember that for younger lips to maintain hydration. She said products like Ormedic Balancing Lip Enhancement Complex from Images Skincare for everyday lips. She also suggests people who have never had lip filler but are interested in it, try a lip plumper first. She recommended Revenesse Lip Plumper, which also manufactures a lip filler. She said that it has peptides and AHA and is a way for people to see how lips look plump.

Cardon said that just like the rest of a person's face, lips change significantly over time. By the mid-20's, collagen loss has already started, and the lips are often the first place it becomes noticeable.

From a clinical perspective, Cardon said three things happen simultaneously:

1. collagen and elastin thin out, so lips lose projection and that natural pout;
2. the maxillary bone (the bony support behind the

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upper lip) gradually recedes, causing the lip to roll inward and;

3. the fat pads around the mouth diminish, softening the vermillion border and creating those vertical (smoker) lines no one wants and making lipstick difficult to apply.

She said the good news is that it's all addressable, and modern lip rejuvenation is increasingly focused on restoration rather than enlargement.

Cardon said she believes that lip filler and topical lip plumpers aren't competitors. They solve different problems at different depths. The biggest difference comes down to whether a person is looking for temporary enhancement or actual structural change. Volumizing lip products can temporarily enhance the appearance of fullness, but they don't replace lost structure. These products can be great for improving hydration and creating a subtle plumping effect. Many contain ingredients like hyaluronic acid, peptides, or mild stimulants/irritants that temporarily increase circulation and/or cause mild swelling, making lips appear fuller for a few hours. Lip filler restores volume beneath the skin and can improve shape, symmetry, definition, and age-related volume loss with results that last months rather than hours.

"I often tell patients that healthy lips should come first. If your lips are chronically dry, sun damaged, or dehydrated, addressing those issues can make a remarkable difference—hydration, sun protection, and barrier repair can make a surprising difference," Cardon said.

Cardon said the lips are one of the most overlooked areas when it comes to sun protection, but that it is important to protect the lips from sun damage because: a person's lower lip is angled directly at the sun all day and is a documented high-risk site for

actinic keratosis and squamous cell carcinoma; the lip skin is thinner than facial skin and has almost no melanin for protection; beyond cancer risk, chronic UV exposure degrades lip collagen, deepens vertical lines, and causes pigmentation changes. She said if someone is investing in skincare or aesthetic treatments, protecting your lips from UV damage should absolutely be part of that routine.

Lip Care

Syneck said there is a lack of awareness that because the lips have very few oil glands they age faster than any other area. She said that things like drinking with a straw, smoking and smiling can affect the way lips look. She said people should invest in products for lips that have antioxidants, peptides or AHA. She said good fatty acids like Vitamin E, which is super healing, avocado oil and hyaluronic acid. She added that people should look for lip products that help build collagen and support the structure of their lips.

Christen Di Lugio is the owner of Skin Deep in Middletown, R.I., and a licensed esthetician. She is a huge proponent of people using sunscreen on their lips. She recommends Colorscience, which makes lip glosses and color balms that have an SPF of 30 or higher. At the end of a facial, she likes to apply a lip hydrator. The one she uses is the Sorella Apothecary Avocado Oil Lip Hydrator.

"I like it because it's sticky and thick and it stays on for a long time," she said, adding that even through eating a meal it still stays on, which she loves. She said her clients will buy it from her because they also like the consistency and the way it hydrates their lips.

For ways to treat the lips, DiLuglio suggests exfoliating the lips with a scrub. She recommends the Farmhouse Fresh One Fine Day Face Polish. She rubs it on clients' lips during the facial process, wipes it off with a warm towel and immediately follows it up with the Sorella Apothecary Avocado Lip Hydrator.

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Lip Care Routine

Cardon said a lip care routine can be very simple. The focus should be on hydrating, protecting and repairing the lips. She said that the lips are not like the skin on the rest of a person's face, there are no hair follicles, sweat or sebaceous glands. That means, the lips can't produce their own protective hydrolipid film.

For a comprehensive lip care routine, Cardona recommended the following:

MORNING

1. Hydrate with a lip product containing hyaluronic acid, ceramides, peptides, or squalane. Ingredients like shea butter, jojoba, and avocado oils are rich in antioxidants, vitamins, and omegas, and support the ceramide barrier on the lips.
2. Apply a broad-spectrum SPF 30 or higher designed specifically for lips.
3. Reapply throughout the day, especially after eating or drinking.

EVENING

Remove makeup and sunscreen.

Apply a reparative lip treatment containing ingredients such as petrolatum, ceramides, shea butter, or lanolin.

WEEKLY

Avoid aggressive scrubs.

If needed, gently exfoliate with a soft washcloth or enzyme-based treatment.

Consistency matters far more than complexity. Also, avoid fragrance, menthol, and camphor as primary ingredients - they create a dependency cycle that worsens chronic dryness over time.

Tia Jones is the associate managing editor of *Skin Inc.*



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THE INTERCELLULAR MATRIX AND SKIN NUTRIENT OPTIMIZATION

By Dr. Erin Madigan-Fleck

The skin possesses a remarkable regenerative capacity; however, this process is contingent upon sufficient intake of proteins, carbohydrates, and fats. These nutrients are indispensable for cellular regeneration, which is vital for preserving healthy skin, and they play roles in numerous biological processes. Nutritional support for the skin depends on several factors: a robust connective tissue network of collagen and elastin; proper circulation and vascular health within the dermis; sufficient cellular hydration; and a healthy epidermal structure, including appropriate lipid function and regulation of trans-epidermal water loss (TEWL). Substances that safeguard the skin against oxidative and ultraviolet (UV) damage, dehydration, and loss of elasticity are also important factors for nutritional skin support.

The Skin Barrier Defense System

The skin's primary defense mechanisms include the stratum corneum and an antioxidant system that maintains redox homeostasis. Both epidermal and dermal cells are exposed to reactive oxygen species (ROS) generated by cellular activities and environmental stressors, including ultraviolet (UV) radiation and pollution, which are linked to premature skin aging and numerous dermatological conditions. The antioxidant system regulates ROS levels, thereby preventing cellular damage. In certain dermatological disorders, oxidative stress and inflammation are interconnected, and reduced antioxidant levels facilitate disease progression. Skin exposed to environmental stressors shows decreased antioxidant concentrations. Antioxidant and immune defense mechanisms counteract free radical damage and safeguard the skin from UV radiation and pollution through enzymes such as superoxide dismutase and other scavenging pathways. The human body's antioxidant defense system remains persistently vigilant, counteracting oxidative damage from endogenous biological processes and environmental contaminants. This system includes enzymes such as superoxide dismutase, glutathione peroxidase, and glutathione reductase, as well as molecules such as vitamin C and vitamin E.

Antioxidants derived from carotenoids—including lutein, lycopene, beta-carotene, and zeaxanthin—are also found within the various layers of the skin. Because the skin is the largest organ, it likely contains more endogenous antioxidants than other organs. Its constant exposure to external oxidative stressors requires a robust antioxidant defense. Studies show that the epidermis has a higher antioxidant capacity than the dermis, which is crucial because the epidermis, especially the stratum corneum, serves as the body's primary barrier against harsh environmental conditions. Non-enzymatic antioxidants, such as carotenoids, are naturally occurring organic pigments classified as phytochemicals. Of the many carotenoid compounds present in nature, humans typically consume about 30 different types through their diet. Known for their antioxidant capabilities, carotenoids effectively quench and trap peroxyl radicals. After ingestion, they are absorbed by various tissues, including the skin, with levels rising as fruit and vegetable intake increases. Compounds such as beta-carotene, lycopene, zeaxanthin, and lutein have been detected in the skin and help protect it from UV-induced damage.

Like other living tissues, skin requires specific levels of vitamin C. Its concentration in the skin is higher than in plasma, particularly in the epidermis, where it can be up to five times greater than in the dermis, indicating accumulation. Vitamin C is essential for maintaining healthy skin, as a deficiency can impair collagen synthesis, resulting in poor wound healing and subcutaneous bleeding due to weaker connective tissue. It also plays a key role in building the skin barrier, which protects against environmental agents and prevents water loss through the skin. As a powerful antioxidant, vitamin C boosts resistance to reactive oxygen species (ROS) produced by the skin. Together with antioxidant enzymes and other antioxidants, it helps neutralize skin-derived oxidants, thereby reducing cellular damage. Excessive and repeated production of oxidants, such as ROS, is associated with many skin disorders. Vitamin E is a key first-line antioxidant that breaks down free radicals in the skin's lipid compartments. About 87% of total vitamin E in the epidermis is α-tocopherol. Its levels are 90% higher in the epidermis than in the dermis, with the highest concentrations found in the deepest layers of the stratum corneum and in sebaceous gland secretions. This likely results from the epidermis's direct exposure to environmental insults. Short- and long-term exposure to harsh environments can lead to erythema, skin thickening, wrinkles, and a higher risk of skin cancer.

During exposure to UV radiation or airborne chemicals, peroxyl radicals react more efficiently with vitamin E than with polyunsaturated fatty acids, producing *tocopheryl radicals*. Vitamin C helps restore vitamin E's antioxidant function by converting *tocopheryl radicals* back to α-tocopherol, thereby protecting the skin's lipid structures and overall tissue integrity. [1,]

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Structural Fundamentals and the Intercellular Matrix

The dermis is the supportive layer of the skin, primarily composed of dense, irregular connective tissue enriched with collagen, elastin, hyaluronic acid, and proteoglycans that retain water. The extracellular matrix (ECM) includes components such as proteases, cytokines, and inhibitors that support blood vessels, nerves, sweat glands, and hair follicles. Fibroblasts synthesize these components and participate in ECM remodeling. The basement membrane at the junction of the epidermis and dermis contains laminin and type IV collagen, which anchor tissues, promote growth, and inhibit the passage of large molecules, inflammatory cells, and tumor cells. The dermal-epidermal junction (DEJ) enhances nutrient exchange, cohesion, and protective functions. The ECM, a hydrated network of proteins and sugars, provides structural support and actively transmits signals essential for tissue development and maintenance, thereby guiding cell fate and homeostasis. Principal ECM proteins—including collagens, proteoglycans, glycoproteins, and elastins—are secreted by cells. Collagens form fibrillar fibers characterized by repetitive proline and hydroxyproline sequences; nonfibrillar collagens, such as collagen IV, form mesh-like networks. Proteoglycans consist of core proteins linked to glycosaminoglycans (GAGs), which attract water and help resist compression. Hyaluronic acid (HA), found in all tissues, does not form covalent bonds; however, it forms a cross-linked network. Glycoproteins, which are peptide molecules with carbohydrate groups, act as connectors, aiding in recognition, binding, and the release of growth factors. [2,]

Nutrients: Getting There

"Integumentary nutritional requirements primarily emphasize the effects of deficiencies, since the skin's structural components depend on diverse nutrients, including peptides, minerals, and vitamins. These nutrients act as enzyme cofactors, activators, or inhibitors."

Linus Pauling Institute—Micronutrient Research for Optimum Health at Oregon State University. [3]

Research in nutrition and dermatology indicates that certain nutrients are essential for healthy skin and overall well-being, and that many of these nutrients are linked to common skin concerns when they fall below baseline levels or are deficient. Nutrition encompasses several biochemical processes, including digestion, assimilation, cellular metabolism, and complex metabolic pathways. Nutritional science places great emphasis on how the body utilizes these nutrients, drawing on insights from anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry. Age and digestive health greatly influence these intricate biochemical and physiological processes, as well as multiple metabolic factors. While experts agree on many basic nutritional principles, they also acknowledge that simply eating "clean" foods or following "clean eating" principles does not necessarily equate to optimal nutrient absorption and utilization. In short, eating healthy foods alone doesn't ensure nutrients are absorbed or utilized effectively, as problems such as gut dysbiosis, poor digestion, nutrient imbalances, and absorption issues can impede nutrient uptake. Additionally, consuming the same foods frequently with little variety may lead to nutrient imbalances and deficits.

Regarding nutritional status and skin health, a range of dietary theories, innovative protocols, and individual ideas—often grounded in "philosophical perspectives"—aim to promote healthy skin. However, internal factors such as bioavailability and bio-individuality play crucial roles in determining whether specific diet trends can achieve the proposed nutritional benefits. Bioavailability specifically governs how nutrients are transported, including their availability, absorption, retention, and use within the body. It refers to the portion of nutrients absorbed from food and used in vital physiological processes. Additionally, the way nutrients are delivered significantly impacts skin nourishment.

Nutritional *bio-individuality* is the principle that each person has unique dietary, metabolic, and lifestyle requirements. It rejects the "one-size-fits-all" paradigm in nutrition, acknowledging that variables such as genetics, microbiome composition, health history, and environmental factors influence how the body processes nutrients. Recognizing one's bio-individuality suggests that optimal nourishment for each individual may vary significantly from that of others. This understanding shifts focus away from restrictive, trend-driven diets toward a personalized and sustainable approach to wellness. Several distinct factors combine to shape your personal nutritional blueprint. *Your DNA influences how you metabolize macronutrients—carbohydrates, fats, and proteins—and affects your risk of nutrient deficiencies.* The unique bacteria in your digestive system directly impact digestion, nutrient absorption, and even your blood sugar response to foods. Differences in muscle mass, activity level, age, and hormone balance determine how fast or slow your body burns calories. Moreover, stress, sleep habits, toxin exposure, and daily activity levels each require different amounts of calories and nutrients.

The key point to understand about nutrition is that there isn't a one-size-fits-all method; additionally, trend-focused and fad ideas are unsubstantiated unless underlying health issues or imbalances are confirmed through biometric evaluations.

Current research acknowledges that nutrition is closely linked to skin health, both influencing it and being influenced by it. Nutrient deficiencies can significantly impair skin conditions, while skin issues may also affect nutrient levels. [4,] Poor diets can lead to multiple skin issues and affect overall skin health, contributing to various skin conditions and diseases. Conversely, maintaining a balanced diet is crucial not only for the repair of damaged skin but also for the preservation of its appearance and overall homeostasis. Bioavailability is a key indicator of how efficiently nutrients are delivered within the body,

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encompassing their availability, absorption, retention, and utilization. This metric quantifies the proportion of a dietary nutrient that is absorbed and used for essential physiological functions. The mode of delivery significantly influences outcomes, including skin nourishment.

Vitamins and minerals differ in size, quantity, and function. Nutrients are transported via active mechanisms, or 'viaducts," which facilitate their passage through the intestinal wall into systemic circulation, where they may be released directly or bound to other molecules. Absorption presents challenges because nutrient exchange requires substantial energy for transport. Nutrients diffuse throughout the body via the bloodstream; without this diffusion, cells would be deprived of vital nutrients. As nutrients circulate, they remain within blood vessels, while the cells they nourish are located outside the vessels. The interstitial spaces between blood vessels and cells create a concentration gradient that promotes the diffusion of nutrients across the vessel wall and into the cells. Furthermore, nutrients may be transported across cell membranes via processes such as pinocytosis or phagocytosis. Pinocytosis is an 'engulfing' mechanism in which liquid substances are enclosed within vesicles and internalized by the cell. Phagocytosis occurs when cells engulf and internalize nutrient particles and cell debris for removal. These processes are essential for nutrient absorption and play a vital role in minimizing cellular waste. [5., 6., 7.]

The Robust Fats

The stratum corneum is encased in a protein-lipid matrix, a vital structure that preserves the skin's barrier function. A primary role of the dermis is to provide physical and nutritional support to the epidermis. Essential fatty acids (EFAs) in the dermis help produce signaling molecules that support the inflammatory response. Damage to dermal collagen is a key factor in skin aging, and EFAs may slow UV-induced photoaging by activating signal transduction pathways that prevent collagen breakdown. The epidermis is organized and comprises various cell types and lipid components. During differentiation, keratinocytes remain

metabolically active thanks to EFAs and epidermal phospholipids. Lamellar bodies, derived from keratinocytes, deliver essential lipids to the stratum corneum.

Essential fatty acids are integral to skin health and functionality, contributing to intercellular cohesion, the formation of the superficial lipid layer, the maintenance of cell membrane fluidity, and acting as precursors for anti-inflammatory eicosanoids. These lipids are biosynthesized from amino acids, carbohydrates, and phospholipids, including saturated and monounsaturated fatty acids, cholesterol, and ceramides, which the skin can produce or modify. A deficiency in essential fatty acids may result in significant dermatological issues, impacting skin appearance and function, and may lead to epidermal hyperproliferation, trans-epidermal water loss, and dermatitis. These lipids serve as functional components of both the dermis and epidermis and are classified as polyunsaturated fats that humans cannot synthesize; hence, they must be obtained through specific dietary sources. Trans-epidermal water loss is directly associated with structural cell lipids and essential fatty acids—a biochemical deficiency indicator that can manifest within a few days to weeks.

There are two classes of EFAs: omega-6 (n-6) and omega-3 (n-3) fatty acids.

Linoleic Acid (LA) is the parent compound of the n-6 PUFAs; α-linolenic acid (ALA) is the parent compound of n-3 PUFAs. From these two parent compounds, the body synthesizes longer-chain derivatives that also have important functions in healthy skin. [8.,9.,10.]

Linoleic Acid (LA) – Omega 6 Fatty Acid (vegetable oils, safflower oil, meat, poultry, eggs)

Linolenic Acid (ALA) – Omega-3 Fatty Acid (dark green leafy vegetables, flax, chia, walnuts, fish, oily fish

Power to the Proteins

All metabolic processes depend on proteins, which activate enzymes to provide energy and facilitate metabolic pathways. In cellular chemistry, effective metabolic sequencing requires cells to have active, well-positioned enzymes that coordinate reactions triggered by nutrients. Proteins are essential for skin health and serve as the fundamental building blocks of cells. They are the second most abundant substance in the body after water, making up about half of the dry weight. Approximately one-third of body proteins are stored in muscles, 20% in bones and cartilage, and 10% in the skin, with the rest distributed throughout various tissues and fluids. Proteins are crucial for cell survival and are necessary for replacing damaged or dead cells. The diet should include “complete” proteins, which provide all twenty amino acids, including the eleven non-essential ones the body produces through normal protein intake. Amino acids are essential for wound healing, skin repair, maintaining acid-base balance, retaining water within cells, protecting against ultraviolet radiation, and supporting the skin microbiome. These amino acids are crucial for both dermal and epidermal structures, serving as precursors of extracellular proteins and enzymes vital to the epidermal barrier.

By age 50, many women may experience a loss of up to 50% of their skin’s collagen content. This decline can be exacerbated by chronic insufficient protein consumption. Complete amino acid chains, which may consist of between 100 and 10,000 amino acids, are sequentially linked to form structural units and fibrous proteins. A protein-deficient diet could impede the proper assembly of these chains, thereby affecting various physiological functions. Consuming a diverse and regularly rotated array of proteins supports healthy

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cellular, muscular, and dermatological development. Deficiencies in multiple amino acids may lead to muscle wasting, delayed wound healing, increased susceptibility to infections, edema around the eyes and ankles, brittle nails, hair breakage, and hair loss. [11.,12.,13]

Collagen is the primary structural component of the extracellular matrix (ECM), providing tissues with elasticity. Its synthesis depends on protein intake and other critical compounds. Connective tissue health largely depends on collagen levels and the extent of fiber cross-linking. Collagen production begins in fibroblasts within the ECM. These active fibroblasts, located near collagen fibers, align parallel to them. Within the cells, procollagen—the precursor to mature collagen—is primarily synthesized in the rough endoplasmic reticulum. Collagen and other proteins in connective tissue are continuously remodeled through processes such as synthesis, degradation, cross-linking, and enzyme activity:

- **Synthesis:** Specialized cells, such as fibroblasts, produce procollagen, which is subsequently secreted into the extracellular matrix (ECM) where it assembles into larger fibrils.
- **Breakdown:** Enzymes such as Matrix Metalloproteinases (MMPs) systematically degrade aged or compromised collagen, facilitating the deposition of new extracellular matrix.
- **Cross-Linking:** Covalent bonds are formed between collagen molecules to stabilize the structure and ensure essential tensile strength.
- **Enzymatic Processes:** Enzymes such as lysyl oxidase (LOX) catalyze the chemical reactions that form mature, resilient cross-links within tissues.

Connective tissue proteins are constantly remodeled and are highly adaptable. Consuming dietary protein, especially high-quality, rapidly digestible types, boosts protein synthesis. Dietary collagen, rich in amino acids, provides essential building blocks for the formation of connective tissue proteins. Proteins such as gelatin and collagen peptides are particularly high in proline and glycine; glycine's small size improves protein stability and promotes tight molecular packing. Proline and hydroxyproline induce twisting of the amino acid chains, and hydroxyproline's hydroxyl group helps stabilize the" triple helix" (the most desirable structural asset for collagen). Hydroxylysine, derived from the amino acid lysine, is common in collagen alpha chains and is essential for fibril formation through cross-linking.

To promote skin health, focus should be placed on proteins rich in proline, glycine, and hydroxyproline, as these amino acids are vital for maintaining structural integrity. Optimal proteins for skin health encompass both endogenous structural proteins and dietary sources that support skin repair, flexibility, and hydration. Consideration should be given to consuming plant-based proteins, as most have very low hydroxyproline levels and generally contain less proline than animal products. Vegans and vegetarians aiming to support collagen synthesis may opt to include specialized vegan protein powders or foods that enhance the body's own amino acid production.

Adequate vitamin C levels are vital for converting proline into hydroxyproline, a key component of collagen production. This process is crucial because hydroxyproline acts as an essential co-factor for enzymes like lysyl oxidase and prolyl hydroxylase, which are needed to stabilize the collagen's triple helix and facilitate crosslinking. [13.,14.]



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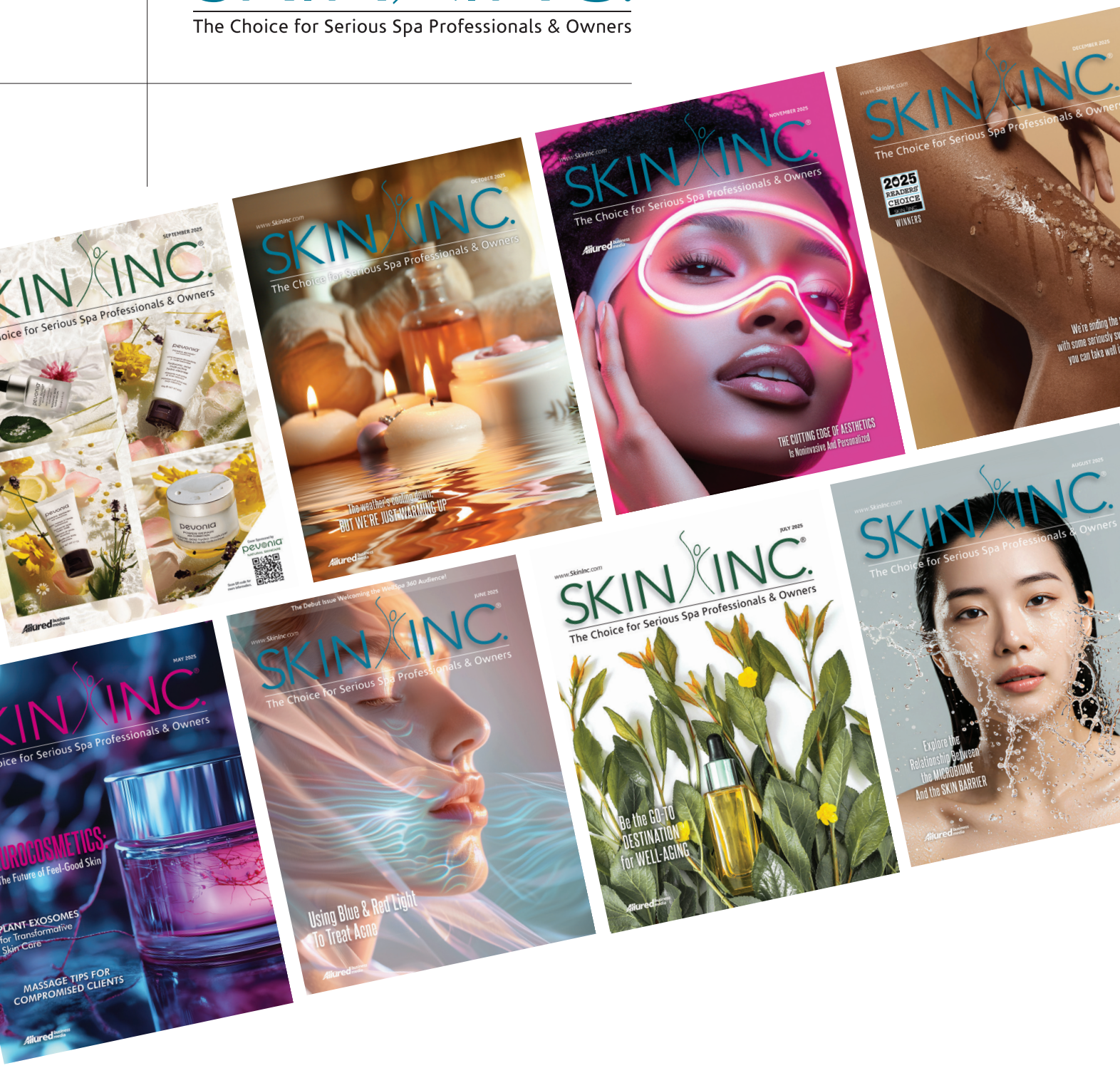

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