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medical dermatology update



Questions and Answers

Tea tree oil

Q: What is your opinion of the use of tea tree oil for acne?

A: Tea tree oil has been shown to reduce the inflammatory and comedonal lesions of acne but is less effective than benzoyl peroxide and prescription topical therapies and has a slower onset of action. Tea tree oil can also sometimes cause an allergic contact dermatitis.

According to the American Association of Cancer, pomegranate extract may have the potential to lessen the risk of skin cancer.

Aloe benefits?

Q: Other than soothing the skin, what can aloe do?

A: There is conflicting data on the benefits of aloe, as some reports say it enhances wound healing and others say it retards wound healing. It has been used topically to treat psoriasis, dermatitis and minor burns.

Mighty fruit

Q: What fruit extracts can decrease the risk of skin cancer? And what antioxidants are contained in fruits?

A: Pomegranate extract contains polyphenols, anthocyanidins and antioxidant activity. It has been shown to decrease tumor promotion in mice. According to the American Association of Cancer, it may have the potential to

lessen the risk of skin cancer in humans as well, but this has not been proven.

Resveratrol, an antioxidant most highly concentrated in the skin of grapes and red wine has also been shown to provide some protection against skin damage from ultraviolet B radiation.

Flavonoids are contained in apples, blueberries, lemons and oranges, and carotenoids are contained in tomatoes.

Feel green

Q: Is it true that green tea can prevent skin cancer?

A: Green tea has been purported to have anti-inflammatory, anti-aging and anti-carcinogenic effects. Green tea has been shown to prevent skin cancer in mice and possibly humans. The major antioxidant in green tea, epigallocatechin 3 gallate or EGCG reduces damaging free radicals and inflammation in skin. Topical treatment with EGCG before UV exposure has been shown to block ultraviolet induced erythema (redness). Unfortunately, most products containing green tea have not been studied in controlled trials. Nonetheless, green tea is safe and may be a beneficial anti-aging and anti-carcinogenic ingredient.

The good stuff

Q: Can you tell me what botanical antioxidants are?

A: They are plant-derived antioxidants that protect cells from oxidative damage. Some include kinetin, genistein (a soy phytoestrogen), resveratrol, silymarin (milk thistle), curcumin and pycnogenol.

From the vine

Q: What is grape seed extract, and what are its benefits?

A: Grape seed extract is an antioxidant which has been touted to improve skin elasticity and scars and prevent wrinkles by protecting against UV radiation. Its antioxidant capacity is derived from proanthocyanidins, which are found in grape seeds and skin, blueberries, cranberries, black currant, green and black tea. Grape seed extract also enhances wound healing and lessens inflammation and free-radical damage. ■

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