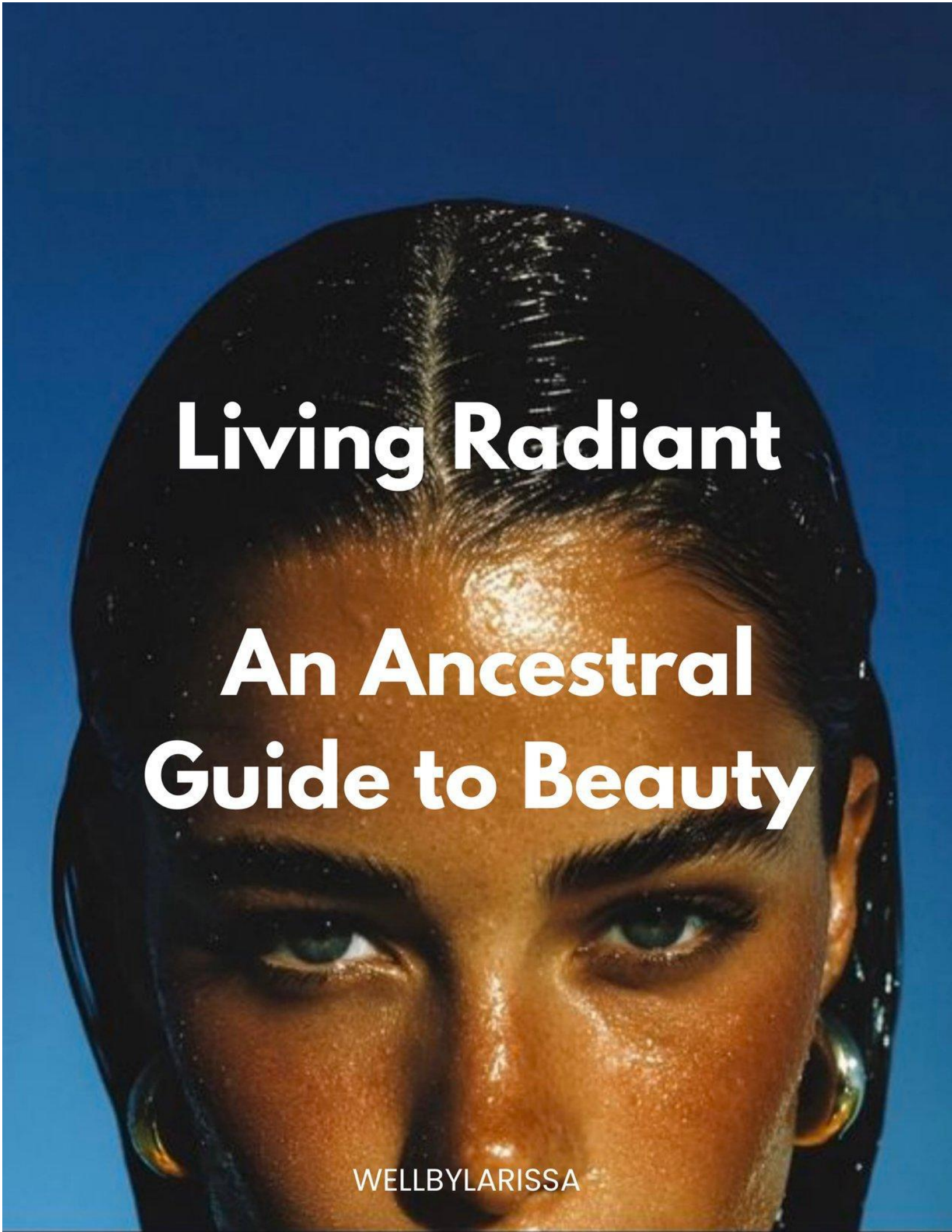




Living Radiant

An Ancestral Guide to Beauty

WELLBYLARISSA

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BEFORE WE BEGIN

The skin is one of the most honest organs in the body. It does not hide what is happening inside. Acne, dullness, premature lines, eczema, thinning hair, brittle nails, and the particular kind of tired aging that shows up in the face of someone running on caffeine, poor sleep, and nutrient depletion, these are rarely just aesthetic problems. Very often they are metabolic signals worth paying attention to.

Traditional cultures observed this without the language of modern science. They noticed across generations that certain foods produced luminous skin, that animal fat kept skin supple into old age, that fermented foods cleared complexions, and that sunlight was medicine, not simply something to fear. The woman who ate liver every week and drank bone broth daily often had skin that aged differently than her peers.

This guide takes those ancestral observations and pairs them with the modern science that is finally catching up. It covers the biology, the contributing causes of modern skin dysfunction, the fat-soluble vitamins and collagen cofactors that conventional beauty conversations often overlook, the traditional beauty practices of cultures from Japan to West Africa to medieval Europe, and practical food and lifestyle habits that tend to produce results.

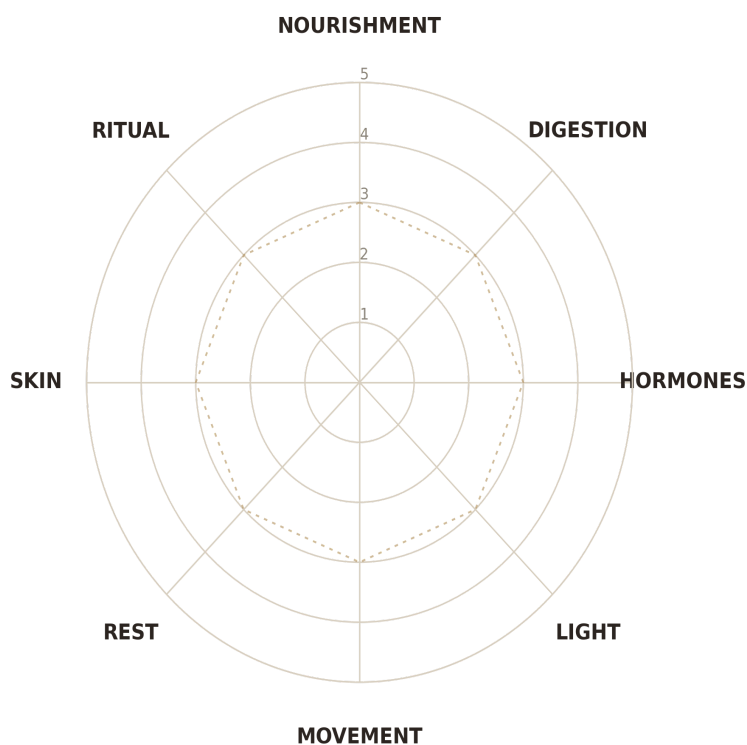
This is not a guide about finding the right serum. It is a guide about nourishing yourself in a way that makes most serums beside the point.

One of the most effective things you can do for how your skin ages is not a product. It is adequate dietary fat, fat-soluble vitamins, collagen precursors, antioxidants from real food, and less of the specific modern inputs that accelerate aging. Everything else is secondary.

YOUR RADIANCE WHEEL

A place to start, and a place to return to

Radiance is not one thing. It is nourishment, digestion, hormones, light, movement, rest, skin, and ritual, working together. Before you read any further, score yourself honestly in each area, 1 meaning depleted and 5 meaning thriving. Come back to this page again in 30 days and fill it in a second time, in a different color or pen if you like.



You don't need to change everything at once. Look at your wheel. Where are you already deeply nourished? Where could you use a little more attention? Choose the one area calling to you most, and let this guide meet you there.



THE BIOLOGY OF HAIR, SKIN, AND NAILS

Understanding what you are working with

Before we can nourish skin, hair, and nails, it helps to understand what they are made of and how they are built. The biology here is not abstract. It directly informs which nutrients matter, why food comes before products, and why the conventional beauty industry has so often been solving for the wrong thing.

The Skin

The skin is the largest organ in the body, covering approximately 20 square feet in the average adult. It is composed of three primary layers. The epidermis is the outermost layer, a waterproof barrier of tightly packed cells called keratinocytes that produce keratin. The dermis is the middle layer, a dense network of collagen and elastin fibers produced by fibroblasts, along with blood vessels, nerve endings, hair follicles, and sebaceous glands. The subcutaneous layer, or hypodermis, is the deepest layer, composed primarily of fat cells that provide insulation, cushioning, and the structural fullness that characterizes youthful skin.

The dermis is where most visible aging occurs. It is roughly 70 percent collagen by dry weight. The collagen network of the dermis provides the structural scaffolding that keeps skin firm, plump, and resilient. As collagen production declines with age, and as existing collagen becomes fragmented by oxidative stress and inflammation, that scaffolding thins and lines and sagging become more visible.

THE SCIENCE

Skin cell turnover: the average skin cell lives approximately 30 days, and the entire epidermis replaces itself roughly every month. This means meaningful changes in skin quality, driven by nutritional change, are often visible within 4 to 8 weeks. You are not changing how your current skin looks. You are changing what your new skin cells are built from.

The Hair

Each hair on the body grows from a follicle embedded in the dermis. The visible hair shaft is made of dead, keratinized cells stacked in a highly organized structure. The living portion of hair is entirely within the follicle, specifically at the hair bulb at the base, where rapidly dividing matrix cells produce the hair shaft.

Hair growth occurs in three phases: anagen (active growth, lasting 2 to 7 years), catagen (transition, 2 to 3 weeks), and telogen (resting and shedding, roughly 3 months). At any given time, approximately 85 to 90 percent of scalp hairs are in anagen, 1 percent in catagen, and 10 to 15 percent in telogen. When a significant nutritional stress, illness, hormonal shift, or dietary change occurs, a disproportionate number of follicles can shift into telogen simultaneously, producing the excessive shedding called telogen effluvium, which typically appears 2 to 4 months after the triggering event.

THE SCIENCE

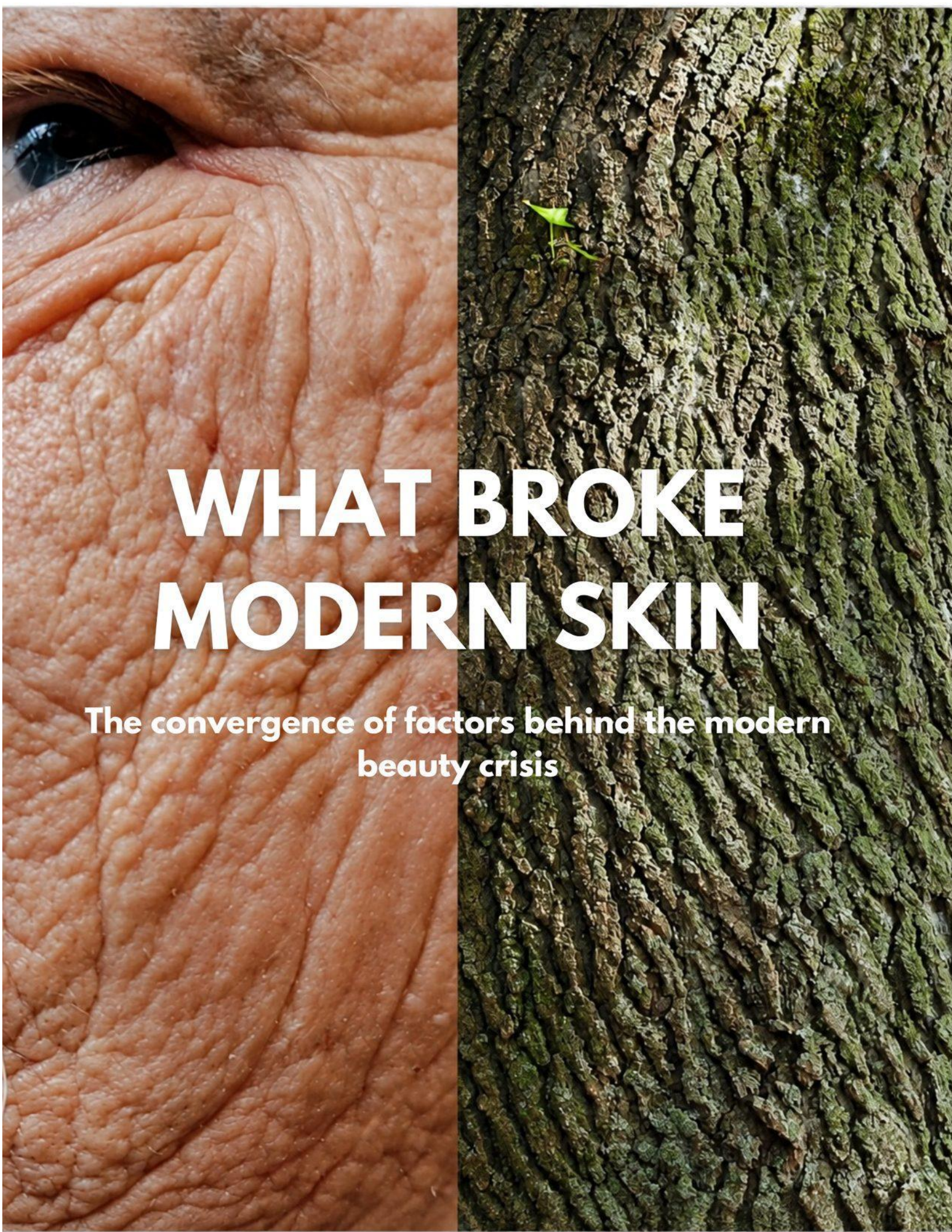
Hair follicles are among the most metabolically active structures in the body, second only to bone marrow. They require a continuous, abundant supply of amino acids, vitamins, and minerals. When the body perceives nutritional scarcity, hair is one of the first non-essential processes to be downregulated. Hair loss is rarely just a hair problem. It is often a whole-body nutritional signal worth listening to.

The Nails

Nails are composed almost entirely of hard keratin, the same protein that makes up hair and the outer layer of skin. They grow from the nail matrix, a region of actively dividing cells beneath the base of the nail. Fingernails grow approximately 3 to 4 millimeters per month. Toenails grow more slowly, at approximately 1.5 millimeters per month.

Because nails grow slowly and are composed of cells produced months ago, nail changes reflect nutritional status from months past. White spots, ridges, slow growth, brittleness, and changes in color or shape can all reflect nutritional deficiencies or systemic health issues that preceded the visible change by weeks to months.

Skin, hair, and nails are something like nutritional archives. They record what you have been eating, absorbing, and exposing yourself to for months. The condition of your skin today reflects what you were doing 4 to 8 weeks ago. Your nails reflect months further back. Any meaningful improvement plan asks for sustained nutritional support, not a single intervention.



WHAT BROKE MODERN SKIN

The convergence of factors behind the modern
beauty crisis

Premature aging, chronic acne in adult women, widespread eczema, rosacea, psoriasis, thinning hair, and brittle nails are far more common now than they were in previous generations, and far more common than they are in many traditional cultures today. This is not simply genetic destiny for most people. It is, in large part, the predictable consequence of specific modern inputs working against the skin's natural systems.

The Seed Oil Shift

One of the most significant dietary changes affecting skin over the last century has been the replacement of traditional animal fats with industrial seed oils. The skin relies on saturated and monounsaturated fats to maintain a strong lipid barrier. The stratum corneum, the outermost layer of the epidermis, is composed primarily of ceramides, cholesterol, and fatty acids. When the diet is chronically high in unstable polyunsaturated fats from seed oils, these oxidation-prone fats are incorporated into skin cell membranes, making the barrier more fragile, permeable, and vulnerable to inflammation.

Seed oils are rich in linoleic acid, an omega-6 fat that becomes incorporated into the phospholipid bilayer of skin cells. Oxidized linoleic acid in the membrane can generate reactive oxygen species that damage surrounding cells and contribute to inflammatory cascades associated with acne, eczema, and rosacea.

THE SCIENCE

A widely cited 2021 study found that higher linoleic acid consumption, largely from seed oils, was associated with higher rates of acne in the population studied. Traditional populations with low seed oil consumption, including some eating high-fat diets built on animal fats, have shown notably lower rates of acne and inflammatory skin conditions.

The Low-Fat Years

The low-fat dietary movement of the 1980s and 1990s removed some of the very nutrients skin depends on most. Vitamins A, D, E, and K2 are fat-soluble. They require dietary fat for absorption and are found almost exclusively in animal foods. A generation of women who avoided fat, avoided egg yolks, and avoided butter, replacing them with low-fat processed food, depleted the fat-soluble nutrient stores that skin, hair, and nail health depend on. The consequences of that depletion are still showing up in skin clinics and dermatology offices today.

Chronic Inflammation From Processed Food

Skin aging is, in large part, an inflammatory process. The fibroblasts that produce collagen are exquisitely sensitive to inflammatory signaling. When systemic inflammation is chronically elevated, matrix metalloproteinases, the enzymes that break down collagen and elastin, are upregulated. Every processed meal, every refined carbohydrate spike, every seed oil cooked food, and every artificial additive contributes something to this inflammatory load. Over time, the visible result can be skin that ages faster than its biological age would predict.

Synthetic Skincare

The modern skincare industry has built a category worth hundreds of billions of dollars largely on treating the consequences of poor internal nutrition with external products. Many of these products contain synthetic ingredients that provide temporary cosmetic improvement while disrupting the skin's natural function. Synthetic surfactants can strip the skin's natural microbiome and lipid barrier. Synthetic fragrances can trigger inflammatory responses in sensitive skin. Silicones can create a film that limits the skin's ability to

breathe and communicate with its environment. Mineral oil, derived from petroleum, sits on the skin surface without meaningfully nourishing it.

Nutrient Depletion

The modern diet is often calorically abundant and nutritionally sparse. The nutrients most commonly lacking in modern diets, vitamin A as retinol, vitamin D, vitamin K2, zinc, collagen precursors like glycine, proline, and vitamin C, omega-3 fatty acids, biotin, iron, and silica, are precisely the nutrients skin, hair, and nails are most dependent on. Many of us are eating plenty of food while under-nourishing our skin at the cellular level.

A striking paradox: we spend more money on skincare products than any previous generation in history, and skin health complaints are widespread. The ancestral woman who spent little on skincare but ate liver and tallow and drank bone broth regularly often had skin that no modern product alone reliably replicates. Food is not the whole answer, but it is a much bigger piece of it than most of us have been told.



THE SKIN-GUT CONNECTION

**An important and often overlooked beauty
connection**

Skin conditions without an obvious topical cause often have a gut component worth investigating. Acne, eczema, rosacea, psoriasis, and general skin dullness are complex and multifactorial. Genetics, hormones, stress, sleep, and skin barrier function all play meaningful roles alongside anything happening in the gut. That said, a growing body of research points to the gut-skin axis as one real and often underappreciated piece of the picture, whether through direct gut-skin signaling or through the broader systemic inflammation and immune dysregulation that gut dysfunction can produce.

The Gut-Skin Axis

The gut-skin axis describes the bidirectional communication system between the gut microbiome, the gut lining, the immune system, and the skin. The gut and skin share a common embryological origin, both developing from the same ectodermal layer in utero, and they maintain a functional connection throughout life through the immune system, the endocrine system, and the nervous system.

The gut microbiome produces short-chain fatty acids, including butyrate, that help regulate immune function and support the integrity of both the gut lining and the skin barrier. Specific gut bacteria produce B vitamins, including biotin and B12, that matter for skin and hair health. Gut bacteria also influence the metabolism of estrogen, which can affect skin collagen, sebum production, and hydration. And the state of the gut lining influences how much inflammatory endotoxin reaches the bloodstream, which can in turn influence skin inflammation in susceptible people.

THE SCIENCE

Rosacea research: several studies have found higher rates of small intestinal bacterial overgrowth, or SIBO, in patients with rosacea compared to controls, and in some studies, rosacea symptoms improved after SIBO was treated. Rosacea is increasingly understood, in at least a subset of cases, as a condition with a gut component expressing through the skin, though it is not the whole story for everyone who has it.

Gut Permeability and Inflammatory Skin

When the gut lining is compromised and intestinal permeability increases, bacterial lipopolysaccharides, or LPS, from gram-negative bacteria can enter the bloodstream more readily. LPS is a potent inflammatory trigger. It can activate immune cells and contribute to the release of inflammatory cytokines, including TNF-alpha and IL-1beta, which are associated with increased MMP production in skin fibroblasts, a process linked to collagen and elastin breakdown. These pathways may also contribute to inflammation in sebaceous glands that plays a role in some acne.

For some people with inflammatory skin conditions, supporting gut lining integrity is a meaningful piece of a broader approach, alongside whatever else is contributing, whether that is hormones, stress, genetics, or topical care. It is one contributing factor among several, not a guaranteed fix on its own.

The Microbiome-Skin Connection

The skin itself has a microbiome, a community of bacteria, fungi, and other microorganisms living on the skin surface and in the follicles. This skin microbiome is in ongoing communication with the gut microbiome. Disruptions to the gut microbiome are associated with changes in the skin microbiome, and the skin microbiome of people with acne, eczema, and rosacea often shows dysbiosis patterns that echo what is happening in the gut.

Gut-Supportive Habits Worth Considering

- **Bone broth:** gelatin and glycine in bone broth may help support the gut lining and are a gentle, food-based way to add these compounds to your diet.
- **Fermented foods regularly:** a more diverse gut microbiome is associated with better skin clarity and fewer inflammatory skin symptoms in research. Aim for fermented food most days rather than treating it as an every-meal requirement.
- **Reducing seed oils:** oxidized linoleic acid from seed oils is associated with both gut and skin inflammation in the research, which is one more reason to favor traditional fats.
- **Being thoughtful with emulsifiers:** polysorbate 80 and carboxymethylcellulose, found in many ultra-processed foods, have been shown in some studies to disrupt the protective gut mucus layer.
- **Prebiotic fiber:** diverse, fiber-rich vegetables feed the bacteria that produce butyrate, the short-chain fatty acid tied to both gut lining integrity and skin barrier function.

ANCESTRAL WISDOM

The connection between digestive health and skin beauty is documented in Ayurvedic medicine going back over 3,000 years. Ayurveda understands the skin as an outward expression of the quality of rasa dhatu, the plasma tissue considered foundational to all other tissues, which depends on healthy agni, or digestive fire. It is an old observation that modern research is only now starting to map in physiological detail, and like most things in this guide, it is one part of a larger, individual picture.



THE SKIN- HORMONE CONNECTION

Hormonal shifts often show up on your face

The skin is a hormone-responsive organ. Estrogen, progesterone, testosterone, cortisol, thyroid hormone, and insulin all have receptors in skin cells and can affect skin structure, function, and appearance. Understanding which hormones affect the skin, and how, is a useful piece of any comprehensive approach to skin health.

Estrogen and Collagen

Estrogen is one of the primary collagen-preserving hormones. Skin has estrogen receptors throughout the dermis and epidermis. Estrogen supports the production of collagen and hyaluronic acid, increases skin thickness and moisture content, and helps moderate the activity of matrix metalloproteinases that break down collagen. This is a large part of why the most dramatic acceleration of skin aging in women tends to occur in the years around menopause, when estrogen declines and collagen production can drop meaningfully.

Estrogen dominance relative to progesterone can also contribute to skin problems. When estrogen is high relative to progesterone, it can drive excess sebum production and fluid retention in the skin. Hormonal acne that flares before menstruation is often connected to the estrogen-progesterone shifts of the late luteal phase, combined with the androgen sensitivity of sebaceous glands in some people.

Androgens and Acne

Testosterone and its more potent form, DHT, bind to receptors in sebaceous glands and can stimulate sebum production. When androgens are elevated, whether from PCOS, insulin resistance, chronic stress, or the natural androgen surge of adolescence, sebaceous glands can produce excess sebum that clogs follicles, creating conditions where acne-associated bacteria proliferate and inflammation follows.

Chin and jaw acne in adult women is frequently androgenic in origin and often correlates with the luteal phase of the menstrual cycle. Ancestral interventions some people find helpful include supporting healthy blood sugar through food, zinc (which may help modulate 5-alpha reductase activity), spearmint tea (traditionally used to support healthy androgen balance), and reducing seed oil intake.

Cortisol and Skin Aging

Cortisol can accelerate skin aging through several mechanisms. It can inhibit fibroblast proliferation, reducing the cells that produce collagen and elastin. It can stimulate MMP production, increasing collagen breakdown. It can impair wound healing and skin barrier repair, reduce hyaluronic acid synthesis, and contribute to facial fat redistribution that changes the structural support of the face.

Chronic stress, even at levels well below what most people would describe as severe, can produce enough cortisol elevation to meaningfully affect collagen production and skin integrity over months and years. Practices that many find helpful for cortisol and skin: adequate sleep, adequate food, movement without overtraining, genuine rest, and adaptogenic herbs that some research suggests may help modulate HPA axis reactivity.

Thyroid and Skin Quality

Thyroid hormone helps regulate the rate of skin cell turnover. In hypothyroidism, skin cells can divide more slowly, producing dry, rough, thick skin with a pale, waxy quality. Hair follicles can become less active, contributing to the diffuse hair thinning sometimes seen with hypothyroidism. Nails can become brittle and ridged.

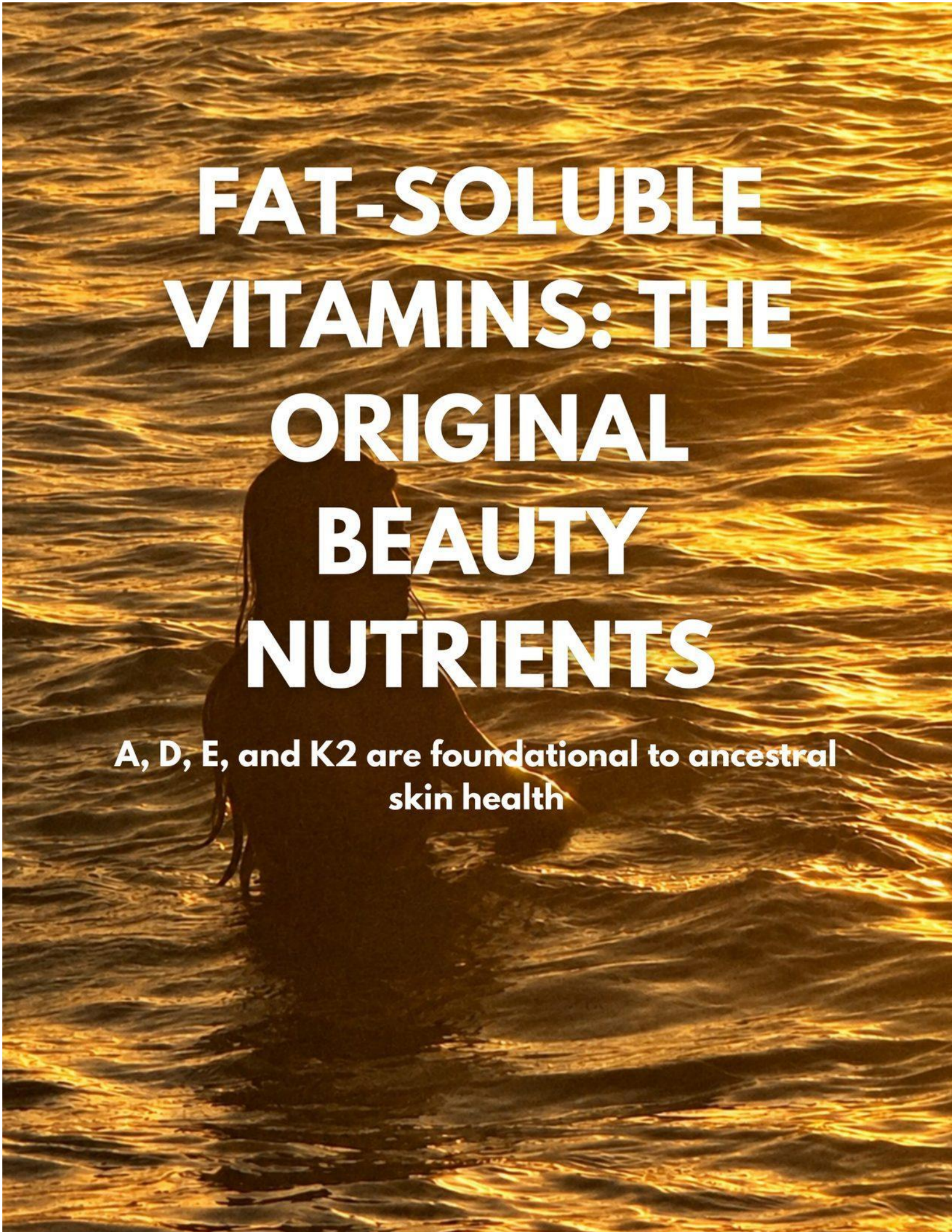
Some women with thyroid-related skin changes have standard thyroid labs within normal range but impaired T4 to T3 conversion or elevated reverse T3. A complete thyroid panel and comprehensive nutritional support, particularly iodine, selenium, iron, and adequate calories, can be a useful and often overlooked approach to thyroid-mediated skin concerns, ideally guided by a knowledgeable practitioner.

Insulin and Glycation

High blood sugar drives glycation, a chemical reaction in which glucose molecules attach to proteins, including collagen and elastin, forming advanced glycation end products, or AGEs. AGEs make collagen fibers stiffer and more cross-linked rather than supple and resilient. They generate free radicals, contributing to oxidative damage, and they can trigger inflammation through their receptor RAGE, creating a pro-aging inflammatory environment.

THE SCIENCE

Research suggests glycation contributes meaningfully to structural collagen changes associated with aging. A diet high in refined carbohydrates and sugar is thought to accelerate skin aging through glycation at a measurable rate. Ancestral diets were generally lower in refined sugar and high-glycemic carbohydrates, which may be one contributing reason traditional populations have often shown slower visible skin aging than their industrialized counterparts, alongside many other lifestyle differences.

A person is standing in shallow water, their back to the camera, looking out at a sunset. The water is dark, and the sky and horizon are a brilliant, shimmering orange and yellow. The person's silhouette is dark against the bright background.

FAT-SOLUBLE VITAMINS: THE ORIGINAL BEAUTY NUTRIENTS

**A, D, E, and K2 are foundational to ancestral
skin health**

The four fat-soluble vitamins, A, D, E, and K2, are among the most consistently underappreciated nutrients in beauty and skin health conversations. They are found almost exclusively in animal foods and animal fats. They require dietary fat for absorption. They work synergistically, each one supporting the others' activity. And their depletion, which is common in women who have followed low-fat dietary advice, is associated with a recognizable pattern of skin, hair, and nail decline that no topical product can fully address on its own.

Vitamin A: The Skin Vitamin

Vitamin A is among the most directly skin-active of all vitamins. It helps regulate keratinocyte differentiation, the process by which skin cells mature and migrate from the basal layer to the surface. It supports fibroblast activity and collagen production. It helps normalize sebum production in sebaceous glands. And in its retinoid forms, it directly modulates gene expression in skin cells, which is why pharmaceutical retinoids are among the most evidence-supported topical anti-aging and acne treatments available.

An important distinction: retinol, the form found in animal foods including liver, egg yolks, and grass-fed dairy, is preformed vitamin A that the body can use directly. Beta-carotene, found in plant foods including carrots and sweet potatoes, must be converted to retinol, and this conversion is inefficient and highly variable between individuals. Many people, particularly those with thyroid dysfunction, diabetes, or certain genetic variants, convert beta-carotene poorly. Relying on plant sources alone for vitamin A can be insufficient for some people's skin needs.

THE SCIENCE

Liver is one of the most concentrated food sources of retinol on earth, with a single 3-ounce serving of beef liver providing well over the daily value for vitamin A. Traditional cultures that ate liver regularly, which was nearly universal before the 20th century, were maintaining vitamin A status that modern plant-heavy, low-liver diets often do not replicate. Vitamin A is fat-soluble and can accumulate, so more is not automatically better; food sources and moderate supplementation are generally safer than high-dose supplements.

Vitamin D: The Anti-Aging Vitamin

Vitamin D receptors are present in nearly every type of skin cell, including keratinocytes, fibroblasts, and immune cells. Vitamin D helps regulate skin cell proliferation and differentiation, supports the skin's innate immune defenses, is associated with reduced inflammatory activity relevant to eczema and psoriasis, and supports skin barrier integrity by stimulating production of cathelicidins, a class of antimicrobial peptides.

Vitamin D is synthesized in the skin in response to UVB radiation. This process requires cholesterol in the skin membrane and occurs in a minutes-to-hours window depending on latitude, skin pigmentation, time of day, and season. Sun-avoidant behavior, combined with widespread vitamin D deficiency in many populations, has left many people without adequate levels of one of skin's most fundamental regulatory nutrients. Testing is the most reliable way to know where you stand.

Vitamin E: The Membrane Protector

Vitamin E is the primary fat-soluble antioxidant in cell membranes. It helps protect the polyunsaturated fatty acids in cell membranes from oxidative damage. In skin, it is concentrated in sebum and in the lipid layers of the stratum corneum, where it helps protect against UV-induced oxidation, supports wound healing, and works synergistically with vitamin C to help regenerate both vitamins after they neutralize free radicals.

Good food sources of vitamin E include sunflower seeds, almonds, hazelnuts, avocado, and olive oil for tocopherols, and animal foods for tocotrienols, the less common but biologically active forms. Whole food vitamin E, with its full family of eight related compounds, is generally considered more effective than isolated tocopherol alone.

Vitamin K2: The Calcification Regulator

Vitamin K2 is perhaps the least understood of the four fat-soluble vitamins in the context of skin health. K2 activates proteins called Matrix Gla Proteins, or MGP, that help prevent calcium from depositing inappropriately in soft tissues, including the skin's elastic fibers. Inappropriate calcification of elastin is one contributor to elastin degradation, a process K2 may help moderate.

K2 is found almost exclusively in animal foods from grass-fed, pastured animals, including grass-fed butter and ghee (in the MK-4 form), aged hard cheeses from grass-fed cows, egg yolks from pastured hens, organ meats, and natto, fermented soy, in the MK-7 form. The modern diet, with its displacement of grass-fed animal fats by seed oils and grain-fed conventional animal products, has reduced typical dietary K2 intake for many people.

ANCESTRAL WISDOM

The traditional Japanese diet, particularly among rural populations who consumed natto regularly alongside fish and miso, has been associated in some research with well-preserved skin quality and lower rates of age-related skin changes relative to some Western populations with similar sun exposure. Researchers have pointed to higher K2 intake from natto as one plausible contributing factor among several, including diet, lifestyle, and genetics.



COLLAGEN: THE SCIENCE AND THE SOURCE

**What it actually is, how it works, and how to
build it**

Collagen is the most abundant protein in the human body, comprising roughly a third of total protein mass. It is the structural scaffolding of the skin, tendons, cartilage, bones, gut lining, and blood vessels. In skin, collagen provides the tensile strength and resilience that keep skin firm, plump, and youthful. Understanding collagen is foundational to understanding skin aging and how to slow it.

The Biology of Collagen

Collagen is a triple helix protein built from three polypeptide chains wound tightly together. The primary amino acids that make up the collagen triple helix are glycine, proline, and hydroxyproline. Glycine accounts for roughly a third of all amino acids in collagen by mass. Hydroxyproline is created from proline through a reaction that requires vitamin C as an essential cofactor, which is why vitamin C deficiency produces scurvy, whose symptoms include severe skin fragility and impaired wound healing: without vitamin C, collagen cannot be properly hydroxylated and the triple helix cannot form correctly.

There are at least 28 types of collagen in the human body. Type I collagen is the most abundant and is the primary collagen of skin, bone, tendons, and ligaments. Type II is the primary collagen of cartilage. Type III collagen, found alongside Type I in skin, provides elasticity and is particularly important in wound healing. Type IV collagen forms the basement membranes that separate tissue layers.

THE SCIENCE

Fibroblasts are the cells that produce collagen and elastin in the dermis. Fibroblast activity tends to peak in youth and decline with age. By the 40s, fibroblasts are estimated to produce meaningfully less collagen per year than at peak production, and by the 60s total dermal collagen content has often declined substantially. This is one reason many people find that investing in fibroblast-supporting nutrition earlier rather than later pays off.

What Supports Collagen Production

- **Vitamin C:** the essential cofactor for prolyl hydroxylase and lysyl hydroxylase, the enzymes that convert proline and lysine to hydroxyproline and hydroxylysine in the collagen triple helix. Without adequate vitamin C, collagen cannot be synthesized or properly cross-linked.
- **Glycine:** the most abundant amino acid in collagen. Dietary sources include bone broth, skin and connective tissue from slow-cooked meats, and gelatin.
- **Proline:** the second most abundant amino acid in collagen. Found in egg whites, dairy, bone broth, and meat.
- **Copper:** required for lysyl oxidase, the enzyme that cross-links collagen and elastin fibers. Found in liver, oysters, and dark chocolate.
- **Zinc:** required for the metalloenzymes that regulate collagen synthesis and breakdown. Found in oysters, red meat, and pumpkin seeds.
- **Silica:** involved in formation of the collagen backbone. Found in horsetail herb, nettles, and cucumbers.
- **Vitamin A:** supports fibroblast proliferation and collagen gene expression.
- **Mechanical stimulation:** fibroblasts respond to physical loading by producing more collagen, one reason resistance training supports skin quality over time.

Bone Broth: An Ancestral Collagen-Supportive Food

Long-simmered bone broth contains glycine, proline, and hydroxyproline, alongside chondroitin sulfate, hyaluronic acid, glucosamine, and minerals, in a food matrix. A well-made bone broth that gels when cooled contains meaningful amounts of these collagen-related compounds in a form that is well absorbed as part of a whole diet.

Bone broth is delivered in a complete food matrix with natural cofactors, and it also provides glycine and gelatin, compounds that some research associates with gut lining support, alongside the collagen precursors themselves.

Collagen Supplements: What the Research Shows

Hydrolyzed collagen peptide supplements, typically taken at 2.5 to 10 grams per day for 8 to 12 weeks, have shown benefits for skin elasticity, hydration, and fine lines in a number of randomized controlled trials. The proposed mechanism: dietary collagen peptides are absorbed in the gut and are thought to signal fibroblasts to increase production of new collagen, elastin, and hyaluronic acid.

An important consideration for collagen supplements is source quality. Bovine collagen from grass-fed, pasture-raised cattle is generally considered high quality. Marine collagen from wild-caught fish provides Type I and Type III collagen in a form some find well absorbed. Collagen supplements are generally considered to work better when taken alongside vitamin C, which is required for their incorporation into new collagen.



THE ANCESTRAL BEAUTY DIET

What traditional cultures ate that supported
radiant skin

Many traditional cultures associated with documented longevity and vitality shared specific dietary patterns that modern nutritional science is still working to fully explain. The common thread is not any particular regional cuisine. It is the consistent presence of specific nutrient categories: animal fats, organ meats, bone broth, fermented foods, mineral-rich foods, and whole unprocessed plant foods eaten alongside them.

Japanese Traditions: Fish, Seaweed, and Fermented Foods

Traditional Japanese dietary patterns, particularly in coastal and rural communities, have historically been associated with well-preserved skin quality and slower visible aging in some populations studied. The traditional diet that has been linked to this was centered on fish and shellfish (providing DHA, astaxanthin, iodine, selenium, and zinc), miso and fermented soy (providing K2, diverse probiotics, and bioavailable minerals), seaweed (providing iodine, fucoidans that may support skin barrier function, and unique antioxidant compounds), green tea (providing EGCG, an antioxidant compound studied for anti-glycation activity), and sweet potatoes and root vegetables as a primary carbohydrate source.

ANCESTRAL WISDOM

Astaxanthin, the carotenoid that gives wild salmon and shellfish their pink color, is one of the more potent antioxidants studied to date. It crosses the blood-brain barrier and concentrates in skin tissue, and some clinical research has explored its role in reducing oxidative damage and supporting skin resilience to UV exposure, alongside, not instead of, external sun protection. Traditional Japanese coastal populations consumed astaxanthin regularly through diet in amounts that modern supplementation only approximates.

West African Traditions: Shea, Palm, and Fermented Grain

Traditional West African beauty culture has long been built around shea butter as both a food and a topical treatment, red palm oil rich in carotenoids and tocotrienols, fermented grain and legume preparations including ogi and locust beans that provide diverse probiotic species, and abundant tropical fruit providing vitamin C and polyphenols. The combination of high vitamin C, carotenoid-rich fats, and fermented food is associated with strong antioxidant intake and gut-skin axis support.

European Traditional Diets: Tallow, Lard, and Organ Meats

Traditional European diets before industrialized food centered on animal fats including butter, lard, tallow, and suet, organ meats, especially liver, eaten regularly, bone broth as the base of many soups and stews, fermented dairy including kefir and sour cream, and fermented and lacto-fermented vegetables, especially sauerkraut and pickled root vegetables.

The skin of traditional European populations eating this way was documented by researcher Weston A. Price as notably different from their industrialized urban counterparts, even within the same generation and country. Traditional alpine Swiss communities eating grass-fed dairy, rye bread, and organ meats showed, in his observational accounts, different skin and bone structure than their urban relatives eating refined flour and industrialized food.

Middle Eastern and Mediterranean Traditions: Olive Oil, Organ Meats, and Fermented Dairy

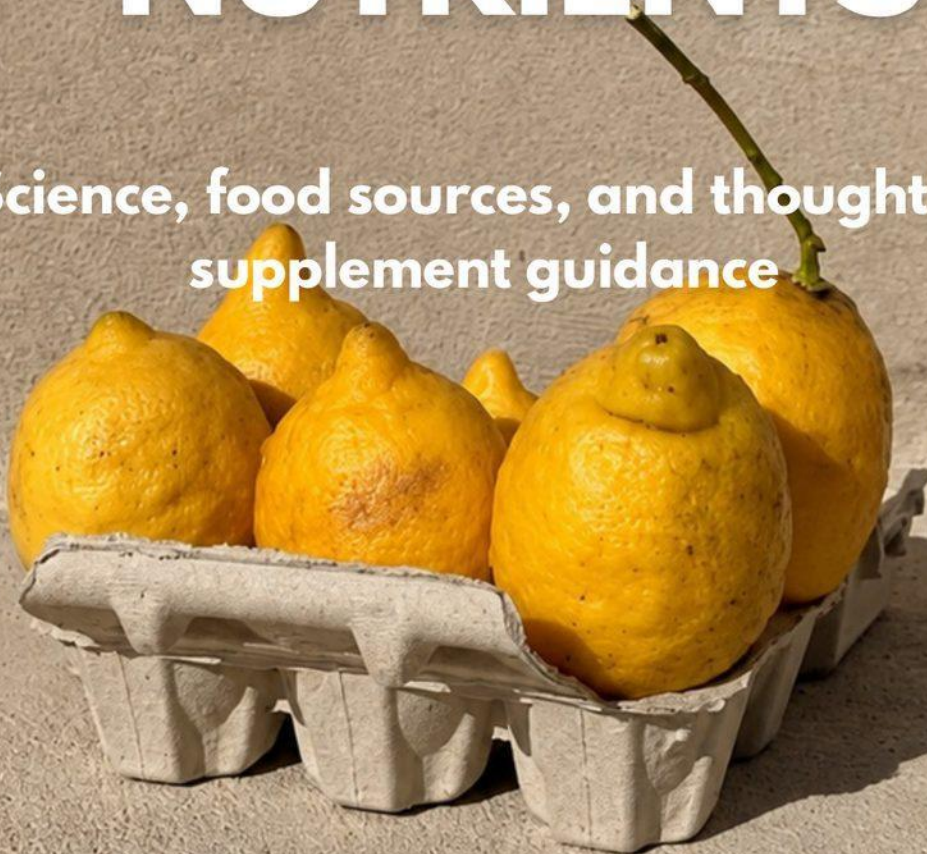
The traditional Mediterranean diet associated with documented longevity benefits is not the modern olive-oil-and-pasta simplification. It is the traditional version, which included organ meats eaten weekly, labneh and fermented dairy at most meals, whole olives and olive oil as the primary fat, abundant fresh herbs providing antioxidants and antimicrobial compounds, and bone-in, slow-cooked meats that released collagen and minerals into every broth and sauce.

Ayurvedic Beauty Nutrition

Ayurvedic medicine has one of the most comprehensive traditional frameworks for beauty nutrition of any traditional health system. The concept of ojas, the most refined product of digestion, is understood as a source of glow, luster, and vitality, built through eating ghee and raw dairy, drinking warm spiced milk in the evening, eating seasonal food prepared with digestive spices, and maintaining strong digestive fire, or agni. Specific Ayurvedic beauty foods include saffron for luminosity and even skin tone, ashwagandha for stress-related skin aging, amla, or Indian gooseberry, one of the highest vitamin C foods on earth, sesame for skin moisture and nail strength, and ghee as the primary vehicle for fat-soluble beauty nutrients.

THE TOP 25 BEAUTY NUTRIENTS

Science, food sources, and thoughtful
supplement guidance



This is your reference for the nutrients that most directly affect skin, hair, and nail health. Each nutrient is listed with its role, its best ancestral food sources, and guidance on when supplementation may be worth considering. Food comes first throughout this guide, and so does testing, before supplementing, whenever that is practical, especially for vitamin D, iron, iodine, zinc, selenium, and vitamin A. These particular nutrients carry real risks in excess, and individual needs vary enough that a personalized approach, ideally with your own practitioner, will always serve you better than a standard dose.

Nutrient	What It Supports	Best Ancestral Food Sources	When Supplementation May Be Considered
Vitamin A (Retinol)	Regulates skin cell turnover; sebum production; collagen synthesis; helps prevent hyperkeratosis and acne	Beef liver, chicken liver, egg yolks, butter, cod liver oil	Most people meet needs through liver and egg yolks; preformed vitamin A is fat-soluble and can build up, so reserve supplements like cod liver oil for when animal liver isn't a regular part of your diet
Vitamin D3	Skin immune defense, barrier function, cell turnover; associated with reduced inflammation	Wild salmon, sardines, egg yolks, sun exposure	Testing (25-OH vitamin D) is the best way to know if you need this. When levels are low, D3 with K2 is commonly used, dosed to bring levels into range rather than a fixed amount for everyone
Vitamin E	Membrane antioxidant; protects skin lipids from oxidation; supports UV resilience	Sunflower seeds, almonds, avocado, olive oil	Whole food sources usually cover this; a mixed tocopherol supplement can be considered if intake of seeds, nuts, and oils is consistently low
Vitamin K2	Helps prevent inappropriate elastic fiber calcification; activates MGP; supports collagen cross-linking	Grass-fed butter, ghee, natto, aged cheese, liver	Most relevant for those eating little grass-fed dairy, liver, or natto; an MK-7 supplement may be considered in that case
Vitamin C	Essential collagen synthesis cofactor; antioxidant; supports UV resilience and iron absorption	Bell peppers, kiwi, citrus, parsley, amla	Easy to get from food daily; supplementation is rarely necessary unless intake is inconsistent or during a focused collagen-support period
Glycine	Primary collagen amino acid; may support gut lining and skin barrier	Bone broth, skin-on slow-cooked meats, gelatin	Bone broth is the whole-food source; collagen peptides or glycine powder can be a convenient addition if broth isn't a regular part of your diet
Zinc	Regulates sebum; involved in 5-alpha reductase activity; collagen cross-linking; wound healing	Oysters, red meat, pumpkin seeds, organ meats	Worth testing if you have persistent acne, hair loss, or slow wound healing. If confirmed low, supplement short-term and pair with copper, since sustained high-dose zinc can deplete copper
Copper	Required for lysyl oxidase; collagen cross-linking; melanin production	Liver, oysters, dark chocolate, sesame seeds	Deficiency is uncommon with a varied diet; generally only considered alongside zinc supplementation, ideally with testing
Silica	Involved in collagen backbone formation; nail and hair strength; skin elasticity	Horsetail herb, nettles, cucumbers, bone broth	Horsetail tea is a gentle food-based source most people can try; supplementation isn't well studied enough to recommend routinely
Omega-3 DHA/EPA	Anti-inflammatory; membrane integrity; sebum regulation; UV resilience	Wild salmon, sardines, mackerel, anchovies	Fatty fish two to three times weekly covers most needs; a fish oil supplement can help if fish intake is low, ideally guided by testing where available
Biotin	Supports keratin synthesis for hair and nails; fatty acid metabolism	Egg yolks, liver, almonds, salmon	True deficiency is uncommon; supplement only if levels are confirmed low, since high-dose biotin can interfere with certain thyroid and hormone lab tests

Nutrient	What It Supports	Best Ancestral Food Sources	When Supplementation May Be Considered
Iron	Oxygen delivery to follicles and skin cells; low ferritin is associated with hair shedding	Liver, red meat, oysters, paired with vitamin C	Only supplement if ferritin has been tested and confirmed low. Iron in excess is not benign, so this is not a nutrient to add preventively
Selenium	Antioxidant via glutathione peroxidase; supports thyroid conversion; anti-inflammatory	Brazil nuts, organ meats, wild fish, eggs	Testing before supplementing is worthwhile when possible. Selenium has a narrow range between adequate and excessive intake, so more is not better
Iodine	Thyroid hormone production; skin cell turnover regulation	Seaweed, shellfish, wild fish, iodized salt	Food sources are generally sufficient for most people. Best discussed with a practitioner first, especially with any personal or family thyroid history
Magnesium	Cofactor for hundreds of enzymes; may help lower cortisol; supports sleep and repair	Pumpkin seeds, leafy greens, cacao, bone broth	Widely under-consumed. A glycinate form is generally well tolerated and reasonable for most people to try, adjusted to bowel tolerance
Vitamin B12	Red blood cell production; nerve function; skin cell renewal	Liver, clams, sardines, eggs, dairy	Especially relevant for anyone eating little animal protein. Worth testing if fatigue or neurological symptoms are present
Folate	Cell division and DNA repair for rapidly dividing skin and hair cells	Liver, leafy greens, legumes, eggs	Food sources generally cover needs. A methylfolate supplement may be considered for known MTHFR variants or during preconception, ideally with guidance
Vitamin B5	Wound healing; sebum regulation; coenzyme A synthesis	Liver, avocado, chicken, sunflower seeds	Deficiency is rare; food sources are generally sufficient for most people
Vitamin B6	Collagen cross-linking cofactor; sebum regulation; hormone metabolism	Chicken, salmon, potatoes, bananas	Food sources are typically sufficient; avoid high-dose, long-term supplementation, which has been linked to nerve symptoms in some cases
Astaxanthin	Potent carotenoid antioxidant; associated with UV resilience and collagen preservation	Wild salmon, shrimp, trout, red algae	A food-first nutrient. Supplementation is optional and best viewed as a complement to, never a substitute for, sun-safety practices
Hyaluronic Acid	Binds water in the dermis; supports skin plumpness and joint cushioning	Bone broth, cartilage-rich cuts, skin-on poultry	Food sources provide the building blocks; oral HA supplements have modest supporting evidence and are optional
Sulfur (MSM)	Involved in collagen disulfide bonds; nail and hair keratin; anti-inflammatory	Eggs, meat, cruciferous vegetables, garlic, onion	Whole food sulfur sources are generally sufficient for most people; consider a supplement only if you notice a clear personal benefit
Lutein/Zeaxanthin	Skin antioxidant; UV and blue light filtering	Egg yolks, leafy greens, marigold	Egg yolks and leafy greens are excellent sources; supplementation is optional for those eating little of either
Probiotics	Gut-skin axis support; may reduce inflammatory skin symptoms; vitamin synthesis	Kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, miso, yogurt	Fermented foods are the ancestral source and a reasonable daily practice for most people. A targeted supplement strain may help during or after antibiotic use, or with specific digestive symptoms
Collagen Peptides	Direct fibroblast stimulation; skin elasticity, hydration, and nail strength	Bone broth is the whole-food form	Bone broth is the food-first version; peptide supplements are a convenient addition, not a requirement, and generally work best paired with vitamin C

BUILD YOUR BEAUTY PLATE

One simple formula, endless combinations

You don't need to memorize the nutrient table to eat for radiant skin. Most meals that support skin, hair, and nails follow the same simple shape.

protein + traditional fat + colorful produce + mineral-rich food + a collagen-rich addition

Here are three example plates built on that formula. Use them as a starting point, not a script.

Breakfast Plate

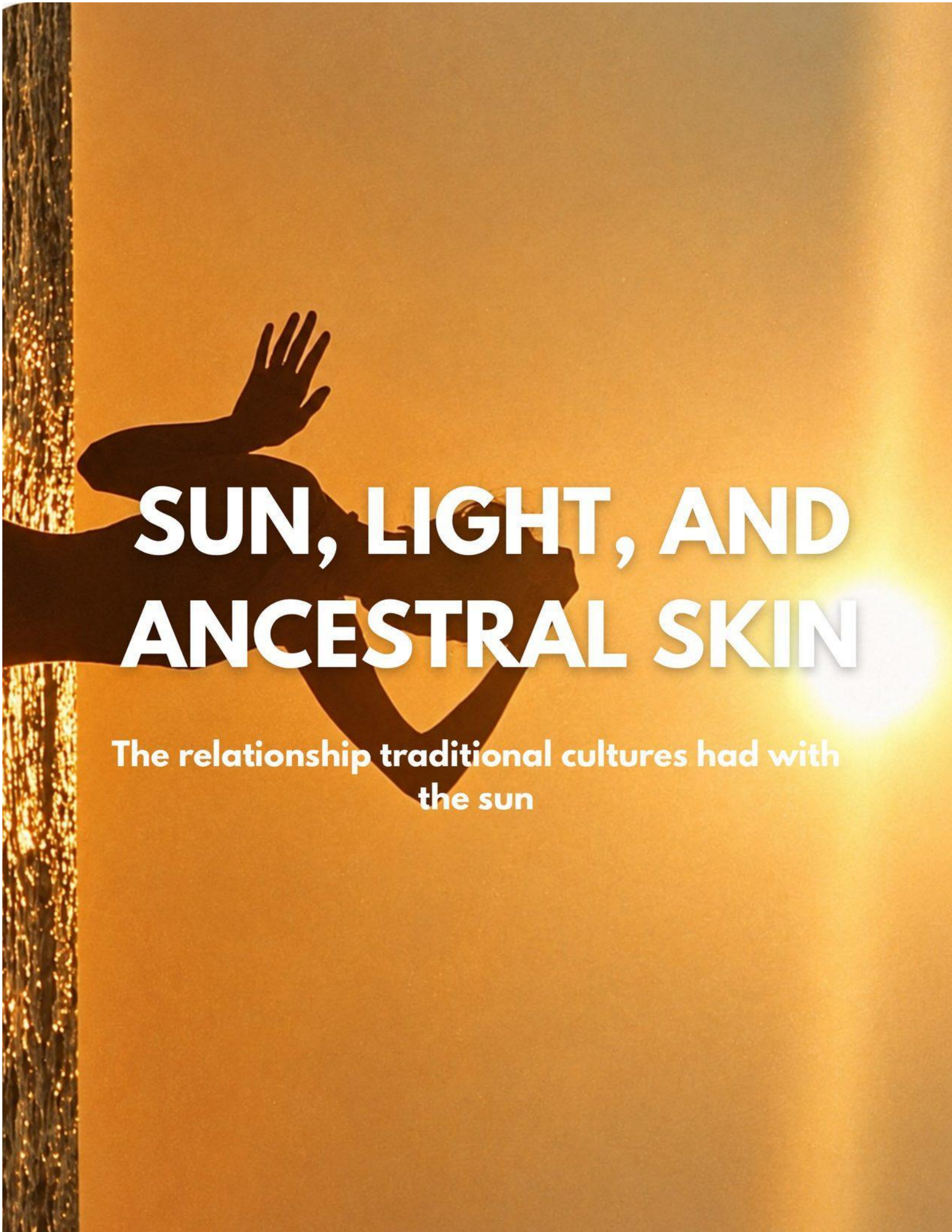
Two eggs cooked in butter, sauteed greens, half an avocado, a side of sauerkraut, and a mug of bone broth or a splash of collagen in your coffee.

Lunch Plate

Wild salmon, roasted sweet potato with ghee, a big arugula salad with olive oil and lemon, kimchi on the side, and a sprinkle of pumpkin seeds.

Dinner Plate

Slow-cooked oxtail or a grass-fed steak, roasted root vegetables in tallow, a colorful salad with bell pepper and herbs, fermented vegetables, and the gelatin-rich cooking liquid spooned over everything.

The background is a vibrant, warm orange-yellow gradient, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. On the left side, there is a vertical strip of darker, textured orange. A dark silhouette of a person's arms and hands is visible, with the hands raised and spread wide, reaching towards the center of the frame. The main title is written in large, bold, white capital letters across the middle of the image.

SUN, LIGHT, AND ANCESTRAL SKIN

**The relationship traditional cultures had with
the sun**

Modern dermatology has, for good reason, emphasized that UV exposure is a major driver of skin aging and skin cancer risk, and that sun protection matters. Ancestral cultures, meanwhile, often related to the sun as medicine and as a fundamental part of daily life. Both perspectives hold real truth, and this chapter tries to hold them together: understanding the actual science of sun and skin lets you protect against genuine UV-related damage while keeping the light exposure that skin, hormones, and overall health benefit from. How much sun is right for you depends heavily on your skin tone, the UV index where you live, the season, any medications you take, and your personal or family history of skin cancer. There is no single number that applies to everyone, and nothing in this chapter is a substitute for talking with a dermatologist about your own risk.

The Science of UV and Skin

UV radiation exists in three forms: UVA, UVB, and UVC. UVC is absorbed by the atmosphere and does not reach the earth's surface. UVB, wavelengths 280 to 315nm, penetrates to the epidermis, where it causes sunburn, triggers vitamin D synthesis, and is a primary driver of UV-induced DNA damage. UVA, wavelengths 315 to 400nm, penetrates more deeply into the dermis, generating reactive oxygen species that contribute to collagen and elastin breakdown, pigmentation changes, and skin thickening over time.

The distinction matters: UVB is both the protective, through vitamin D, and the damaging, through burn and DNA damage, form of UV. UVA is primarily damaging without the vitamin D benefit. Ordinary window glass blocks most UVB but transmits UVA, which means sitting near a window for long stretches provides collagen-degrading UVA exposure without the vitamin D benefit of UVB.

Morning Light and Your Circadian Rhythm

Long before sunscreen was a consideration, getting outside within the first hour or two after waking, ideally without sunglasses, was simply part of daily life. Morning light, viewed with your eyes (never look directly at the sun), and felt on your skin, helps anchor your circadian rhythm: it supports a healthy morning cortisol rise, helps regulate melatonin later that night, and is associated with better sleep, mood, and hormonal rhythm in the research on light and circadian biology. Because the sun sits low in the sky in the early morning, UV intensity is typically much lower than at midday, which is one reason this window is a comfortable, low-risk place to start if you are rebuilding a healthier relationship with light. Ten to twenty minutes outside in the morning, ideally paired with a short walk, is a simple daily practice many people find worth keeping.

Build a Healthy Relationship With Light

Traditional peoples generally did not apply SPF 50 sunscreen and sit in the sun for six hours, and they also were not typically indoors under artificial light all day either. Many had what is sometimes called a solar callus: skin that was gradually adapted to regular outdoor life over time, with melanin density that built up gradually across a season rather than skin that went from fully covered all winter to unprotected for hours the first hot day of summer.

Melanin is produced in melanocytes in response to UV exposure and helps absorb UV radiation and protect underlying DNA. This adaptation happens gradually, over days to weeks of consistent, moderate exposure, and it varies enormously by skin tone: it offers real but partial protection, and it is never a substitute for burning prevention, shade, clothing, or sunscreen when you are in strong sun for any length of time.

A grounded, modern version of this ancestral relationship with light might look like: regular, brief, unprotected outdoor time when the sun is gentler, in the morning or late afternoon, building up gradually

rather than all at once; genuine care to avoid burning at any time of day, using shade, clothing, hats, and sunscreen as appropriate for your skin type, the UV index, and how long you will be outside; and treating nutrient-dense food as support for your skin's resilience, never as a replacement for physical sun protection. If you have fair skin, a personal or family history of skin cancer, are on any photosensitizing medication, or are simply unsure what is right for you, please check with a dermatologist. What is a reasonable amount of midday sun for one person can be a real risk for another.

ANCESTRAL WISDOM

Red light and near-infrared light therapy is, in some ways, a modern echo of sitting by a fire or in early morning sun. The red and near-infrared wavelengths, roughly 600 to 1000nm, that predominate at sunrise, sunset, and around fire, penetrate the skin and are thought to stimulate cytochrome c oxidase in mitochondria, supporting cellular energy production, and some research has explored their role in fibroblast activation and wound healing. Many traditional cultures spent time by firelight in the evening. It's a lovely thought that this wasn't just warmth and community. It may also have been a gentle, daily source of this kind of light.

Internal Support, Not a Substitute

Ancestral diets were rich in certain antioxidants that research has associated with some degree of photoprotective support from within, including carotenoids from animal foods like astaxanthin from wild salmon and shellfish, beta-carotene and lycopene from plant foods, and vitamin E from seeds and animal fats. These compounds may offer a modest, supportive layer of antioxidant defense. They do not block UV rays the way shade, clothing, or sunscreen do, and nutrition should never be treated as a reason to skip external sun protection when you need it.

- **Astaxanthin:** found in wild salmon, shrimp, and trout; studied for its antioxidant activity and a possible supportive role in skin's UV resilience, alongside, not instead of, sun protection.
- **Lycopene:** found in cooked tomatoes; some research associates regular cooked-tomato consumption with modest measurable photoprotective markers.
- **Omega-3 fatty acids:** associated with reduced UV-induced inflammation in some studies; wild salmon eaters have shown somewhat lower sunburn responses than those eating very low omega-3 diets in limited research.
- **Polyphenols from green tea:** EGCG has been studied for its role in reducing UV-induced oxidative stress in skin cells.
- **Adequate vitamin D status:** some evidence suggests a modest protective association with UV-induced DNA damage pathways, one more reason testing and correcting a true deficiency is worthwhile.

Choosing a Non-Toxic Sunscreen

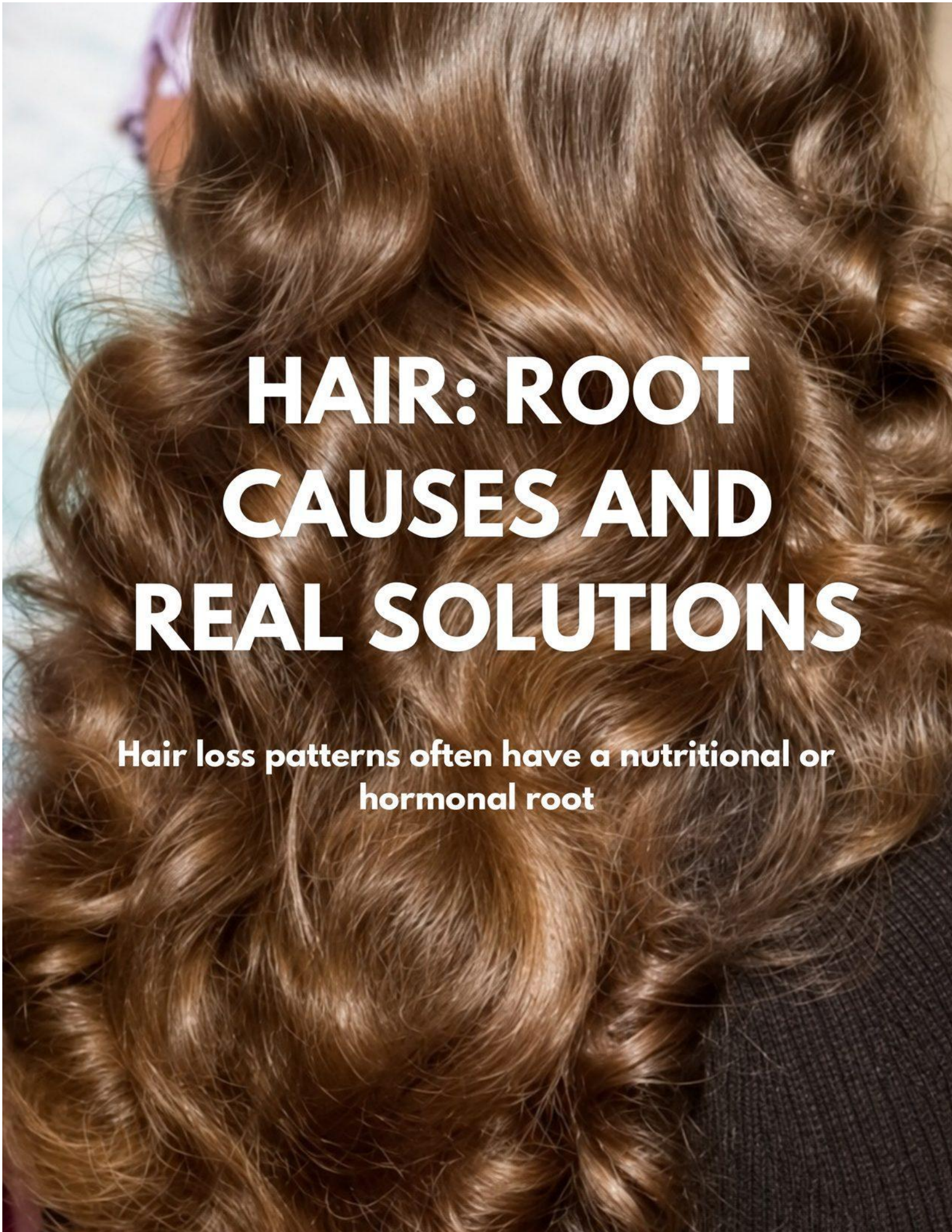
When you are in direct sun for any real length of time, sunscreen is still one of the most useful tools you have, and choosing one thoughtfully matters. Many conventional chemical sunscreens rely on ingredients like oxybenzone, octinoxate, octisalate, homosalate, and avobenzone, which absorb into the bloodstream and have raised enough questions around hormone activity and reef toxicity that many people prefer to avoid them when a good alternative exists.

- **Look for:** non-nano zinc oxide or titanium dioxide as the active ingredient. These sit on the surface of the skin and physically reflect and scatter UV rays rather than being absorbed systemically, and they are considered broad-spectrum, covering both UVA and UVB.
- **Look for:** a broad-spectrum label and an SPF appropriate to your skin tone and time in the sun, reapplied roughly every two hours outdoors and after swimming or sweating.
- **Consider avoiding:** oxybenzone, octinoxate, octocrylene, homosalate, and synthetic fragrance if you are trying to minimize endocrine-disrupting ingredients and are choosing between two otherwise similar products.
- **A starting point:** many people look to organizations like the Environmental Working Group's sunscreen guide for updated, independently reviewed options each season, since formulations change often.

Natural Fiber Clothing as Sun Protection

Clothing is, in a real sense, the oldest and most reliable form of sun protection, and it's one that does not require reapplying. Tightly woven natural fibers, linen, heavier cotton, and hemp among them, block a meaningful amount of UV radiation, and a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses with UV protection cover two of the areas, the face and eyes, that are both especially sun-exposed and hardest to keep resunscreened throughout the day. Many fabrics today are also rated for UPF, or ultraviolet protection factor, which gives you a concrete number to look for if you want clothing built specifically for long days outside.

Food and lifestyle can support your skin's resilience from within. They are not a substitute for shade, clothing, and sunscreen when you need them. Both things are true, and both matter.



HAIR: ROOT CAUSES AND REAL SOLUTIONS

**Hair loss patterns often have a nutritional or
hormonal root**

Hair loss in women is common and can be genuinely distressing. It is also, in a large share of cases, addressable through understanding its underlying cause. Hair loss is rarely just a hair problem. It is often a signal worth investigating further, whether that points to nutritional deficiency, hormonal imbalance, thyroid dysfunction, or inflammatory load.

Types of Hair Loss and Their Roots

- **Telogen Effluvium (diffuse shedding):** the most common cause of diffuse hair shedding in women. Often triggered by a systemic stress 2 to 4 months before the shedding begins: crash dieting, childbirth, surgery, illness, significant nutritional deficiency, or a major hormonal shift. Addressing the trigger and providing robust nutritional support generally supports recovery over time.
- **Androgenetic Alopecia (patterned thinning):** associated with elevated androgens, particularly DHT. Produces patterned thinning at the crown and a widening part rather than diffuse shedding. Associated with PCOS, post-hormonal contraception, perimenopause, and insulin resistance. Zinc, saw palmetto, and blood sugar regulation are commonly discussed supportive interventions, best explored with a practitioner.
- **Thyroid-Related Hair Loss:** most commonly associated with Hashimoto's thyroiditis. Can produce diffuse thinning across the scalp, loss of the outer third of the eyebrows, and dry, coarse hair texture. A full thyroid workup, not just TSH, is generally the more complete approach.
- **Iron Deficiency (low ferritin):** a commonly missed cause of hair loss in women. Some women with hair loss have ferritin levels that fall within a lab's normal range but are still on the lower end. Discussing your specific ferritin number and symptoms with your provider, rather than relying on 'normal' alone, is often useful.
- **Malabsorption and Gut Issues:** celiac disease, inflammatory bowel disease, and significant gut dysbiosis can impair absorption of key hair nutrients: iron, zinc, biotin, B12, and vitamin D. Hair loss that does not respond to supplementation may point to an absorption issue worth investigating.

Nutrients Commonly Linked to Hair Health

- **Iron and Ferritin:** test rather than guess, and supplement only if confirmed low. Eating liver weekly is a food-first way to support iron status.
- **Zinc:** found in oysters, red meat, and pumpkin seeds.
- **Biotin:** egg yolks and liver are well-absorbed food sources; most people do not need a supplement.
- **Protein:** hair is made largely of protein. Inadequate total protein intake can reduce hair growth. Many people do well aiming for roughly 0.7 to 1 gram per pound of body weight from varied protein sources, adjusted to individual needs.
- **Silica:** from horsetail or nettle tea, thought to support the hair shaft from within.
- **Vitamin D:** worth testing, since low levels are associated with hair shedding in some research.
- **Omega-3:** may help reduce scalp inflammation that can impair follicular function.

What Ancestral Cultures Did for Hair

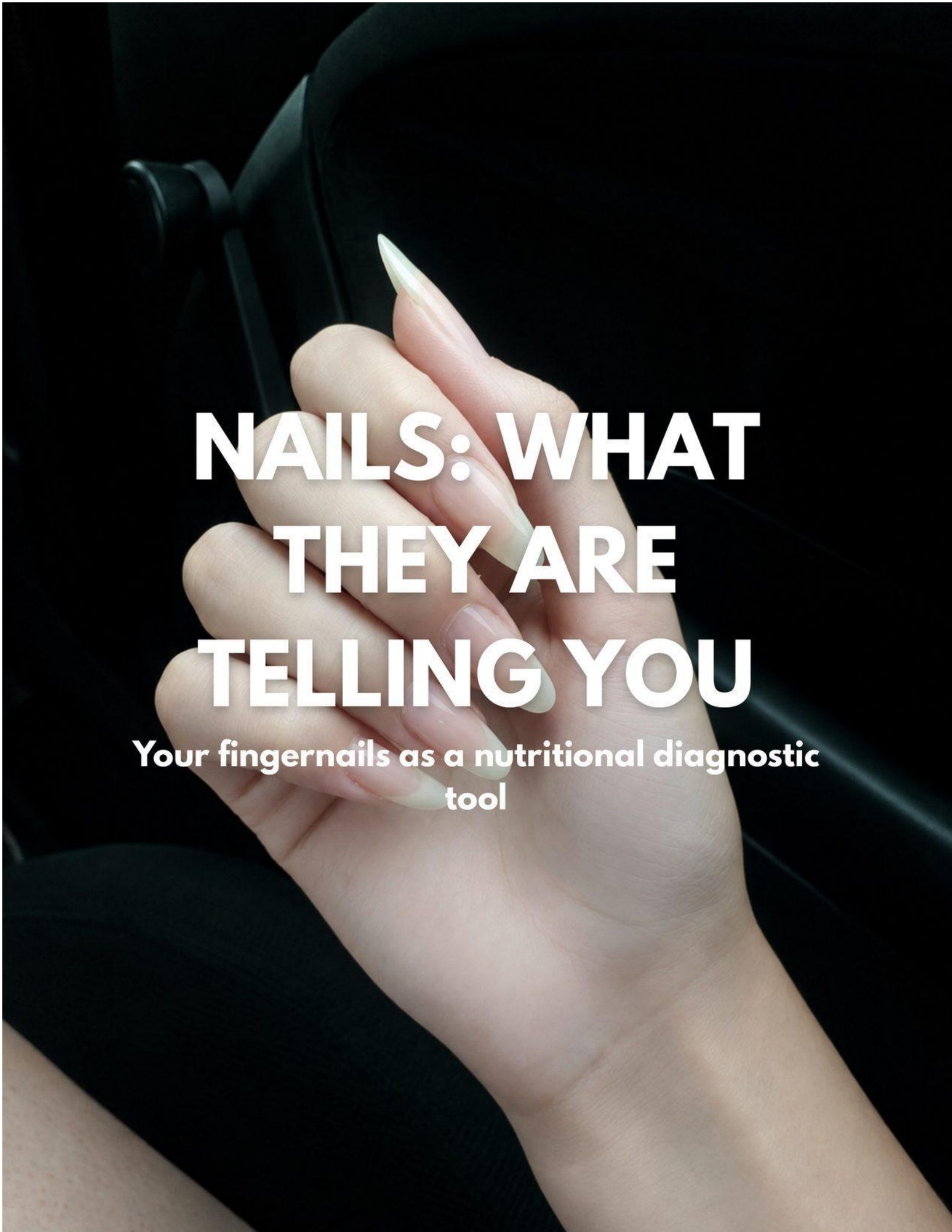
Traditional hair care across cultures shared several consistent practices. Oil application to the scalp and hair was widespread: sesame oil in Ayurvedic tradition, coconut oil in South and Southeast Asian traditions, argan

oil in Moroccan tradition, and tallow and animal fat in Indigenous American and African traditions. These oils were massaged into the scalp to stimulate circulation and protect the hair shaft, often applied hours before washing.

Herbal hair rinses were also widespread: rosemary vinegar rinse in European tradition, neem leaf in Ayurvedic tradition, and hibiscus flower rinse in African and Caribbean traditions. These rinses were typically applied as a final step after washing, and were thought to seal the hair cuticle and support scalp comfort.

THE SCIENCE

A 2023 randomized controlled trial found that rosemary oil performed comparably to minoxidil for stimulating hair growth over six months of use in the study population. The traditional rosemary vinegar rinse documented across European folk practice contains related active compounds in a gentler, food-based form.



NAILS: WHAT THEY ARE TELLING YOU

**Your fingernails as a nutritional diagnostic
tool**

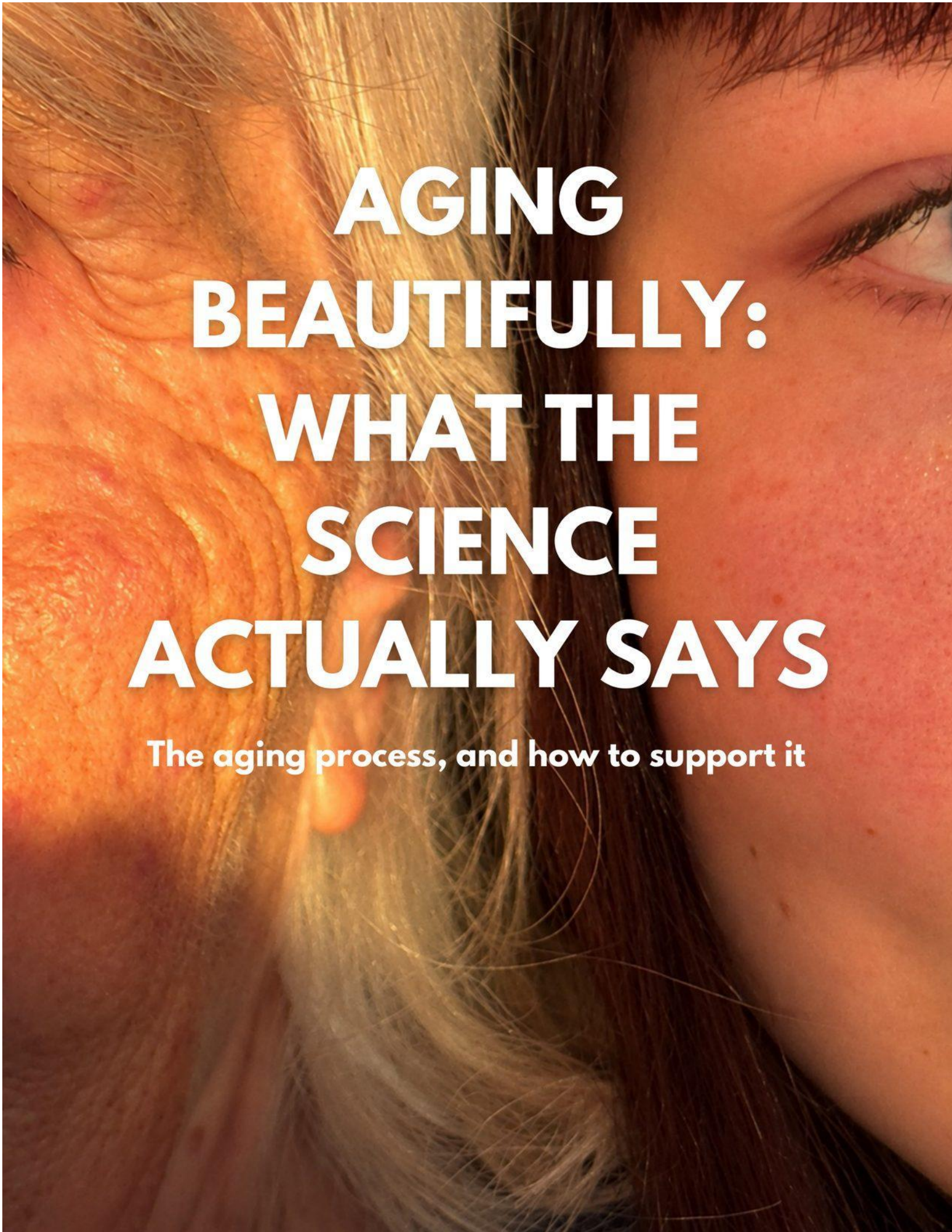
Nail changes are among the more reliable early signs of nutritional deficiency and systemic health shifts. Because nails grow slowly and reflect nutritional status from weeks to months ago, they offer a useful, if delayed, window into recent metabolic history.

Nail Signs and What They May Mean

- **Koilonychia (spoon nails):** associated with iron deficiency anemia. The nail becomes soft and scoops upward rather than curving naturally. Uncommon in the modern West but one of the more specific nail signs of significant iron deficiency.
- **White spots:** true white spots (leukonychia) are usually caused by minor trauma to the nail matrix. Persistent white spots across multiple nails may point toward zinc status worth checking.
- **Vertical ridging:** common with age and can reflect dehydration, nutrient depletion (particularly iron, B12, and zinc), and thyroid function.
- **Horizontal ridging:** Beau's lines reflect a temporary halt in nail growth, often due to a significant systemic stress, illness, nutritional shift, or hormonal change. The ridge's location on the nail can help estimate roughly when the disruption occurred.
- **Brittle or peeling nails:** can indicate deficiencies in biotin, sulfur-containing amino acids (found in eggs and meat), silica, iron, or hydration. Frequent water exposure and harsh detergents can also strip the nail's natural oils.
- **Yellow nails:** can indicate fungal infection, respiratory conditions, lymphedema, or thyroid dysfunction. Persistent yellowing that does not resolve with antifungal treatment is worth discussing with your provider.
- **Pale nail beds:** very pale nail beds can indicate anemia. Pink, well-oxygenated nail beds with a clean white crescent at the base are generally associated with good iron status and circulation.

A Nail-Supportive Routine

- Biotin from egg yolks: aim for at least two egg yolks daily as a food-first source.
- Silica from horsetail tea, steeped 20 minutes: one to two cups daily.
- Sulfur-containing foods: eggs, meat, garlic, and onion support the disulfide bonds that give nails their strength.
- Iron and ferritin: test rather than guess if nails are brittle, ridged, or pale, since nail symptoms are among the earlier signs of iron deficiency.
- Topical care: massage a small amount of tallow balm or jojoba oil into the nail beds and cuticles nightly to support moisture retention.

A close-up photograph of two faces. The face on the left is older, with prominent wrinkles and a warm, orange-toned skin. The face on the right is younger, with smooth skin and a similar warm tone. The text is overlaid on the image.

AGING BEAUTIFULLY: WHAT THE SCIENCE ACTUALLY SAYS

The aging process, and how to support it

Skin aging is not a single process. It is the convergence of multiple biological mechanisms, some intrinsic, driven by genetics and time, and some extrinsic, driven by environment and lifestyle. Understanding each mechanism helps explain why certain nutritional and lifestyle choices tend to support skin over time, and why no single product addresses all of them at once.

Contributing Mechanisms of Skin Aging

- **Collagen decline:** fibroblast activity tends to decrease with age, and the collagen produced becomes increasingly fragmented and disorganized. This is a primary structural driver of wrinkles, sagging, and thinning skin, and is supported by collagen precursor nutrition, vitamin A, copper, and mechanical stimulation.
- **Glycation:** sugar molecules cross-link collagen and elastin fibers through the Maillard reaction, making them stiffer and more brittle. This process tends to accelerate with high blood sugar and may be moderated through lower-glycemic eating.
- **Oxidative stress:** free radicals generated by UV exposure, pollution, and metabolic processes damage skin cell membranes, DNA, and proteins. The antioxidant network of vitamins C and E, glutathione, carotenoids, and polyphenols helps neutralize this damage.
- **Inflammaging:** chronic, low-grade systemic inflammation contributes to aging through cytokine-mediated MMP upregulation, oxidative stress, and mitochondrial dysfunction. Seed oils, refined sugar, processed food, and gut dysbiosis are commonly discussed dietary contributors.
- **Mitochondrial decline:** skin cells, particularly fibroblasts and keratinocytes, need abundant mitochondrial energy for collagen synthesis and cell renewal. As mitochondrial efficiency declines with age, energy available for repair tends to decrease. Some people explore CoQ10, red light therapy, and mitochondrial-supportive nutrition here.
- **Cellular senescence:** aging cells that stop dividing but do not die accumulate in the dermis and secrete inflammatory compounds. Diet quality, movement, and certain polyphenols like quercetin and fisetin from whole foods are areas of ongoing research interest.
- **Epigenetic drift:** gene expression changes with age in patterns sometimes called the epigenetic clock. These changes are associated with chronic stress, poor nutrition, and toxic exposures, and may be supported by adequate sleep, nutrient density, and stress reduction.

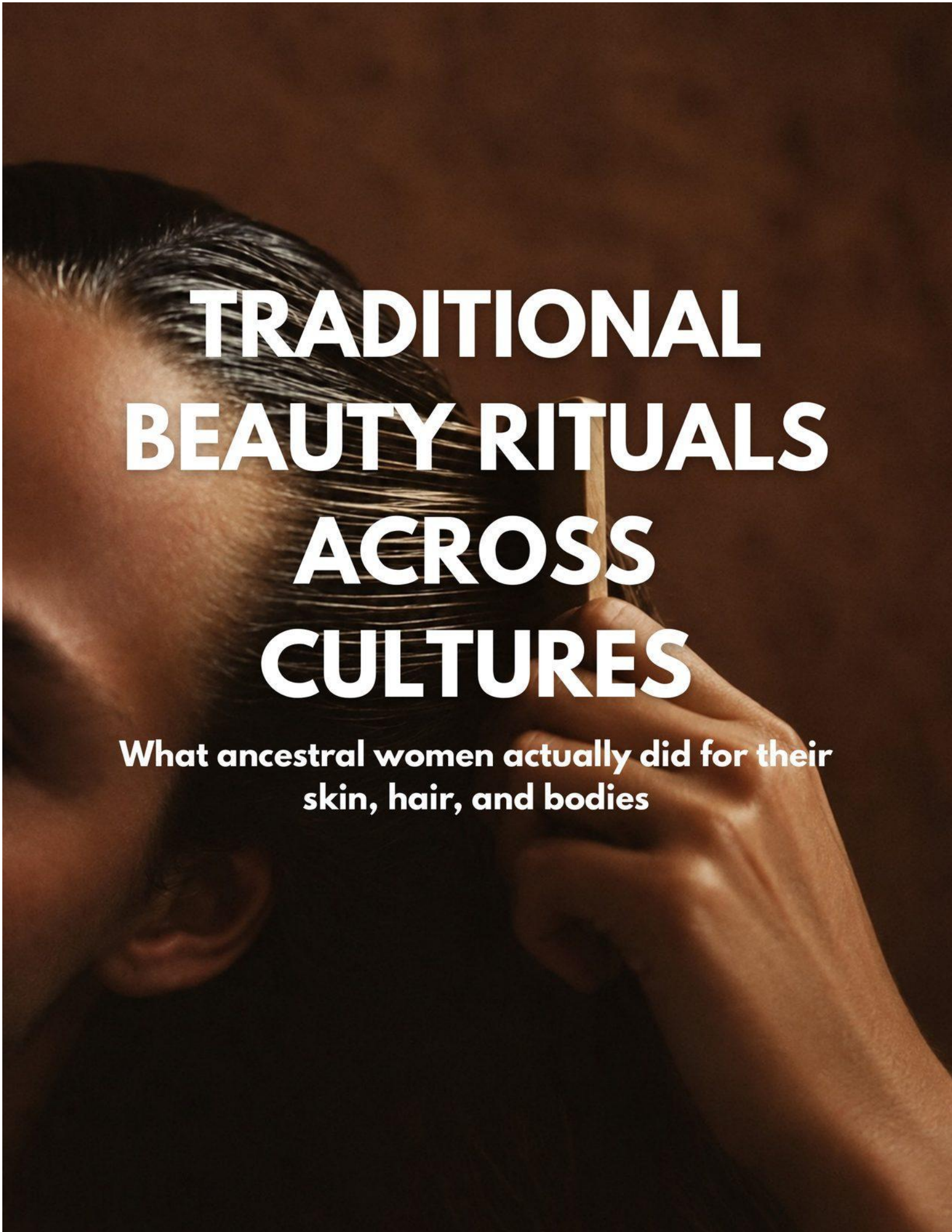
What Traditional Cultures Tended to Share

Populations that maintained visible vitality and skin health into older age tended to share several things in common. They ate nutrient-dense whole food, including organ meats and animal fat. They maintained strong community connection and a sense of purpose. They moved their bodies consistently throughout the day rather than exercising intensely and then sitting for the rest of it. They slept in alignment with darkness and light. And they were largely free from the chronic inflammatory inputs of the modern food system.

ANCESTRAL WISDOM

Observational accounts of Okinawan elders who maintained traditional dietary patterns into the 1990s described skin that appeared notably younger than their chronological age by Western standards. Their traditional diet was rich in pork and pork organs, including collagen-rich skin and ears, fermented soy products, seaweed, sweet potatoes, turmeric, and bitter melon. Their fat intake came from lard rather than

seed oils. They also lived within a community structure that provided consistent social connection and a clear sense of purpose, alongside the diet, which likely mattered a great deal too.



TRADITIONAL BEAUTY RITUALS ACROSS CULTURES

**What ancestral women actually did for their
skin, hair, and bodies**

Every traditional culture developed sophisticated external beauty practices that were passed from mothers to daughters across generations. These practices persisted not simply because they were old, but because they tended to work, and because they have stood up reasonably well as researchers have started studying the biology behind them.

Ayurvedic Beauty: Abhyanga and Oil Practices

Abhyanga, the Ayurvedic full-body self-massage with warm oil, is one of the older daily beauty and health practices documented, appearing in texts over 2,000 years old. It is traditionally performed with sesame oil in the colder months, considered warming, and coconut oil in the warmer months, considered cooling. The massage follows the direction of lymphatic flow and is performed before bathing, allowing the oil to penetrate the skin for 20 to 30 minutes before being rinsed off.

Benefits documented in both traditional texts and some modern research include improved circulation, reduced cortisol, enhanced lymphatic drainage, improved skin hydration and texture, better sleep when performed in the evening, and parasympathetic nervous system activation that supports both gut and hormonal balance.

Persian and Middle Eastern: Rose Water and Herbal Baths

Rose water has been used as a skin treatment across Persia, the Ottoman Empire, and throughout the Middle East for over a thousand years. It is the distillate of rose petals and contains phenylethanol, geraniol, and other compounds studied for anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, and skin-soothing properties. It was applied as a facial toner, used in baths, and added to cooking as a beautifying ingredient.

The hammam, the traditional bathhouse common across the Middle East, North Africa, and Turkey, was the primary beauty institution of the region. A complete hammam ritual involves steam to open pores, exfoliation with a kese mitt, a rough exfoliating glove, cleansing with black soap made from olive oil and plant ash, and intensive scalp and hair treatment with argan oil or black seed oil. This ritual was performed weekly or more frequently as the cultural standard of beauty maintenance.

Korean Beauty: The Gua Sha Tradition and Fermented Skincare

Korean beauty culture, which has influenced global skincare significantly, has roots in traditional practices that predate the modern K-beauty industry by centuries. Gua sha, the practice of scraping the skin with a smooth-edged tool to stimulate circulation and lymphatic flow, originated in Chinese and Korean medicine as a therapeutic practice and was adopted as a beauty practice for its visible effects on skin texture and puffiness. Done regularly, it is thought to stimulate circulation to the dermis, support lymphatic drainage, and support muscle tone of facial tissue.

Traditional Korean women also applied fermented rice water to their skin and hair, a practice documented across East Asia for centuries. Fermented rice water contains ferulic acid, allantoin, and diverse organic acids studied for skin barrier support and brightening. The fermentation process produces lactic acid, which gently exfoliates, and compounds that may support the skin microbiome.

Indigenous American Beauty Practices

Many Indigenous cultures across the Americas developed sophisticated plant-based beauty practices. Jojoba oil, extracted from the jojoba plant native to the Sonoran Desert, was used by O'odham and other desert

peoples as a skin and hair treatment. Its unique structure as a liquid wax rather than a true oil makes it similar in composition to human sebum, making it one of the more compatible topical oils for skin and scalp.

Cornmeal was used as a facial exfoliant and mask across many Mesoamerican cultures. Aloe vera, native to the Americas and Mesoamerica, was applied topically for burns, wounds, and skin hydration. Wild berries, including rosehips, were consumed both as food and applied topically as one of the higher vitamin C sources available in the ancestral landscape.

European Traditional Beauty: Tallow and Beeswax

Traditional European beauty preparations were built almost entirely on animal fats and plant-infused oils. Tallow, the rendered fat of beef or sheep, was one of the most widely used skincare ingredients in Europe from ancient Rome through the 19th century. Medieval beauty manuals document preparations of tallow infused with roses, lavender, and other herbs, applied to the face and hands to support softness and skin comfort.

Beeswax was used to thicken tallow and oil preparations into salves, lip balms, and face creams. The combination of beeswax and tallow provides a breathable, non-occlusive film that closely mimics the skin's natural lipid composition, more so than many petroleum-derived ingredients. These preparations were standard beauty practice across social classes in traditional Europe.



THE NON-TOXIC SKINCARE SWAP GUIDE

Replace what harms with what actually works

The modern skincare industry generates hundreds of billions of dollars annually while selling products that often contain endocrine-disrupting chemicals, synthetic fragrance compounds that can be absorbed through the skin, petroleum-derived ingredients that sit on the skin surface without nourishing it, and surfactants that can strip the skin's natural microbiome and lipid barrier. Here is a practical swap guide.

Cleansers

- **Remove:** commercial face wash with SLS, SLES, or synthetic fragrance. These can strip the skin's acid mantle and natural microbiome.
- **Replace with:** raw honey cleansing (apply to damp skin, massage gently, rinse), oil cleansing with jojoba or sunflower oil, or a gentle castile soap diluted in water with a few drops of lavender.
- **A good ancestral cleanser:** raw honey. Antimicrobial, prebiotic for the skin microbiome, enzyme-rich, and naturally close to skin's pH. Used across ancient Egypt, Greece, and Ayurvedic tradition as a primary skincare treatment.

Moisturizers

- **Remove:** commercial moisturizers with mineral oil, dimethicone, parabens, phenoxyethanol, or synthetic fragrance.
- **Replace with:** grass-fed tallow balm, jojoba oil, rosehip oil, or a simple blend of beeswax, tallow, and a plant oil.
- **A good ancestral moisturizer:** grass-fed tallow balm. Contains a fatty acid profile close to human sebum, plus fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E, and K. Used across European, Indigenous American, and African traditional cultures.

Serums and Treatments

- **Remove:** synthetic retinol products with synthetic carrier ingredients, niacinamide serums in petroleum bases, and vitamin C serums with L-ascorbic acid that oxidizes rapidly.
- **Replace with:** rosehip oil, a natural source of vitamin A precursors and vitamin C, bakuchiol oil, a plant-based retinol alternative from an Ayurvedic plant with some clinical evidence for comparable anti-aging benefit without the irritation many experience with retinol, and fresh-squeezed lemon or rose hip extract for vitamin C.

Sunscreen

- **Consider avoiding:** chemical sunscreens containing oxybenzone, octinoxate, octisalate, and avobenzone if you'd like to minimize ingredients that raise endocrine-disrupting concerns.
- **Consider instead:** non-nano zinc oxide mineral sunscreen. It sits on the skin surface, physically reflects UV, and is not meaningfully absorbed systemically. Reapply regularly when outdoors, and see Chapter 09 for full guidance.

Exfoliants

- **Remove:** plastic microbeads, synthetic acid exfoliants in petroleum bases, and harsh physical scrubs.
- **Replace with:** raw honey with baking soda, finely ground oats with yogurt, fermented rice water toner, or diluted raw apple cider vinegar, which contains naturally occurring alpha hydroxy acids.



DIY ANCESTRAL SKINCARE RECIPES

**Make your own with ingredients that have
worked for thousands of years**

01. Classic Grass-Fed Tallow Face Balm

Ingredients

- 4 tbsp grass-fed tallow (rendered from kidney fat for the purest result)
- 1 tbsp jojoba oil, 1 tbsp rosehip oil
- 5 drops each: rose essential oil and frankincense essential oil
- Optional: 1/4 tsp beeswax pellets for a firmer consistency

Instructions

1. Gently melt tallow and beeswax, if using, in a double boiler until just liquid. Do not overheat.
2. Remove from heat and stir in jojoba oil and rosehip oil.
3. Allow to cool to room temperature but not solidify. Add essential oils and stir.
4. Pour into a small glass jar. Allow to set at room temperature for several hours.
5. Apply a small amount to clean, slightly damp skin. A little goes a long way.

This balm closely mimics the skin's natural sebum composition. The fat-soluble vitamins in grass-fed tallow are in their most bioavailable topical form. This was the face cream of traditional European women for centuries.

02. Raw Honey and Rose Facial Cleanser

Ingredients

- 2 tbsp raw local honey, 1 tbsp rose water (pure distillate, no additives)
- Optional: 1/2 tsp finely ground oats for gentle physical exfoliation

Instructions

6. Combine honey and rose water. Mix until smooth.
7. Apply to damp skin and massage gently in circular motions for 60 seconds.
8. Rinse thoroughly with warm water.

Raw honey is antimicrobial, prebiotic for the skin microbiome, enzyme-rich, and naturally close to skin's pH. It has been used as a skincare treatment since ancient Egypt and is documented in Greek and Ayurvedic beauty texts.

03. Rosemary Hair Rinse for Growth

Ingredients

- Large handful fresh rosemary or 3 tbsp dried
- 2 cups water, 2 tbsp raw apple cider vinegar

Instructions

9. Simmer rosemary in water for 20 minutes. Allow to cool completely.
10. Strain into a spray bottle. Add apple cider vinegar.
11. After shampooing and conditioning, apply generously to scalp. Massage in and leave for 5 minutes before rinsing.
12. Use 2 to 3 times per week consistently for 12 weeks to assess effect on hair growth.

A 2023 randomized controlled trial found rosemary oil performed comparably to minoxidil for stimulating hair growth after 6 months of use. The traditional rosemary vinegar rinse documented across European folk medicine contains related active compounds in a gentler form.

04. Fermented Rice Water Toner

Ingredients

- 1/4 cup uncooked white rice (organic), 2 cups filtered water

Instructions

13. Rinse rice briefly. Cover with water and let soak 30 minutes.
14. Swish and strain the milky water into a clean jar.
15. Leave at room temperature for 24 to 48 hours until slightly sour smelling.
16. Dilute 1 part fermented rice water with 3 parts plain water. Apply to face with a cotton pad after cleansing. No rinsing required.

Fermented rice water contains ferulic acid, allantoin, inositol, and natural lactic acid. It has been used for skin and hair in Japan, Korea, and China for centuries. The fermentation creates natural exfoliating acids and microbiome-supporting compounds.

05. Ayurvedic Abhyanga Massage Oil

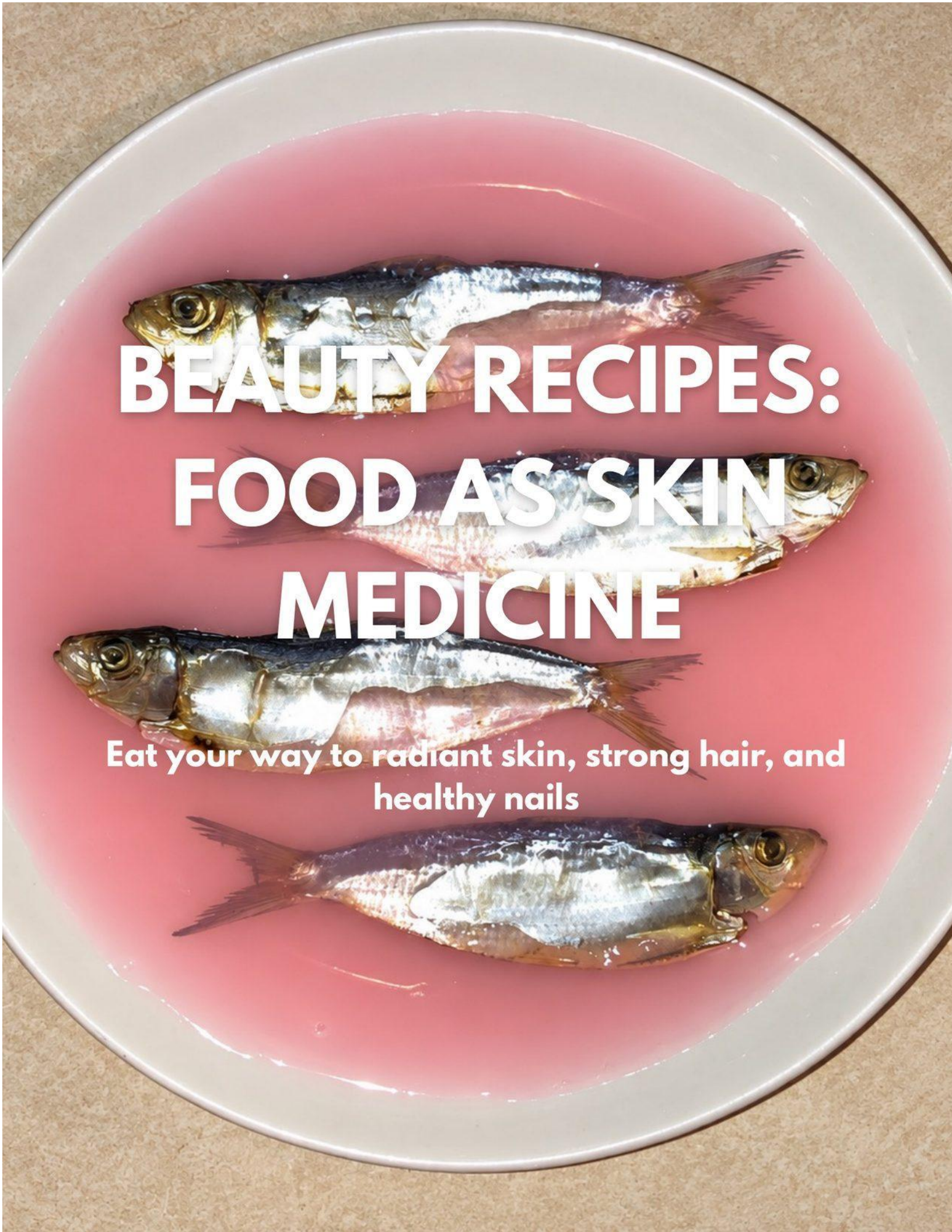
Ingredients

- 1/2 cup organic sesame oil (cold-pressed, untoasted) for autumn and winter
- Or 1/2 cup organic coconut oil for spring and summer
- 10 drops ashwagandha-infused oil or 5 drops each rose and sandalwood essential oil

Instructions

17. Warm the oil gently by setting the bottle in a cup of hot water for 5 minutes.
18. Beginning at the extremities and working toward the heart, massage warm oil into the entire body using long strokes on limbs and circular strokes on joints.
19. Allow to absorb for 20 to 30 minutes. Wipe off any excess with a warm towel before bathing.
20. Practice 3 to 7 mornings per week for cumulative benefit.

Abhyanga is documented in Ayurvedic texts as producing smoothness, strength, and nourishment of the skin. Some modern research supports that regular oil massage may help reduce cortisol, improve skin hydration, stimulate lymphatic flow, and activate the parasympathetic nervous system.

A top-down view of a white plate with a pink oval-shaped area in the center. Inside this pink area are four cooked fish, likely mackerel, arranged in a vertical line. The fish are silver with some reddish-orange on their sides. Overlaid on the image is the text 'BEAUTY RECIPES: FOOD AS SKIN MEDICINE' in large, bold, white capital letters. Below this, in smaller white capital letters, is the text 'Eat your way to radiant skin, strong hair, and healthy nails'.

BEAUTY RECIPES: FOOD AS SKIN MEDICINE

**Eat your way to radiant skin, strong hair, and
healthy nails**

01. The Beauty Bone Broth

Ingredients

- 3 lbs grass-fed beef knuckle and marrow bones
- 2 chicken feet (adds collagen), 2 tbsp apple cider vinegar
- 2 carrots, 2 celery stalks, 1 onion, 1 head garlic halved
- 1 tsp turmeric, 1-inch fresh ginger, bay leaves, peppercorns
- Filtered water to cover, 2 to 4 quarts

Instructions

21. Roast bones at 400F for 35 minutes until deeply browned.
22. Transfer to a large pot with vinegar and cold water. Sit 30 minutes.
23. Add vegetables, turmeric, ginger, and spices. Bring to near-boil then reduce to lowest simmer.
24. Simmer 24 hours uncovered. Strain and cool. Should gel firmly when refrigerated.
25. Drink 1 to 2 cups daily. Turmeric and ginger add anti-inflammatory and antioxidant support to this collagen-rich broth.

A broth that gels firmly when cold has plenty of gelatin. The glycine, proline, and hydroxyproline in a gelling broth are the same compounds incorporated into skin collagen by fibroblasts. Give it a few weeks of regular drinking to notice how you feel.

02. Liver and Caramelized Onion Beauty Bowl

Ingredients

- 4 oz chicken liver sauteed in butter with caramelized onions and fresh thyme
- 2 soft-boiled eggs, 1/2 cup roasted sweet potato cubes
- Large handful arugula dressed with lemon and olive oil
- 1 tbsp pumpkin seeds, fresh parsley

Instructions

26. Saute onions low and slow in butter until deeply golden, 30 to 40 minutes. Add liver and cook 2 to 3 minutes per side. Season well.
27. Arrange arugula on a plate. Top with sweet potato, eggs, liver, and onions.
28. Scatter pumpkin seeds and parsley. Drizzle with lemon and olive oil.

This bowl delivers vitamin A from liver, choline from eggs for cell membrane integrity, beta-carotene and vitamin C from sweet potato, zinc from pumpkin seeds, and bitter arugula to support liver and estrogen metabolism. A genuinely complete single-meal beauty intervention.

03. Salmon and Astaxanthin Beauty Bowl

Ingredients

- 6 oz wild sockeye salmon (sockeye is highest in astaxanthin), seared skin-on
- 1/2 cup cooked wild rice, large handful watercress
- 1/4 avocado sliced, 2 tbsp fermented ginger carrots

- Dressing: 1 tbsp raw sesame oil, 1 tsp tamari, 1 tsp raw honey, lemon, grated ginger

Instructions

29. Sear salmon skin-side down in butter or ghee until crispy, 4 to 5 minutes. Flip and cook 1 to 2 minutes more.
30. Build bowl: wild rice, watercress, avocado, fermented carrots, salmon on top.
31. Whisk dressing and drizzle over everything.

Wild sockeye salmon is one of the higher astaxanthin food sources. Astaxanthin accumulates in the skin and has been studied for internal antioxidant activity that may support skin's UV resilience. The fermented carrots add probiotic support for the gut-skin axis.

04. Collagen-Building Slow-Cooked Oxtail

Ingredients

- 3 lbs oxtail, 2 cups bone broth, 1 cup red wine
- 1 can crushed tomatoes (vitamin C for collagen synthesis), 1 onion, 4 garlic cloves
- Fresh rosemary and thyme, 2 bay leaves, tallow for searing
- Sea salt and cracked pepper

Instructions

32. Sear oxtail in tallow until deeply browned on all sides.
33. Saute onion and garlic. Deglaze with wine. Add tomatoes, broth, herbs, and oxtail.
34. Cover and braise at 300F for 3 to 4 hours until meat falls off the bone.
35. Serve with roasted root vegetables. Eat the gelatin-rich cooking liquid alongside.

Oxtail has one of the higher collagen contents of any beef cut. The gelatinous connective tissue melts into the braising liquid during the long cook, contributing glycine, proline, and hydroxyproline. The tomatoes in the sauce provide lycopene and vitamin C, both useful for collagen synthesis.

05. Oyster and Wilted Spinach With Lemon Butter

Ingredients

- 12 fresh oysters or 2 tins oysters in olive oil, 2 large handfuls fresh spinach
- 3 tbsp grass-fed butter, 4 garlic cloves thinly sliced
- Zest and juice of 1 lemon, fresh parsley, flaky salt

Instructions

36. In a wide pan melt butter over medium heat. Add garlic and cook until golden.
37. Add spinach and toss until wilted. Add oysters and warm through gently 1 to 2 minutes.
38. Finish with lemon zest, juice, parsley, and salt.

Oysters are one of the more zinc-dense foods available, providing more zinc per serving than almost any other food. Zinc supports collagen cross-linking, sebum regulation, wound healing, and may help moderate 5-alpha reductase activity linked to androgenic acne and hair loss. Spinach adds iron and folate.

17

BEAUTY DRINK RECIPES

Nourish your skin from the inside out

01. Collagen-Building Morning Elixir

Ingredients

- 8 oz warm bone broth or hot water, 1 tbsp grass-fed collagen peptides
- 1/2 tsp vitamin C powder or juice of 1/2 lemon (a useful cofactor for collagen synthesis)
- 1 tsp grass-fed butter or ghee, pinch of turmeric and black pepper
- Optional: 1/4 tsp astaxanthin powder (deep red color)

Instructions

39. Combine all in a mug and whisk until collagen dissolves and butter emulsifies.
40. Drink first thing in the morning on an empty stomach.

Taking collagen alongside vitamin C is thought to support its incorporation into new collagen. The fat from butter helps with absorption of fat-soluble astaxanthin and turmeric.

02. Antioxidant Beauty Smoothie

Ingredients

- 1 cup whole milk kefir, 1/2 cup wild blueberries
- 1 tbsp ground flax seeds, 1 tbsp almond butter
- 1 tsp maca powder, 1/2 tsp amla powder (a notably high vitamin C food)
- 1 tsp raw honey, pinch of cinnamon

Instructions

41. Blend all ingredients until smooth. Drink immediately.

Wild blueberries contain meaningfully higher anthocyanin content than many cultivated varieties. Anthocyanins are studied for their antioxidant protection of collagen. Amla powder is one of the higher vitamin C foods by weight of any food source.

03. Silica and Mineral Hair and Nail Tea

Ingredients

- 2 tbsp dried horsetail herb (a notably high plant silica source)
- 1 tbsp dried nettle leaf, 1 tsp dried oat straw
- 2 cups boiling water, raw honey and lemon to taste

Instructions

42. Steep all herbs in boiling water for 20 minutes. Longer steeping releases more silica.
43. Strain and add honey and lemon. Drink 1 to 2 cups daily, consistently, for about 12 weeks to notice an effect.

Horsetail herb contains one of the higher plant silica concentrations available. Silica is involved in collagen backbone formation and nail and hair keratin strength. Nettle provides iron, magnesium, and folate.

04. Turmeric and Black Pepper Anti-Aging Latte

Ingredients

- 8 oz raw whole milk or full-fat coconut milk
- 1 tsp turmeric, 1/4 tsp cinnamon, pinch of black pepper (increases curcumin absorption significantly)
- 1/2 tsp fresh grated ginger, 1 tsp grass-fed ghee, 1 tsp raw honey

Instructions

44. Warm milk gently without boiling. Whisk in all spices, ghee, and honey.
45. Pour into a mug and drink warm in the afternoon or evening.

Curcumin from turmeric is studied for its role in inhibiting MMP-1 and MMP-3, the collagen-degrading enzymes involved in aging, and for reducing NF-kB inflammatory signaling. It requires fat and piperine, from black pepper, to be well absorbed.

05. Rosehip and Hibiscus Vitamin C Infusion

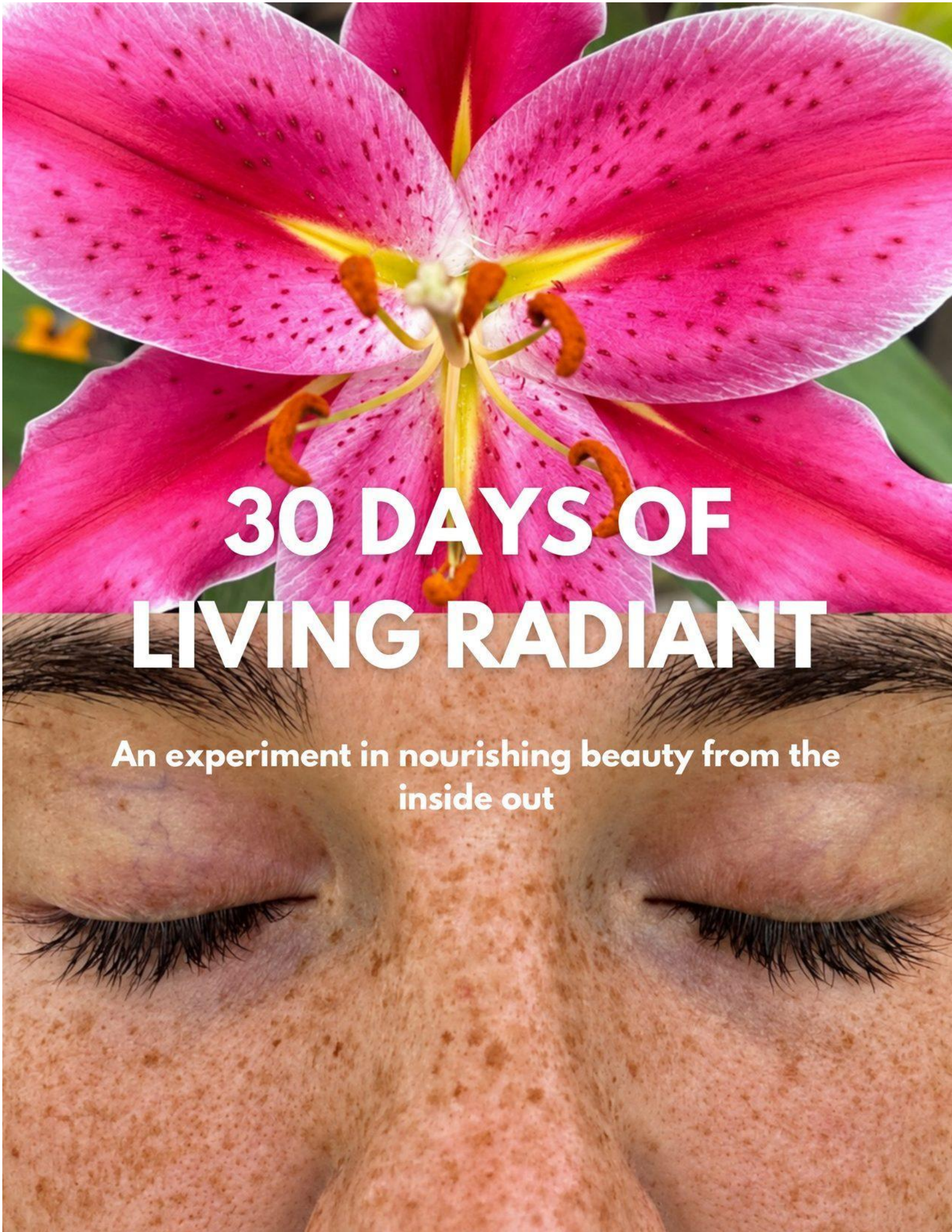
Ingredients

- 2 tbsp dried rosehips (a notably high natural vitamin C plant source)
- 2 tbsp dried hibiscus flowers, 1 tsp dried rose petals
- 2 cups boiling water, raw honey to sweeten, served cold over ice in summer

Instructions

46. Pour boiling water over all herbs. Steep 15 minutes.
47. Strain and sweeten with honey. Serve warm or refrigerate and serve cold.

Rosehips were a primary winter vitamin C source for European populations before citrus was widely available, and they contain notably more vitamin C by weight than oranges. Hibiscus provides anthocyanins studied for collagen protection. This infusion was drunk regularly in traditional European folk medicine as a beauty and immune tonic.



30 DAYS OF LIVING RADIANT

**An experiment in nourishing beauty from the
inside out**

This 30-day arc blends internal nutrition, ancestral skincare, lifestyle practices, and thoughtful food-first supplementation into one experiment you can run for yourself. Skin, hair, and nail health share the same nutritional root system, which is part of why addressing them together tends to work better than picking just one.

Treat this less as a rulebook and more as an invitation. Each week, try a few new things, notice what you actually experience, and by the end, keep whatever served you. You do not need to do all of it. You do not need to do it perfectly. And nothing here is a substitute for medical care if something feels off.

Week 1: Notice and Simplify

- Try replacing the seed oils in your kitchen with grass-fed butter, ghee, tallow, and olive oil. Many people find this one of the more noticeable changes they make for their skin, though everyone responds differently.
- Skim the ingredient list on your current skincare. If you want to simplify, synthetic fragrance, parabens, mineral oil, and PEGs are common ingredients people choose to phase out first.
- Start a cup of bone broth most days, homemade or a quality store-bought version that gels when refrigerated.
- Add a vitamin C-rich food, a raw bell pepper, kiwi, or handful of parsley, to your largest meal most days.
- Try the collagen-building morning elixir from Chapter 17: warm broth or water, collagen peptides, lemon, and butter.
- If you're ready, pick up a grass-fed tallow balm or jojoba oil to try in place of your usual moisturizer.
- Notice how your skin feels when you cut back on pulling, rubbing, or sleeping face-down. A silk pillowcase is a nice, low-effort addition if you'd like one.

Week 2: Build and Nourish

- Try liver once this week. Even 2 oz of chicken liver pate on sourdough counts.
- Add oysters or another zinc-rich food once or twice this week.
- Add wild salmon or sardines a couple of times this week for DHA and astaxanthin.
- If it appeals to you, start the honey and rose water cleansing routine morning and evening. Give your skin some time to adjust to any new routine, that timeline is different for everyone.
- Try the silica and mineral hair and nail tea most days.
- Consider a scalp massage with warm jojoba or rosemary-infused oil a couple of times this week.
- If you have hair loss, brittle nails, or persistent fatigue, this is a good week to ask your provider about checking ferritin.

Week 3: Deepen What's Working

- If the tallow balm felt good last week, make or buy a full batch and use it as your evening skincare step.
- Try the rosemary hair rinse after every other wash.
- Add fermented foods a few times this week, sauerkraut with dinner, kefir at breakfast, miso before lunch, wherever it fits naturally, rather than aiming for every single meal.

- If refined sugar has made up a big part of your week, try dialing it back and notice what you observe in your skin over the following two weeks.
- If you'd like to build a bit more comfort with midday sun, see Chapter 09 first. Whether any unprotected sun time is right for you, and how much, depends on your skin tone, health history, medications, and comfort level, and it is genuinely different for everyone. Always avoid burning, and check with a dermatologist if you are unsure.
- Try a nightly tallow or jojoba nail bed massage before sleep.
- Make the antioxidant beauty smoothie a few times this week if you enjoyed it.

Week 4: Notice and Choose What to Keep

- Take stock of your skin, hair, and nails. Many people start to notice changes in hydration, breakouts, or nail strength somewhere around this point, though timelines vary quite a bit from person to person, and that's normal.
- If eating liver weekly felt good and sustainable, consider keeping it in rotation. If once a month fits your life better, that's a fine place to land too.
- If daily bone broth became a comfortable habit, keep it going. If a few times a week suits you better, that works as well.
- If the tallow balm earned a permanent place in your routine, wonderful. If you found yourself missing your old moisturizer, that's useful information too.
- Keep the rosemary rinse and scalp massage if you noticed a difference worth repeating.
- Choose the two or three practices from this month you noticed the most from, and let those be the ones you carry forward. You do not need to keep all of it to benefit from some of it.

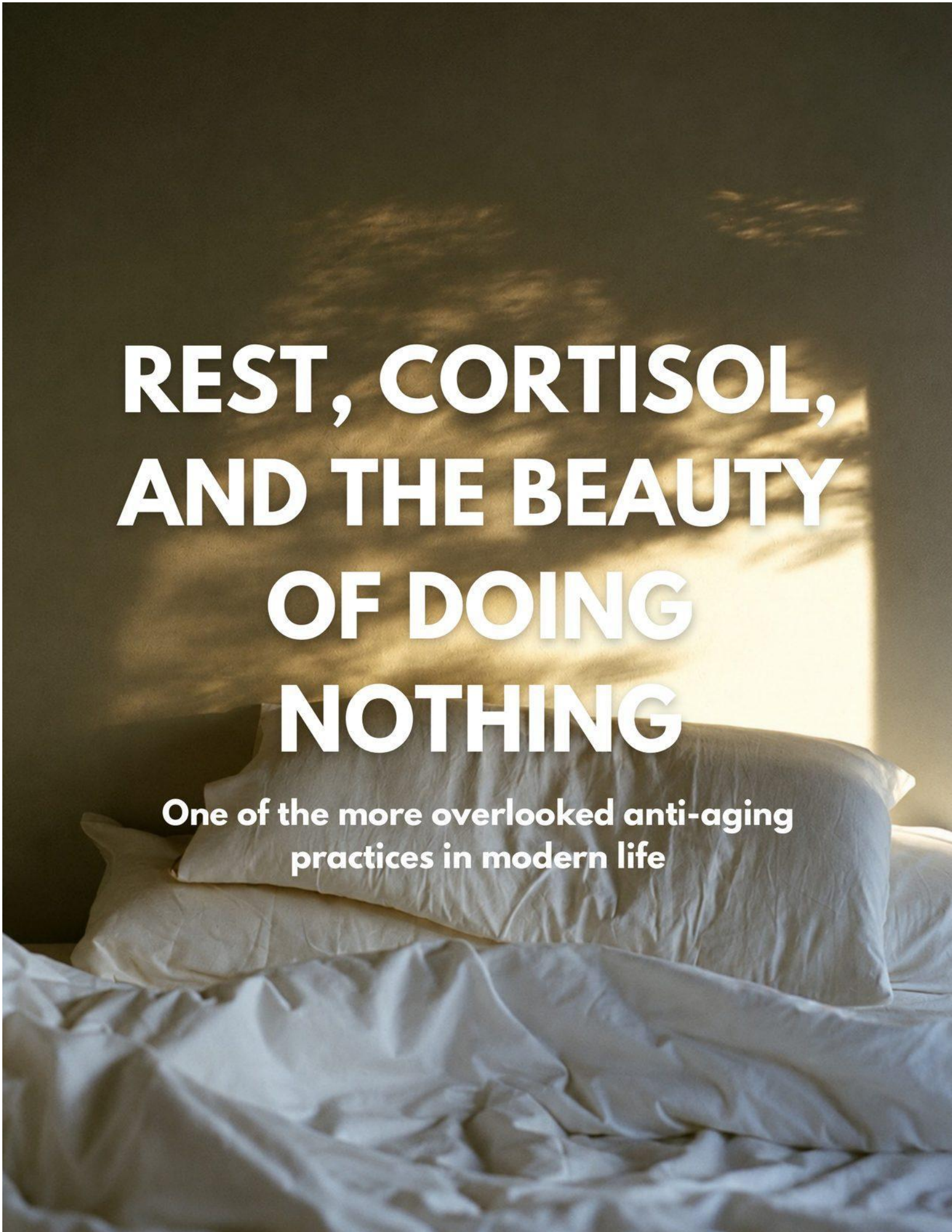
A Final Word on Beauty

The women who tended to age most beautifully in traditional cultures were rarely the ones who used the most products. They were often the ones who ate the most liver, who drank bone broth regularly, who oiled their skin with animal fat, who spent time in the sun and fresh air, who slept well and deeply, who were not chronically stressed or chronically underfed, and who maintained strong community and a sense of purpose into older age.

Beauty, in the ancestral sense, was the visible expression of genuine health, not the performance of health through products, but health built from the inside out. That is what this guide is about, and it's what these practices, sustained over months and years, tend to support.

Start with one thing. The bone broth. The tallow balm. The weekly liver. The daily vitamin C. Start where you are and let the results teach you what to add next.

Your skin is not a problem to be fixed. It is a system to be nourished. Nourish it the way your ancestors did, and notice how it responds.



REST, CORTISOL, AND THE BEAUTY OF DOING NOTHING

**One of the more overlooked anti-aging
practices in modern life**

You can eat well, use clean skincare, and take every supplement in this guide, and still find your skin, hair, and nails struggling if your cortisol runs chronically elevated. Cortisol is not a bad hormone. It is essential. But when it is chronically high and never fully resolves, it works against many of the biological processes that produce radiant skin, strong hair, and healthy nails.

The ancestral body had cortisol spikes: a predator, a conflict, a difficult crossing. But then the stressor resolved and cortisol dropped. The nervous system returned to its baseline, parasympathetic state, and repair began. Modern cortisol often never fully resolves. It tends to be low-grade, continuous, and driven by a thousand inputs the body registers as some form of threat even when the conscious mind does not: the phone notification, the inbox, the bright screen at 10pm, the skipped meal, the back-to-back commitments with no white space, the alarm before the body is ready to wake.

THE SCIENCE

The cortisol-collagen relationship: cortisol binds to glucocorticoid receptors in fibroblasts and is associated with suppressed collagen and elastin gene expression. It can upregulate matrix metalloproteinases, the enzymes that break down existing collagen. It can reduce hyaluronic acid synthesis and impair epidermal barrier repair, and it disrupts the overnight growth hormone pulse that supports skin cell renewal. Poor sleep and unresolved stress are measurable in the dermis over time.

Sleep: An Original Anti-Aging Practice

Growth hormone is a primary driver of overnight skin repair. It is released in pulses during slow-wave deep sleep, predominantly in the first 2 to 3 hours after sleep onset, and it stimulates fibroblast proliferation and collagen synthesis. Without adequate deep sleep, the growth hormone pulse is blunted and the overnight repair cycle is incomplete, which is part of why sleep deprivation shows up on the face fairly quickly, and why chronic poor sleep is associated with visible acceleration of skin aging over months and years.

The skin's barrier repair function also operates largely during sleep. Transepidermal water loss increases at night, and the skin compensates by upregulating ceramide and fatty acid synthesis in the stratum corneum. This nightly barrier renewal is temperature-regulated and tied to the circadian clock, and it depends on both adequate sleep duration and the right light environment.

THE SCIENCE

A 2015 study published in *Clinical and Experimental Dermatology* found that poor sleep quality was associated with increased signs of skin aging, including fine lines, uneven pigmentation, and reduced skin elasticity. Poor sleepers also showed slower recovery of skin barrier function after UV exposure compared to good sleepers in that study.

- **Sleep duration:** most people need at least 7 hours of relatively uninterrupted sleep for meaningful skin repair, with 8 to 9 hours often optimal. Skin cell renewal and collagen repair during slow-wave sleep is hard to fully compensate for elsewhere.
- **Sleep timing:** sleeping in a window that aligns with your natural circadian rhythm, generally earlier rather than later, tends to support the cortisol and growth hormone rhythms involved in repair better than staying up late and sleeping the same total hours.
- **Light environment:** a very dark room supports melatonin's ability to help lower cortisol and activate the repair-dominant state overnight. A sleep mask or blackout curtains can be a genuinely useful tool here, not just a comfort preference.

- **Room temperature:** a cooler room, generally somewhere around 65 to 68 degrees Fahrenheit for most people, supports the drop in core body temperature associated with entering deep, slow-wave sleep.

The Cortisol-Beauty Cycle

- **Collagen suppression:** cortisol is associated with suppressed fibroblast collagen synthesis through glucocorticoid receptor binding.
- **Collagen breakdown:** cortisol can upregulate MMP-1, MMP-3, and MMP-9, enzymes that degrade collagen and elastin.
- **Hyaluronic acid depletion:** cortisol is associated with reduced hyaluronan synthase activity, which can leave skin drier and less resilient over time.
- **Barrier impairment:** cortisol can impair lipid synthesis in the stratum corneum, weakening the skin barrier and increasing vulnerability to irritants and UV damage.
- **Acne:** chronic cortisol elevation is associated with increased adrenal androgen conversion, which can drive sebum overproduction and the jaw and chin acne that often shows up during stressful periods.
- **Hair shedding:** telogen effluvium, the diffuse shedding that follows a period of significant stress, is understood to be cortisol-mediated, and it typically appears 2 to 4 months after the stressful period resolves.
- **Nail growth:** nail growth rate is associated with chronic cortisol elevation in some research. Slow-growing, brittle nails during stressful periods may be a direct reflection of this.

What Tends to Sustain the Cortisol Cycle

- **Screens after dark:** blue-light-emitting screens after sunset can suppress melatonin and delay the evening cortisol drop that melatonin helps signal.
- **Late eating:** eating the last meal quite late can keep the digestive system active during the window when cortisol should be dropping and growth hormone should be beginning its overnight release.
- **Skipped meals:** skipping breakfast or eating the first meal quite late can elevate cortisol for the duration of the fast in some people, which is part of why skipping breakfast sometimes leaves people feeling wired and anxious by mid-morning.
- **Overtraining:** daily high-intensity training without adequate recovery can keep cortisol elevated for hours after training. The acute cortisol spike from exercise is generally considered beneficial. Chronic suppression of cortisol recovery from overtraining is not.
- **Alcohol:** alcohol can disrupt sleep architecture, suppressing REM and slow-wave deep sleep even when it seems to help with falling asleep. It can raise cortisol in the second half of the night as the liver processes it.
- **Chronic busyness:** unscheduled, unstructured time that is always filled, with a screen, a podcast, or a task, can prevent the nervous system from downshifting into a parasympathetic state. Downtime is not wasted time. It is when a lot of repair happens.

What Traditional Cultures Tended to Build In

- **Weekly rest:** many traditional cultures had a designated day of rest each week, the Hebrew Sabbath, the Christian Sunday, the Islamic Jumu'ah, and various Indigenous lunar rest cycles among them. These were

often community-supported breaks in the work cycle that gave the body and nervous system a recovery window roughly every seven days.

- **The midday rest:** the siesta in Mediterranean tradition, the riposo in Italian tradition, and similar practices honored across tropical and subtropical cultures, align with a natural post-lunch dip in alertness and the midday heat. Some research suggests a short horizontal rest after the midday meal can meaningfully reduce afternoon cortisol and support mood and performance.
- **The bathhouse:** the hammam and bathhouse tradition across the Middle East, North Africa, Turkey, Japan, Scandinavia, and Eastern Europe was a structured weekly practice of heat, steam, and water that activates the parasympathetic nervous system deeply. A sauna or hammam session tends to produce a cortisol spike followed by a longer parasympathetic rebound, which may lower baseline cortisol for a good while afterward.
- **Firelight evenings:** after dark in traditional societies generally meant dim firelight, candlelight, or darkness. Activities shifted from physical work to story, music, handcraft, and conversation. The absence of artificial light after sunset was a daily signal to the nervous system that the productive day was complete and rest could begin.
- **Ayurvedic dinacharya:** the Ayurvedic daily routine, dinacharya, includes specific rest windows built into the day as standard practice: oil massage before bathing, quiet time after the morning routine before eating, and rest after the midday meal.

A Practical Cortisol-Beauty Protocol

- **Evening light:** dim the lights in your home around sunset or by 7pm. Lamps, candles, or amber bulbs work well. Many people notice improved sleep depth and less morning puffiness within a few days of doing this consistently.
- **Earlier dinner:** eating dinner earlier and closing the kitchen for the night can help cortisol drop naturally in the evening and support an on-time growth hormone pulse.
- **Magnesium before bed:** magnesium glycinate, commonly 300 to 400mg before bed, is one of the more directly cortisol-supportive minerals, and many people are simply not getting enough of it from food.
- **Ashwagandha:** a well-studied adaptogenic herb for cortisol support, generally 300 to 600mg of a standardized extract in the evening. It has been used in Ayurvedic medicine for stress support for thousands of years, and it is worth checking with your provider before starting if you're on thyroid medication or pregnant.
- **Evening breathwork:** five minutes of slow diaphragmatic breathing before sleep, with exhales twice as long as inhales, activates the vagus nerve and drives a parasympathetic shift. Many people notice this working within the same session.
- **Nighttime skincare as ritual:** applying your tallow balm or facial oil slowly and with attention, rather than rushing through it, can double as a calming, vagal-toning practice, not just a skincare step.
- **Weekly white space:** protecting one evening a week as genuinely unscheduled, no commitments, no plans, no screens, echoes the ancestral firelight evening and Sabbath rest combined. Downtime is not a gap to be filled. It's a practice worth protecting.

The Sleep Skin Routine

The hour before sleep is one of the more useful windows of the day for skin. A few ways to use it well:

- Dim lights and put screens away roughly an hour before bed.
- Wash your face with warm water and raw honey rather than a harsh cleanser that strips the acid mantle before the barrier repair cycle begins.
- Apply tallow balm, rosehip oil, or your chosen facial oil while skin is slightly damp so it seals moisture in.
- Massage a small amount of tallow or jojoba into nail beds and cuticles.
- Take magnesium glycinate and any other evening supplements.
- Try five minutes of slow breathing: inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4, exhale for 8. Repeat until you feel calmer.
- Sleep on a clean silk or satin pillowcase if you have one, since it creates less friction against delicate facial skin than cotton.
- Aim for a dark, cool room and 7 to 9 hours, adjusted to what your body actually needs.

The women who age most beautifully tend not to be the ones who found the single best product. They are often the ones whose nervous systems get enough regulated rest to repair overnight. Rest is not the absence of productivity. It's some of the most important beauty work your body can do.

THE LIVING RADIANT CHECKLIST

A menu, not a to-do list

This isn't something to complete in full every day. Think of it as a menu of small, ancestral-inspired practices to pick from when you want a nudge. Screenshot it, print it, or come back to this page whenever it's useful.

NOURISH

- ☐ A protein-rich breakfast
- ☐ A vitamin C-rich food today
- ☐ Something fermented
- ☐ A cup of bone broth
- ☐ Colorful vegetables at two meals

SKIN

- ☐ A gentle cleanse, no harsh scrub
- ☐ Tallow, jojoba, or your chosen facial oil
- ☐ A few minutes of gua sha or facial massage
- ☐ Non-toxic sunscreen if you'll be in the sun

HAIR

- ☐ A 5-minute scalp massage
- ☐ Oil your ends if they're feeling dry
- ☐ A silk or satin pillowcase or scarf

LIGHT

- ☐ A few minutes of morning light outside
- ☐ Dim the lights after sunset
- ☐ A midday pause, if your day allows it

REST

- ☐ Screens away before bed
- ☐ Magnesium or a calming evening tea
- ☐ Five minutes of slow breathing
- ☐ One thing off your calendar this week

MY 5 NON-NEGOTIABLES

Choose only what you actually want to keep

You've made it through the whole guide. You don't need to carry all of it forward, and trying to would probably backfire. Think back through what you tried this month, or what stood out most as you read, and choose only five practices you genuinely want to keep.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Five practices kept consistently will do more for you than forty tried once and abandoned. Start there.

**BEAUTY IS NOT A PRODUCT.
IT IS A REFLECTION OF HOW DEEPLY YOU NOURISH YOURSELF.**

Start with the bone broth. Start with the liver. Start with the tallow balm. The rest follows.