

# Our SKIN...

What covers and protects everything inside our bodies, helps to keep our bodies at the correct temperature, allows us to have the sense of touch, controls evaporation of fluids while also acting as a water resistant barrier, and is our biggest organ? Yes, it is our SKIN. A few other interesting facts about our skin are:

- Daily we lose approximately 30,000 to 40,000 dead skin cells from our outer layer of skin, totaling about nine pounds annually;
- All mammals have some hair on their skin and their skin is made up of three primary layers called epidermis, dermis, and hypodermis;
- An adult average square inch of skin holds about 650 sweat glands, 20 blood vessels and more than 1,000 nerve endings;
- As skin ages it becomes thinner and therefore it can be damaged more easily;
- Other changes to aging skin includes less elasticity (and therefore more wrinkles), a decrease in volume and aging skin receives less blood flow.

As we age most of us struggle with the image we see in the mirror as our skin is one of our most visible body parts. It is not uncommon to continue to think and act similar to when we were of a younger age, but then we look in our mirrors and think “I look old!”. We may know that our skin will droop and develop wrinkles, lines and furrows as we grow older but we don’t have to like it, and some of us will spend lots of money looking for a miracle cure or a miracle cream that will reverse the aging process or return our youthful appearance.

Growing older is certainly not the only factor that contributes to our skin having more lines and wrinkles as gravity is also responsible for folds in the skin and our environment, medications, internal body functioning and bad habits can also have negative consequences. The American Academy of Dermatology Association has identified the following seven unhealthy habits that contribute to aging skin and in many cases make you look older than your years:

- **Smoking:** Exposure to cigarette/cigar smoke significantly increases wrinkles and dryness partly due to the behavior of smoking and also because it depletes your body of Vitamin C, which is key for keeping skin plump and moist. Over the years your complexion will likely develop an unhealthy yellowish hue.
- **Sun Exposure:** The risk of skin cancer is significantly increased, freckles can turn into brown sun spots, the skin looks more leathery, wrinkles and sagging increase.
- **Lack of Exercise:** There are multiple benefits to exercise including muscle tone and increased energy level.
- **Exposure to Cold Weather:** Cold outdoor temperature and inside heated rooms contribute to dry skin.
- **Alcohol Use:** Alcohol contributes to dilating small blood vessels and over time these can become permanently damaged, creating a flushed appearance and broken vessels on the skin’s surface.

- **Stress:** Stress and worry cause frowning and over time the muscles in the face actually confirm to that movement.
- **Lack of Sleep:** Dark circles and bags under the eyes, and sagging skin are often results.

As it is summer and we all want to enjoy the warmth of the sun when we can in Michigan, now is the time to pay particular attention to sun safety. Most dermatologists would advise you to daily apply a sunblock or sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher. However, sunblock and sunscreen are not the same. Sunblock is opaque, stronger and generally only has to be applied once or twice daily whereas a sunscreen product is more transparent, breaks down faster once exposed to sunlight and you have to consistently reapply it throughout the day and use a higher SPF to get the same protection. Many cosmetic skin care products such as foundation or face lotion and body lotions also have SPF factors that you could consider wearing.

Although the warmth and light of the sun can relax us and boost our spirits, these benefits come also with a dangerous trade off. Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the U.S. as more than 3.5 million new cases occur annually. Over 90% of these cases are caused by the sun's ultraviolet rays (UVR). The American Cancer Society estimates one in five Americans will develop skin cancer in their lifetimes. However, if we are 65 or older our chances significantly increase as our skin is now thinner and the epidermis turnover rate for cell repair is lower. If detected early, survival rates are very high so you are advised to ask your physician for a professional exam and to be aware of any personal skin changes. Sun damage to our skin is cumulative so be smart and protect your skin when you venture out in the sun. There is no such thing as a healthy tan as it is actually the skin's response to the sun's damaging rays.

The Delta College 50+...Just Like Gold Program offers monthly "Bits and Bites" sessions (the format is a bit of information with bite to eat) that will introduce you to new topics, new options and new information. This coming fall one of the sessions offered will be titled *Skin Deep* and it will be your chance to interact with skin specialists and to become more knowledgeable about your skin. You are invited to join us at this educational session and encouraged to become a member of our 50+...Just Like Gold Program.

Douglas Macarthur wisely said "Years may wrinkle the skin, but to give up interest wrinkles the soul".

Sue Montesi  
Dean of Learning Centers and Innovative Programs  
Delta College