

BEAUTY & BRAINS

THE THINKING WOMAN'S GUIDE TO SKIN CARE
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Stress test

CAN A SKIN-CARE PRODUCT DO FOR THE DERMIS WHAT XANAX DOES FOR THE MIND?

DON'T STRESS OVER THIS, BUT STRESS may cause wrinkles. That's the implicit claim behind dozens of new beauty products designed to "help skin withstand stress" or "counteract the detrimental effects of chronic stress." Orlane, a Parisian skin-care line, says its Hypnotherapy, a \$470 cream, contains "antidepressants for the skin." Skyn Iceland—Solutions for Stressed Skin is, as the name indicates, completely based on the idea.

The belief that skin is a psychosomatic screen is part of an idea first articulated in the 1920s by Hungarian physician and endocrinologist Hans Selye, the "father of stress." Dr. Selye claimed that stress plays a role in the development of every disease and that failure to cope with stressors can result in "diseases of adaptation" such as ulcers and high blood pressure. The best-known contemporary proponent is dermatologist Howard Murad, M.D. "Dryness, dullness, dark under-eye circles, fine lines, and laxity can be attributed to stress," Dr. Murad says. "It's an epidemic that affects physical health. Why wouldn't that include the skin?"

Skin De-stressors (clockwise from near right): John Masters Organics Mandarin Maximum Moisture (\$48, www.johnmasters.com); Skyn Iceland Cool Detox Face Mask (\$56, www.skyniceland.com); and Juara Turmeric Antioxidant Facial Mask (\$38, www.juaraskincare.com)

Dr. Murad has spent the past three years researching the effects of what he calls "cultural stress." "It's the pervasive kind that most of us don't even notice," he says, for example, having virtual



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rather than personal relationships and letting work interfere with eating and sleeping well. "Each life stressor alone is relatively insignificant, but when individual stressors become patterns, health deteriorates."

Sarah Kugelman, the founder of Skyn Iceland, is exactly the type of woman Dr. Murad has in mind. Her work-life juggling act—at top cosmetic companies, no less—wreaked havoc on her skin. She couldn't find a product to alleviate it, "so we researched raw materials and were able to find clinical studies that proved various ingredients could do the job," she says, referring to the dozen or so botanicals, such as peppermint and Arctic berries, that became the line's foundation.

A search for a skin de-stressor led two other women to a mainstay spice of Indian cuisine, turmeric. It's used in the Turmeric Antioxidant Facial Mask from Juara, a skin-and-body-care range based on Indonesian beauty rituals. "The curcuminoids in turmeric root are a great antioxidant and have anti-inflammatory properties—a perfect two-in-one ingredient," says Juara cofounder Metta Murdaya. Forever Alchimie uses turmeric because it boosts heat-shock proteins (HSPs), the skin's own cell-protective mechanisms, says Barbara Polla, M.D., the line's creator.

HSPs are one area where science vouches for the mind-body connection, as skin cells emit HSPs when they sense stress. "The HSPs' job is to protect cells from stress. But they also can repair proteins like collagen, chaperoning them from harm," explains Dr. Polla. The John Masters Organics skin-care line uses a subset of HSPs called glycoproteins (part sugar, part protein) in its

Mandarin Maximum Moisture lotion to create a barrier against environmental assaults and dehydration. Masters claims that glycoproteins also stimulate new cell growth. The protect-repair function is the reason London aesthetician Kimberly Sayer uses glycoproteins in her eponymous skin-care line. "They trigger beneficial biological activities," she says.

Perhaps the best evidence that stress harms skin is the fact that Origins, an Estée Lauder brand known for running with the best new research on natural products, has latched onto a category of botanical extracts called adaptogens. They allegedly improve the skin's vital functions when it's inundated with stress hormones, and one of them, *Rhodiola rosea* (golden root or rose root), is in Origins' just launched Youthtopia cream and lotion. Herbal adaptogens such as ginseng and watercress are also the basis of a dozen-plus products in the Bioelements spa line.

For Dr. Murad, the stress-skin connection boils down to water. "The skin under chronic daily stress becomes like a tire that's lost some air," he says, citing a study in which medical students during finals showed marked transepidermal (through the skin) water loss. "The skin cells and the barrier are impaired with stress, and natural plumpness diminishes." He found the same syndrome in about a thousand of his patients. To help the skin make better use of its moisture, Dr. Murad might recommend his Cellular Replenishing Serum and Wet Suit Cell Hydrating supplements. However, his preferred prescription would put him out of business. "Taking time out to read a book, taking a walk, or connecting with people," he says, "is what's really going to help your skin."

