

COSMOPOLITAN

Here's How to Keep Exercise From Messing Up Your Skin

Say good-bye to breakouts and blotchy skin!



THE WORKOUT: BOXING, BOOT CAMP, CROSSFIT

Sneaky Skin Issue: Breakouts

Shared equipment — gloves, mats, weights — can be a hotbed for bacteria. When possible, BYO and wipe down weights (or anything else that's shared) with an antibacterial towelette (travel-size packs were *made* for gym bags). Most important: "Avoid touching your face during your workout," says Paul Jarrod Frank, MD, a cosmetic dermatologist in NYC. Wiping away sweat with a germ-y hand may seem harmless, but it can cause acne or, worse, spread cold sores and skin infections.

THE WORKOUT: RUNNING

Sneaky Skin Issue: Sagging Skin

"I can spot a serious runner just by looking at her face," says Elizabeth Hale, MD, clinical associate professor of dermatology at NYU Langone Medical Center (and marathoner), who defines "serious" as logging 25 miles a week or more. Blame the literal pounding of pavement, which results in "runner's face": a loss of volume in the temple and cheek areas that eventually leads to sagging. "The constant force causes micro-tears in collagen that compound over time," says Dr. Hale, who notes there's a genetic factor too. And if you run outdoors, the UV exposure — a proven collagen killer — doesn't help. So what does a long-distance-running doctor suggest? Prescription retinol ("the ultimate skin smoother," she says) followed by a firming cream with collagen-stimulating peptides (Dr. Hale uses Olay's Regenerist Micro-Sculpting Cream, \$26) and possibly fillers down the road. Also SPF 30, which, for those who take it outside, is as vital as a good pair of sneakers.

THE WORKOUT: HOT YOGA

Sneaky Skin Issues: Redness and Brown Spots

If you have rosacea — a skin condition that causes redness and a bumpy texture — or are prone to broken blood vessels, beware: Extreme heat combined with excessive sweating can cause inflammation, making these conditions worse. "In some cases, it could permanently dilate capillaries," says Dr. Frank. Other problems that occur: dark spots and melasma (aka larger dark patches). While research is limited, some doctors (including Dr. Frank) believe that heat can stimulate the pigment-making cells.

THE WORKOUTS: SPINNING, DANCE CARDIO

Sneaky Skin Issue: Irritation

Aside from guzzling water, the thing you're most likely to do during a drenching, high-intensity workout: Wipe your skin with a gym towel. Unfortunately, "communal towels are typically washed with harsh detergents and chemicals that can irritate skin," says Dr. Frank. They are also notoriously coarse and can strip the protective layer of skin, so anything you put on your face afterward could result in redness, says Dr. Hale. Once again, it's best to bring your own ... and if you forget, gently blot (don't rub) with the free ones.

THE WORKOUT: SWIMMING

Sneaky Skin Issue: Dryness

Chlorine can rob skin of its natural oils, leaving you dry and itchy. Post-swim, always wash with a gentle cream cleanser and follow with a basic lotion made with ceramides (try CeraVe Moisturizing Cream, \$15), which rebuild the protective layer that chlorine strips.

YOUR FACE ON FITNESS: EXERCISE CAN BE THE ROUTE TO BETTER SKIN. HERE'S PROOF.

It detoxes pores.

Think of sweating like the steam portion of a facial. "It causes pores to dilate and pushes out bacteria and sebum," says Dr. Hale. If you wear makeup, however, you won't get the full benefits. "The barrier prevents all this from escaping, plus it can actually clog pores," says Dr. Hale. Can't bear to go bare? Limit makeup to a waterproof mascara, lip stain, and breathable mineral foundation or concealer. Sweat Cosmetics' powder is noncomedogenic, so it won't clog pores, and is free of oil and silicones that trap debris.

It's a natural form of strobing.

When we exercise, our heart beats faster and pumps more blood. "Much of that increased flow goes to our most vital organ, the brain, and the face reflects this upward surge by flushing," says Dr. Hale. Cue that bright, lit-from-within glow that lasts long after a sweat session.

It improves skin texture.

Exercise reduces stress, which lowers cortisol — the hormone that spikes when you're feeling tired and overworked. When cortisol levels are out of whack, it can lead to an overproduction of oil and collagen breakdown, explains Dr. Hale. Keeping them in check with exercise can mean fewer breakouts, tighter pores, and firmer skin.

It fights puffiness.

Working out tones with time but can have immediate slimming benefits too. "It helps flush out excess water so you look less bloated," explains Dr. Frank. (FYI: Losing too much H₂O can cause dehydration. As a rule, aim to drink eight ounces of water for every 30 minutes of exercise.)

It can delay aging.

"Studies show that exercise boosts skin-cell energy, increasing cell metabolism and collagen production," explains Joshua Zeichner, MD, a dermatologist in NYC. Result: a plumper, firmer complexion with fewer fine lines.

If you only do one thing...

Shower post-workout! "The moisture and heat combined with dead skin and sebum can cause acne, rashes, and folliculitis — inflamed hair follicles that look like pimples," says Dr. Hale. Soap and water are your best bet for eliminating dirt and oil from head to toe, but wipes work in a pinch, especially ones that contain salicylic acid. Afterward, skip heavy creams and oil-based products, as they can clog dilated pores, notes Dr. Frank.