

By Katy Neusteter

These 5 easy changes offer the biggest beauty benefits

Absolutely gorgeous

Let's call 2008 what it is: An opportunity to toss out old habits and whisk in new, healthy, enduring ones. But that doesn't mean you have to scrap everything from 2007. "Just upgrade the things you do with the most frequency," says Kat James, author of *The Truth About Beauty* (Atria, 2007). We asked James and other experts for their secrets on how to achieve lasting beauty without reinventing your daily wheel. Here's what they told us.

1 Tame the sugar demon

"Nothing destroys beauty faster than sugar," says Esther Blum, MS, RD, author of *Eat, Drink, and Be Gorgeous* (Chronicle, 2007). After they have been chemically altered, the sugars, fructose and glucose, in high-fructose corn syrup adhere to collagen—the protein that keeps skin elastic—making it stiff and inflexible. The result? Wrinkles.

"Humans were never supposed to be subjected to sodas," says James, who cautions that excessive sugar consumption not only causes blood sugar and insulin levels to spike, but also increases inflammation-triggered facial edema and worsens dark under-eye circles. "Just 24 hours after quitting high-sugar drinks, some people see a reduced puffiness in their faces." ▶

Other easy upgrades: Eat a square of dark chocolate on a full stomach. You'll feed cravings without spiking blood sugar levels as much as you would by eating sweets on an empty stomach. And substitute low-glycemic coconut flour for white flour in baked goods. To cut sugar hankerings, take 50–100 mg of 5HTP before meals; or chew gymnema leaves to block your ability to taste sugar.

2 Eat more fat

Not just more fat—better fat. “We’re obese but we’re also extremely malnourished,” says Blum, who blames our reliance on hydrogenated oils for afflictions ranging from cardiovascular disease to migraines to chronically dry skin. Replace saturated fats with healthy ones, such as omega-3 fatty acids—to regulate hormones and plump up skin by keeping cell walls hydrated and flexible.

Blum suggests working omega-3s into your diet by eating—surprise, surprise—wild Alaskan salmon. The fish also contains astaxanthin—a carotenoid that gives its flesh a reddish blush. A powerful antioxidant, astaxanthin is a natural internal sunscreen that protects skin from sun damage and discoloration. Try to eat 4 ounces of sustainable, wild-caught salmon three times per week.

3 Be kind to your gums

Americans love healthy smiles, yet 75 percent of us suffer from periodontitis, or gum infection, which can lead to abscesses, lost teeth, and even cardiovascular disease.

To keep bacteria from thriving between teeth and under gums, brush once a day with a make-at-home formula composed of common kitchen ingredients, suggests Sheila Wolf, RDH, a dental hygienist in San Diego and author of *Pregnancy and Oral Health* (Radcliffe, 2004). Mix ½ cup baking soda with 1 teaspoon sea salt in a sealable container you can store in your bathroom. Before brushing your teeth, pour a quarter-size dollop of the mixture into the palm of

your hand. (Make sure your hands are clean—you don’t want to introduce bacteria into your mouth.) Next wet a very soft toothbrush with a half-cupful hydrogen peroxide and mix it into your palm until a paste forms. Use as you would toothpaste. Baking soda helps remove stains from teeth and counteracts tooth decay by neutralizing the mouth’s pH; peroxide kills anaerobic bacteria and lightens teeth; and salt heals and disinfects gums.

4 Strike a pose

Donuts and pizza consumed on the sly are only part of the reason why you gain weight during periods of intense anxiety at work or home. When you’re under pressure, your adrenal glands release cortisol, a stress hormone that at high levels eats away muscle tissue and stores the energy as fat. Thankfully exercise regulates the hormone. But because sustaining an elevated heart rate for too long can actually raise cortisol levels, Blum recommends moderate exercise, such as yoga. “Even ten minutes a couple of days a week helps keep cortisol levels in check,” she says.

In addition to reducing stress, yoga supports endocrine function and improves circulation. “Headstands and inversion poses are good for reducing wrinkles and for massaging the thyroid.”

5 Turn your focus inward

Hours spent on your appearance won’t amount to much unless you feed your inner well-being. In other words, unhappiness can put the skids on everything else you do right, diminishing both your health and your external glow. “Pleasure is a nutrient,” Blum says. “Give yourself a ten or 20-minute break more than once a week—it has to be once a day.” Try upping your pleasure quotient with a daily walk, reading, time with your kids, or even chocolate—whatever you think adds to your quality of life. You will radiate happiness and beauty naturally. ■