

Quinn on Nutrition: Put on your best face

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I didn't like being called "freckle face" when I was a kid. So when my mom took me to the pediatrician for a routine check up, I asked him if he could make my freckles go away. He kindly told me he could, "but you will never be able to go out in the sun again or your freckles will come back." So I got used to being "freckle face."

Freckles may be the least of our skin worries as we grow older. Like it or not, gravity tugs our skin downward each decade after the age of 35 or so. And there is really no such thing as anti-aging. The best we can do is to age well, according to dermatologist Dr. Raja Sivamani at a recent webinar sponsored by the Almond Board of California (yes, almonds can be good for our skin).

I was fascinated with the photos Dr. Sivamani showed us that compared the faces of 60-something identical twins. One was a non-smoker. The other a smoker. Can we influence the rate that our skin shows the signs of aging? Definitely, yes!

Smoking, for example, puts a tremendous amount of oxidative stress on the skin. The result: A face that ages rapidly.

"Photoaging" is the damage to our skin caused by sun exposure. It shows up in the form of wrinkles, dark spots and leathery skin.

Besides not smoking and the dedicated use of sunscreen, we can also protect our skin from the inside out with certain nutrient components, says Dr. Sivamani.

Carotenoids—various color pigments in plants—are photoprotective, for example. That means they work like a sunscreen to guard against sun damage. These carotenoids include lycopene, the pigment that makes tomatoes and watermelon red, [beta carotene](#) that gives orange and green color to carrots, [sweet potatoes](#), kale and other greens and astaxanthin (asta-zan-thin), a lesser known carotenoid responsible for the reddish pigment in salmon and other marine animals.

While Dr. Sivamani advocates certain dietary supplements to achieve healthier skin, he says eating whole food sometimes has a better impact.

Almonds are a good example. They offer a good source of dietary fiber (fiber feeds the good bacteria in our gut which can promote healthy skin, believe it or not) and vitamin E, which helps protect our skin from the damaging effects of the sun. One recent clinical trial found that older men and women had slower wrinkle development after eating a handful of almonds every day for 4 months.

No, there is no magic formula that will stop our [skin](#) from its downward sag. But each time we put on sunscreen, consume healthful foods or choose not to smoke, we help slow down the aging process.

Now is the time to start, says Dr. Sivamani. Our choices over time can really help us put our best faces forward.

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