

Health

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Anti-aging products?

Your eyesight is going. So is your hearing. Fatigue is now a daily condition and your weight loss plan to fight that creeping obesity isn't working; the only part of you getting thinner is your hair.

Can anti-aging products help? Can they actually slow or even stop the aging process? Generally, the old adage is probably the best advice – if a product sounds too good to be true, it usually is.

However, there is evidence that antioxidants (“disease fighters”) can protect your body by neutralizing free radicals (waste products) that may damage the body and as a result, speed the aging process. Antioxidants consumed in foods and those taken as supplements both show evidence of protecting the body. Foods brighter and deeper in colour offer the most antioxidants and other properties to keep your body's immune system strong. The more well-known antioxidants include:

1. Vitamin A and beta-carotene. They're richest in red and yellow vegetables, like carrots, winter squash, cantaloupe, and apricots. Spinach too. Vitamin A is also rich in fish liver (cod-liver or halibut-liver oils).
2. Vitamin C. The richest source is citrus fruits. Peppers and kiwi fruit are good sources too, and there are varying amounts in many other fruits and vegetables (even cauliflower and potatoes!).
3. Vitamin E is an antioxidant that may also protect against cataracts and slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease. Vitamin E is rich in vegetable oils, nuts and seeds.
4. Selenium is an antioxidant mineral. It's found primarily in seafood and liver. However, two or three Brazil nuts daily will meet your daily requirement.
5. Coenzyme Q-10 is an antioxidant enzyme produced by your body. It's rich in beef, sardines, tuna, spinach, and peanuts.

Hormone levels decline with age and scientists suggest hormones play a major role in the aging process. Two of the more talked about hormone supplements are DHEA and HGH.

DHEA. Dehydroepiandrosterone (de-hi-dro-ep-e-an-DROS-tur-own) is a hormone produced mainly in the adrenal glands. DHEA levels decline with age and when the body is severely stressed. Most health authorities do not recommend supplemental DHEA for those under the age of forty, as younger bodies are seldom deficient in this hormone. Other factors that deplete DHEA in the body are high intakes of sugar, nicotine, caffeine, and alcohol. Deficiencies of the essential fatty acids (omega's 3 and 6) can also reduce levels, mostly because these "good" fats promote hormone production and keep them in balance.

DHEA is a controversial supplement. There can be risks, including hormone imbalance, liver damage, cancer, excess body hair, and high blood pressure. Health Canada (at the time of this writing) has declared DHEA to be an "anabolic steroid" and it's illegal to own or sell it without a prescription. However (at the time of this writing), in the United States, DHEA is currently still available over-the-counter.

To promote healthy adrenal glands and ensure your natural secretion of DHEA, it's best to improve your lifestyle habits (diet, exercise, stress control) to keep hormones balanced.

HGH or human growth hormone is released by the pituitary gland. This peptide hormone plays a role in several functions that keep us looking and feeling young. After about age 20, HGH production begins to decrease. The injectable hormone is banned in Canada. If abused, it can create severe side effects such as distortion and enlargement of organs and bones, as well as cause diabetes, heart disease, and impotence.

However, there are several products available that claim to safely stimulate the body's production of HGH. These products contain herbs, amino acids, vitamins, and minerals. There is no evidence they really work and no long-term studies to support their claims. But they are safe when used properly. If you currently use prescription drugs, talk to your pharmacist about possible drug interactions.

Several lifestyle practices can naturally boost your HGH production:

1. Get adequate sleep. Most HGH is released during deep sleep.
2. Exercise. HGH is also released during physical activity. Try to be moderately active on a regular basis.
3. Avoid sugar and other highly refined and processed foods (also called simple carbohydrates). These can make the pancreas release large amounts of insulin. Insulin and HGH are antagonists, therefore when insulin rises, HGH levels fall. Especially avoid these poor carbohydrate choices near bedtime, as it will interfere with your body's release of HGH during sleep. Cut back on simple carbohydrates or foods altered by man. Choose complex carbohydrates (fruit, vegetables, root vegetables, legumes and grains) in the form Mother Nature created them.

4. Other inhibitors of HGH include stress, being overweight, a diet high in “unhealthy fats” like saturated and trans fats, and alcohol (which is really a simple sugar as well). A poor diet in general affects HGH production, because deficiencies of many nutrients will reduce the release of HGH.

Here’s some more good advice for aging gracefully . . .

1. Exercise your body and your mind.
2. Eat sensibly and healthfully.
3. Maintain a healthy weight.
4. Avoid trendy quick-weight-loss diets.
5. Use sunscreen and avoid getting too much sun.
6. Don’t smoke and avoid second-hand smoke.
7. Learn to control your reaction to stressful situations.
8. Take time to relax and smell the roses. Slow the pace of your life and you’ll slow the aging process.

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