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## **A natural move: Feeding your skin**

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With varying degrees of success, cosmetics manufacturers have long turned to nature for ingredients, ranging from arsenic in Elizabethan days to semiprecious gems and sheep placentas in present times.

"There isn't anything that grows or occurs in nature that manufacturers won't put in a product and say that it benefits the skin," says self-described "cosmetic cop" Paula Begoun, author of "Don't Go to the Cosmetics Counter Without Me" and founder of the Seattle-based makeup and skin-care company Paula's Choice.

Case in point: In 2003, a dermatologist on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" touted a high-end skin cream made of growth factors derived from -- brace yourself -- a human foreskin.

It's enough to make shoppers yearn for the sweet simplicity of the 1950s, when Helene Curtis introduced Shampoo Plus Egg.

We may, in fact, be heading in that direction. The cosmetics industry is capitalizing on the same "back to nature" trend that has shifted sales in the food industry, says Internet shopping expert Michelle Madhok, of SheFinds.com.

"People are shopping at Whole Foods and just generally eating better, so the thinking may be that whatever's healthy to ingest is good for the skin, too," she explains.

Lately, skin-care product labels read like grocery lists. Along with botanical and "farm fresh" ingredients such as lavender and goat's milk, additives such as caffeine, cayenne pepper and cinnamon are cropping up in cosmetics, Madhok says.

At the same time, finely powdered semiprecious gems are turning up in facial treatments.

But all that glitters is not gold.

"Most of these ingredients aren't going to cause problems for people, but they're not going to offer any real benefit, either," says Dr. Jonathan Dalton, a dermatologist with Deerfield Dermatology Associates. "I'm not saying that none of them work. There's just not a lot of evidence or studies to support their helpfulness.

"A lot of these things are marketing gimmicks."

Money might be better spent on products that have proved their effectiveness over time. Dalton says the "gold standard treatments" for rejuvenation are vitamin A, glycolic acid, and certain antioxidants such as vitamin C and tea polyphenols, all of which have been shown to have protective or ameliorative effects on the skin.

What's the verdict on some of today's trendiest skin-care ingredients? Gimmicky or golden? We asked the experts to weigh in.

Tourmaline (a semiprecious gem, in powdered form)

- Showing up in: Facial creams, masques and serums such as Aveda's Tourmaline Charged Radiance Masque (\$26) and **Artemis Woman Healing Gems Tourmaline Facial Scrub (\$19.99)**.

- Claims: Aveda Web site claims that "finely powdered tourmaline -- one of nature's most energizing minerals -- boosts skin's energy..."

- Verdict: "I can see how it's marketable -- it's a gem, and that sounds exciting," Begoun says. "But in terms of research that it does anything for the skin, there's zippo, nada, none."

Dalton also reviewed the scientific literature and found "no research from any reputable resource that shows any type of improvement to the skin," he says.

#### Caffeine

- Showing up in: A number of anti-wrinkle and anti-cellulite treatments, including L'Oreal's Body Expertise Sublime Slim Patches (\$13.99).

- Claims: According to the L'Oreal Body Expertise Web site, the stick-on patches deliver a "targeted solution to the exact area needing intensive treatment. Skin-smoothing Hydrogel is infused with ultra-concentrated Caffeine Cx Agent, to firm and tone."

- Verdict: Begoun's research turned up only two studies showing that caffeine improves the appearance of cellulite. One was conducted by Johnson & Johnson, which owns the RoC and Neutrogena brands, both of which sell cellulite creams that contain caffeine. The other was conducted by cosmetic ingredient manufacturers that sell anti-cellulite compounds.

"There is no other independent research showing that caffeine provides any benefit for treating cellulite," Begoun says.

Caffeine does have potential as an antioxidant, though, so it's not necessarily a wasted ingredient in skin-care products, she adds.

Black pepper and cayenne pepper

- Showing up in: Body washes and scrubs, such as Molton Brown's Re-Charge Black Pepper Body Wash (\$25) and Murad's Activating Body Scrub (\$47.50) with cayenne pepper

- Claims: The manufacturers claim their pepper products increase circulation, promote detoxification and energize the skin. The Molton Brown Web site advises consumers to "massage in a circular motion towards the heart to boost circulation."

- Verdict: "I expect the amount of pepper is minuscule," Begoun says, "but I can't imagine putting pepper on the skin -- even just a speck. Can you imagine getting that in your eye?"

Dalton says the primary ingredient in cayenne pepper is a known skin irritant called capsaicin, which paradoxically is sometimes used medicinally to treat severe nerve pain. Capsaicin is a vasodilator, so it will boost circulation, but only locally -- not systemically. Capsaicin can cause rashes and irritate the eyes, and it's not water soluble, so it won't rinse off.

The bottom line is it's best to use cayenne and black pepper while cooking, not cleansing, Dalton says.

Cinnamon

- Showing up in: Lip glosses, such as DuWop's Lip Venom (\$16), as a plumping agent

- Claims: Makes lips appear redder and fuller

- Verdict: Cinnamon will engorge the blood vessels and perhaps cause some swelling, Dalton says; however, the results will be temporary and probably not dramatic enough to achieve the Angelina Jolie look. Side effects may include chapped, sore lips.

Begoun says you can get the same effect from eating Red Hots candy or engaging in an intense make-out session,

and wouldn't either option be more fun -- not to mention cheaper?