

# SKIN HEALTH

By Tara Marie Segundo, M.A.

■ **Editor's Note:** Tara Marie Segundo, M.A., WNBF pro figure competitor, holds a Master's degree in applied physiology from Columbia University, plus multiple certifications as a personal trainer and fitness instructor. She has worked in the fitness industry for over 20 years and currently lives in New York City, where she has successfully crossed over into the world of modeling, acting and broadcasting. For more information, please visit [taramariesegundo.com](http://taramariesegundo.com).

**W**hen I'm sitting in my apartment in the dead of winter, the last thing on my mind is being on the beach. Still, I take care of my skin as though I soon will be. Unfortunately, too many of us regard skincare as something we do only for our faces. I, too, used to make that mistake. All winter I'd cover up a multitude of sins with clothing, only to panic when it was time to put on shorts – or, heaven forbid, a bikini.

But I'm much older now (41 to be exact), and a smidge wiser. It feels weird to say; I remember when 40 sounded like the age of a person headed to "the home." But when I look in the mirror, I don't see a typical 41-year-old woman. I attribute this to some good habits I've picked up over the years.

When I started competing in figure (swimsuit) shows at age 38, I was aware that I'd be up against beautiful girls – some in their early 20s. I knew I'd have to be vigilant about more than just my physique. You see, when you're on stage wearing practically nothing with bright lights beaming mercilessly down on you, everything shows. It is imperative to have great skin on your face, neck and everywhere else.

I knew I'd need to make changes to get the results I wanted, and I knew my past mistakes would lead me to the answers. I did some research and listened to what others had to say, then created a personalized skincare program that I still follow. Here are some of the things that work for me and just might work for you:

**Drinking water.** I know when I'm not drinking enough water because my lips dry up and looked chapped. (As you may know, the lips are part of your skin.) I drink at least a gallon of water a day to prevent dryness, more if I do a lot of cardio and sweat profusely. And I never wait until I'm thirsty; thirst indicates that dehydration has already begun. The next time you don't want to drink enough water, remember that a prune is just a dehydrated plum – and this isn't the look you want!

**Clean eating.** Like the rest of your body, your skin needs nutrients. When I eat lots of vegetables, whole grains and protein from soy and animal sources, I look and feel alert and my skin has a certain glow to it. When I eat junk food, however, my skin looks dull.

I am now on a dairy-free diet. Back in college, when I drank a lot of milk, I had acne and chronic dark circles under my eyes. It wasn't until I cut out dairy that I stopped looking like an exhausted teenager having a hormonal surge. This is not to suggest that milk products are evil; in my case, an allergy was the culprit. You may also have similar food allergies that are taking their toll on your skin.

## SKINCARE ADVICE *From A Pro*

**Consuming fats.** If you're worried about gaining weight with a diet that contains fat, remember this: Fat is the slowest macronutrient to digest, so when you eat it, you fill up faster and stay full longer. I am not suggesting that you gorge yourself on high-fat, high-calorie foods, but many of us take too much fat out of our diets, and this can be detrimental both to our bodies and our skin.

About 15 years ago, I tried a lowfat, moderate-protein, high-carb diet plan, and I ran into a lot of problems. My hair, skin and nails became dull and dry, I had a number of sports injuries that wouldn't heal, I was tired all the time and I didn't have the radiant look I associate with youth . . . yet I was only 25.

I no longer worry about how many grams of fat I ingest. I use olive oil liberally and I put ground flaxseeds on vegetables and grains. I eat red meat, turkey, chicken with the skin, avocados and a variety of nuts, even when I am dieting for a competition. I know that in some figure circles I'd be branded a heretic . . . but hey, a girl's gotta eat, and my skin always looks great on stage.

**Exercising.** The skin is the largest organ of the body. Weight training and aerobic exercise improve circulation, and good circulation improves the look of your skin by virtue of better oxygen delivery to the tissues. Few things are less attractive than blue lips and a pasty complexion, so get moving and get your blood pumping to improve in these areas. You will



*Did You Know?  
Humans shed  
1.5 lbs. of skin  
per year.*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHARLES WORTHINGTON

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look and feel more radiant by raising your body temperature, and increase your metabolism, to boot.

You may also ward off varicose veins with regular exercise. Many sedentary women have noticeable problems with varicose veins. They run in my family, but I believe that frequent exercise has kept me free from this problem.

**Not smoking.** This is just common sense. I can spot a smoker before she ever lights up just by looking at her skin. Smoking deprives the most superficial skin layers of oxygen, and no oxygen means no glow – so don't smoke if you care at all about your skin.

**Exfoliating.** When I have to prepare for a photo shoot or competition, I do a major exfoliation in the shower, using two ingredients that will leave your skin looking fresh and feeling like velvet. I can't rightfully take credit for this idea, as I actually picked it up from my manicurist. She used this technique on my hands, but I knew it would be a great (and inexpensive) way to exfoliate my entire body. Here are the steps:

1.) Buy the largest and cheapest bottle of body lotion you can find. Quality actually isn't that important here. You simply need a base for the paste you will make.

2.) Buy a large bag of white table sugar.

3.) Saturate your skin with warm water in the shower. Turn off the water and squeeze a handful of lotion into one hand, and scoop out an equal amount of sugar with your other hand.

4.) Mix the sugar and lotion together until you have a paste about the consistency of pudding. Work the paste over your body and refill your hands with fresh lotion and sugar. Keep mixing and rubbing until you are covered from neck to toe with the paste, giving extra attention to your elbows, knees, feet and hands.

When you are finished, rinse the paste off your body. Your skin will immediately feel softer. After your shower, when you are still slightly damp, apply a thick moisturizer all over your body and put on cotton socks and pajamas. When you awaken the following morning, you'll be impressed with how silky your skin feels.

Use this tried-and-true technique a few times weekly on your feet and hands, and decide how frequently you want to use it on the rest of your body based on the time of year and your unique needs. Stay beautiful and I'll meet you on the beach. ★

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