

## BODY

# The New-Pill Parade

**Suddenly, vitamins that are supposed to improve my skin, my hair, even my nails are at every cosmetics counter. What's in them—and are they safe?**

By [Beth Landman](#)

Lately, the word “neutraceutical” is becoming as much a part of a fluent beauty vocabulary as “peeling,” “lifting,” and even the dreaded “fine lines.” Lots of skin-care brands (particularly the recent flood coming out of dermatologists’ offices) suggest a pill (or three, or ten) to accompany your daily ritual of scrubbing, toning, glopping. It’s not radical thinking to suggest that what’s going on inside might turn up on your skin, but what’s in these things? And are they safe?

“People vary in terms of what their systems can tolerate,” says Dr. Melanie Grossman, an assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Columbia University with a private practice on Madison Avenue. “Some can potentially be helpful, but I’ve seen patients have problems. You have to be careful, because these things do accumulate in your body. Vitamin A can cause headaches. Vitamin E slows blood clotting. People take aspirin at the same time, then wonder why they are getting bruises all over their bodies.” Overdosing on vitamin E—a skin-care favorite for its powerful antioxidant properties—has also been linked to heart disease.

Although they won’t necessarily rush to negative judgment, most doctors don’t recommend neutraceuticals (unless, of course, they’ve just delivered a shipment of their own to Sephora). “There is a theoretical reason to believe they may be beneficial,” says Dr. Richard Granstein, head of dermatology at Weill Cornell Medical Center. But he’s also quick to point out that no serious clinical trials have been done yet.

“Many of these products say that they can soften fine lines and renew elasticity, which is practically impossible for a pill or liquid formulation to do,” says Soho dermatologist Dr. Brad Katchen. “We have even seen skin eruptions or rashes from oral supplements.”

Author and skin-care-product developer Dr. Nicholas Perricone, one of the first doctors to market the idea that skin care’s holy grail—that “youthful glow”—might actually come from the inside, is pretty convinced he’s onto something, despite his critics. “From what I see, there are very few problems and tremendous potential benefits,” he says. The \$120 vitamin program he sells as part of his line consists of seven pills to be taken twice a day and includes omega-3 fish oils (said to control histamine reactions), vitamin D, and a super-antioxidant pill containing vitamin A, B-6, copper, and zinc, among other ingredients. “It’s a challenge for a consumer to figure out which supplements to choose,” says Dr. Perricone. “It takes research. I would suggest they pick up my book.” Of course. But Dr. Jonathan Waitman, an instructor at Weill Cornell who specializes in internal medicine and nutrition, advises caution: “A book isn’t necessarily controlled data; a book is

opinion.”

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