

THE ESSENCE OF BEAUTY

When it comes to the ingredients in our "miracle" beauty creams, less could very well be more BY MELANIE DE

The elusive fountain of youth has always featured in humankind's imagination. And today, the hyper-demands of modern living and our quest for perfection have turned this fascination into a virtual obsession. We're constantly looking out for "miracle elixirs", beauty creams which we expect to perform miracles, to give us that ultimate feeling of being healed and renewed at an instant.

Unfortunately, many women don't know that most skincare products in the market that claim to give miraculous results, also come with a lot of skin-aggravating synthetic additives. According to Dr. Leow Yung Hian, senior consultant dermatologist at the Singapore National Skin Centre, our usual jar of face cream contains not just the active ingredients, but also emulsifiers, stabilizers, preservatives, masking fragrance, and others. A simple check through my beauty products at home confirmed this. My "carrot cream" has a total of 34 ingredients. Carrot extract was somewhere on the ingredients list, together with paraben (a group of synthetic preservatives) and a host of other chemicals. Honestly, out of those 34 ingredients, the only one that I really understood the purpose of was carrot.

A QUESTION OF CONTENT

Ms. Angie Soon, the general manager of SpaCare International, an award-winning spa management company that oversees spas in Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and China, explains, "Chemicals found in most beauty products are generally safe for use on the skin. But that does not mean that most beauty products are problem free. From time to time, skin reactions and other allergic reactions can occur. Problems range from simple skin irritations, rashes, to full-blown allergic reactions. The most common negative reactions to beauty products are itching and redness in the area where the product is applied."



In fact, creams that give us the desired results immediately are the ones that we should be wary of. Ms. Caroline Kan, director of Optimal Corporation, the distributor of holistic skincare brand Dr. Hauschka Skin Care in Singapore, advises, "Propylene glycol, used as a moisturizer, and sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS), commonly used for creating lather, are both found in many beauty products today. These ingredients have been shown to cause allergic skin reactions. Alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs), found in over 200 manufacturers of skincare products, are used to accelerate exfoliation of dead skin cells. AHAs and glycolic peels increase production of new skin cells by giving the skin the equivalent of a mild chemical burn. But excessive exfoliation degrades the important barrier function of the skin, the first line of defense of the immune system. AHAs also increase susceptibility to sun damage, cause temporary inflammation of the skin, and are suspected to increase the risks of allergic reactions." It's no wonder women have been losing the beauty battle by slathering on these beauty products religiously!

THE VIRTUES OF "PURE"

Those of us in search of a better beauty salve may now have our prayers answered, with more products being launched in the market that tout to be "pure" and free from additives. But just how pure can "pure" be? Dr. Kan sheds light on the matter: "A 'pure' beauty product that contains absolutely no chemicals and preservatives doesn't exist. Preservatives are required to keep products stable and usable from the point of manufacturing to their use and storage in the consumer's home." So, with the myriad of products available, how do we check for claims of "purity"? It's not that difficult. As Dr. Leow reveals, "All ingredients above one percent must be listed in descending order as advised by the Cosmetic Control Unit of the Health Sciences Authority (HSA) Singapore." So, additives that are not listed are probably present only in trace quantities. Furthermore, one can check to ensure that the active ingredients promoted by manufacturers are actually listed as the first few items of the ingredients list. Given that these guidelines are in place, a "pure" beauty product, that is, a product with high concentrations of one or a few active ingredients, minus the synthetic additives, is still an attractive option for ladies who aren't responding satisfactorily to their current regime. Vio is one such pure beauty product that is now available in Singapore. Each bottle of the Vio Solution contains around two, and up to five, pure active ingredients, like vitamin A and collagen. There are altogether 11 different serums, and all are free from coloring, fragrance and parabens.

Without synthetic additives, the skin accepts pure ingredients more readily, and in time, is able to revert to normal conditions and regenerate itself from within. Dr. Hauschka is one such pure beauty associate. The skin preparations from Dr. Hauschka are free of toxic pesticides and preservatives and the night care is simply to cleanse and condition, without using pore-clogging creams or moisturizers. The night beauty range consists of pure liquid ampoules that support the skin's monthly regenerative rhythm and encourage the skin to renew itself naturally, whilst the body is at rest.

Less is, indeed, more. "Dr. Hauschka's pure, biodynamic skin preparations are elegantly simple as they aim to bring the skin back to balance. Pure, stable, therapeutic plant extracts are produced without the use of alcohol or synthetic preservatives, thus allowing the healing aspects of nature to be directly imparted to the skin. The skin responds by activating its own healing processes," says Ms. Kan of Dr. Hauschka.

A HIGHER QUALITY CONTROL

As the pure skincare formulations are intended to be as free from chemical additives as possible, the labs are also taking the lead in rethinking standard beauty product packaging and harnessing science and technology in their preservation methods. Vio employs colored bottles with special caps to protect the beauty fluids from light damage and oxidization. "Dr. Hauschka's products are formulated with natural preservatives like propolis and essential oils, stable ingredient compositions with natural resistance to spoilage," explains Ms. Kan.

Even some spas are stripping away the additives and getting back to basics with their in-house products. Similar to Dr. Hauschka, Thal'ion Skin Care is also focused on purity, not just of ingredients but also processes. The company specializes in harvesting seaweed and a variety of marine plants for their cosmetics and spa preparations. In order to preserve all the active ingredients in their original form, within 24 hours of harvesting, the seaweeds are processed using a low temperature dryer before being introduced in Thal'ion's facial and body ranges. These marine-based treatments, collectively called

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CONTACT INFORMATION

Vio Solutions are available at Skin Inc Concept Store at The Central, Clarke Quay, also available at spas and dermatologists' clinics islandwide. www.viosolution.com

Dr. Hauschka treatments are available at Aldha Spas at Robertson Walk and Cluny Court, and retailed at TANGS Orchard and Vivocity. www.drhauschka.com.sg

Thal'sens treatments are available at The Aspara at Goodwood Park Hotel. www.aspara.com.sg

thalassotherapy, have been very popular for beauty and health rejuvenation at seaside resorts in Europe. Now, with innovative preservation methods, thalassotherapy can be bottled and the benefits reproduced for thalasso devotees residing elsewhere, without the purity of the active substances being lessened.

Having stable, pure beauty extracts is just the beginning. As an adjunct to all this research, scientists are also working on improving how efficiently these molecules of pure ingredients can be utilized by the skin. Alda Yeo, business development manager of Skin Inc, which brings Vio into Singapore, reveals, "Hydrolyzed technology is used to break down the molecules of the Vio serum to 1,000 times smaller than can be found in other skincare products available in the market, thus facilitating penetration to the dermis layer. The serums also contain lysolecithin to aid penetration into the skin."

Place your bets. Pure beauty concentrates would be quickly gaining cult status, as they simplify our beauty regimens to the very basics of what we need, cut out unwanted nonsense, and reward with dramatic results. The answer is, as they say, pure and simple. ☺