

beauty *fix*

PUT YOUR
money WHERE
YOUR MOUTH IS

*Soft, plump lips
require more than
a little chapstick to
keep them looking
youthful.*

by LISA EVANS

LUSCIOUS LIPS

Slapping on some lipstick may give your pucker a temporary boost, but if what's underneath the shimmer is dull and flaky, the transformation will be short-lived.

Dermatologist Dr Ian Webster says the most effective way to maintain healthy lips is to avoid sun damage. "The lower lip tends to protrude more and tends to get more sun damage," he says.

A lip balm with built-in sunscreen can help to protect lips from harsh UV rays. Lip creams containing hypoallergenic ingredients such as petrolatum or preservative-free products are preferred over those with fragrances, which can aggravate allergies. Moisturising lipsticks containing aloe or lanolin will help to trap in moisture, making lips pillow-soft.

"A good moisturising lipstick with a top coat of lip gloss will not only help to protect the lips, but give them a pretty, feminine look," says Webster.

There's nothing like dry, chapped lips to spoil a romantic moment, but maintaining a kiss-worthy, youthful-looking mouth requires more than just lip service. From teeth to lips and the surrounding skin, here's what you can do:

EVENING LIP CARE

Don't forget about the lips in your nighttime routine. You probably already exfoliate your face and body, but did you know that your lips can benefit from this treatment too? Exfoliation turns over epidermal cells and stimulates new collagen growth.

You can purchase lip exfoliation sticks or make your own at home using a drop of honey and sugar. Rub gently into lips in a circular motion and follow with a moisturising lip balm.

FEED YOUR LIPS

Just as skin requires nutrients to stay healthy and glowing, your lips can benefit from an extra dose of vitamins. Webster recommends a daily multivitamin containing a minimum of 600IU of vitamin D. In addition to having anti-inflammatory properties, vitamin D is responsible for the growth of keratinocytes in the epidermis (top layer of the skin). "Healthy keratinocytes produce a healthy look to the skin and the lips," says Webster.

Moisturise lips from the inside out by adding foods to your diet that are high in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, flax seed and walnuts, and stay hydrated by drinking water and stocking up on foods with high water content, such as cucumber, lettuce and watermelon.

A HAIRY SITUATION

Moustache hairs are often the result of an underlying hormonal imbalance, which can get worse as we approach menopause. At-home waxing kits are easy to use, but are best for individuals with dark hair and pale skin.

Webster cautions dark-skinned individuals against waxing and depilatory creams, as these can cause inflammation of the skin and lead to hyperpigmentation, especially after sun exposure.

ERASING LINES AROUND THE MOUTH

"With aging and sun damage, the skin loses its elasticity and lines start to appear above the top lip from repeated facial expressions," says Webster. Protecting skin from the sun, and stocking up on antioxidant-rich foods such as berries, broccoli and spinach, helps to keep collagen and elastin below the surface of the skin, warding off the development of fine lines.

Webster recommends using a daily moisturising cream with SPF and retinoids that stimulate the body to produce more collagen and thicken the deepest layers of the skin. Regular chemical peels, alpha or polyhydroxyl acid can also help to soften the appearance of fine lines. Deeper lines may benefit from treatments such as dermal fillers and lasers.

"In some cases a small amount of Botox can be used, but if this is overdone, it's noticeable, as the patient is not able to move those muscles," says Webster.



HEALTHY TEETH FOR A PRETTY SMILE

Don't ruin a beautiful smile by revealing a lacklustre set of choppers. A shiny set of teeth can go a long way towards giving your smile a boost. While brushing two to three times a day is a must, an unhealthy diet can cause teeth to become weak and chip or crack more easily.

We all love a little sugar, but this sweet stuff can cause severe damage to teeth. "In the mouth, the excess sugar gets taken into the plaque, is converted into acid, and this will dissolve the matrix of the tooth and cause the start of a cavity," says dentist Dr Leslie Lang.

Some sweets are worse than others. Hard candies that stay in the mouth for a long time are particularly harmful, as are soda drinks, which coat and stick to the teeth. The high sugar content in sodas isn't the only thing that makes them a danger to your smile. "The bubbles are mild acids and these can start to dissolve the enamel matrix of the tooth, which is the beginning of a cavity," says Lang.

Even some foods that you think are good for your body can harm your teeth. Although coffee is said to have some health benefits, including lowering the risk of Type-2 diabetes and warding off certain types of cancers, the acid in your morning cup of java weakens and softens tooth structure, making it more prone to damage from wear. A glass of red wine may help to keep our tickers strong, but it's one of the worst culprits when it comes to staining teeth. Dried fruits are often touted as a healthy snack option, but these, too, are high in sugar and acids, and can stick to teeth.

Vitamin-enriched drinks are another culprit. While they may sound healthy, these drinks have a high sugar content. "These will stick to the tooth and do harm by feeding the sugar to the bacteria which live in the plaque," says Lang.

Drinking citrus juice or sucking on a lemon to extract vitamin C is recommended by doctors to boost your body's immune system, but these fruits are also very acidic and can harm teeth, says Lang, who advises patients to rinse their mouth with water or brush their teeth after drinking citrus juices or consuming any of the previously mentioned foods or drinks.

SO, WHAT FOODS ARE GOOD FOR TEETH?

Fibrous fresh fruits and vegetables, such as raw carrots and apples, are like windshield wipers for teeth. Fibre rubs against the enamel and cleans the surface. High-calcium foods such as milk products, and vegetables such as broccoli and kale, can help to build strong and healthy teeth.

Eating for your teeth doesn't mean you can't indulge in the sweet stuff. Many claims have been made that dark chocolate is good for teeth. "Dark chocolate contains [a lower sugar content and] a number of essential minerals which are lacking in the diet. The chocolate also coats the tooth with a wax layer which causes the plaque to form a round blob rather than splatter all over the whole tooth surface, [making it easier to remove]," says Lang.



FLASH THOSE PEARLY WHITES

Regular brushing is the easiest way to whiten teeth; however, Lang warns that once stains have settled onto the tooth, it's very difficult for the teeth to be satisfactorily cleaned at home. Teeth-whitening treatments using carbamide peroxide on specially made trays are effective in lightening teeth, on average, two full shades. "Over-the-counter whitening products are much less effective and often lead to sensitivity of the teeth," says Lang.



PREVENTION

The best way to ensure a healthy mouth is prevention. Smoking and sun exposure are major causes of wrinkles around the mouth, and smoking is the leading cause of teeth stains.

Avoid using your teeth as bottle-openers, or holding hair pins or clips in your front teeth. "These can cause chips in the edges of the teeth, which are difficult to repair," says Lang.

Brushing regularly and eating a healthy diet rich in antioxidants, vitamin D and omega-3s to keep lips moisturised, encourage collagen growth and prevent wrinkles will have your mouth looking gorgeous and kiss-worthy into the new year and beyond. ■