

Hormonal beauty bothers—solved!

For millions of us, so-called signs of aging are really symptoms of an endocrine issue. Here, what you need to know to look and feel years younger

Mirror, mirror on the...*wha?!* Seemingly out of nowhere, your time-tested beauty regimen isn't doing the trick anymore. Maybe your complexion is looking less than radiant. Or your normally voluminous locks have gone limp. Changes like this could be clues to an underlying hormonal imbalance, particularly if you're 35 or older.

"As we enter the perimenopausal years, our hormones start dropping, fluctuating and changing in their ratios to one another," says Florence Comite, M.D., an endocrinologist in New York City. "That can wreak havoc not only on our internal health but on multiple aspects of our appearance, from hair to skin to weight."

Still, while cosmetic symptoms may be the first we notice, they're often the last to be taken seriously. "The tendency is for doctors to see these things as vanity issues," laments endocrinologist Sara Gottfried, M.D., author of the upcoming book *The Hormone Reset Diet*. "Many physicians pat women on the hand and say, 'Oh, you're just getting older.' But the truth is that our appearance is a reflection of what's happening in our body. It's an important message that should be decoded, not dismissed." Fortunately, you can start solving your hormonal puzzle *today*. Here's how.



If you're experiencing THINNING HAIR

Along with one or more of the following:

- Bloating after eating
- Low mood or sudden memory problems
- Weak or brittle nails

The cause could be LOW THYROID

"In my experience, thyroid dysfunction is the number one cause of hair thinning in perimenopausal women," Dr. Gottfried reports. In fact, German scientists discovered that thyroid hormones are critical to forming the cells (called *keratinocytes*) that make up the hair shaft, as well as sustaining the growth phase of strands. Unfortunately, incidence of sluggish thyroid jumps by 133 percent between early adulthood and age 48.

Even if your doctor has ruled out a thyroid disorder in the past, consider a second opinion. "Physicians typically test levels of thyroid-stimulating hormone, or TSH, defining the normal range as .35 to 5.5 mIU/L," says endocrinologist Romy Block, M.D., a clinical assistant professor at the University of Chicago. "But a high 'normal' number means your brain is trying to kick-start your thyroid."

In addition to a TSH test, ask your doctor for a free T₃, free T₄ and reverse T₃ test, as well as a test for antibodies such as *antithyroglobulin*. Your more nuanced results may indicate that you'd benefit from thyroid hormone replacement—as well as the following strategies.

Your Rx for healthier locks

THIS KIND OF MULTI. The body requires a number of micronutrients during the tricky chemical conversion of T₄ (an unstable form of thyroid hormone) to T₃ (its more metabolically active form). Women with hypothyroid symptoms tend to have suboptimal levels of the key nutrients, and to make matters worse, many multis are insufficiently potent, Dr. Gottfried says. She advises taking a multivitamin that contains the following thyroid boosters in the adjacent amounts: methylated folate (400 mcg), selenium (200 mcg), copper (2 mg), and zinc (15 mg). For extra thyroid insurance, choose a multi formulated without gluten fillers. (Read more on gluten below.) One brand that hits all the marks: Metagenics Multigenics Intensive Care (\$34 for 180 tablets, VitaCost.com).

A GLUTEN-FREE TRIAL. The molecular structure of gluten (a protein in wheat, barley and rye) is a look-alike for thyroid hormone, and as a result, gluten can worsen hair loss in the millions of women who unknowingly suffer from gluten intolerance. "The immune

system goes after gluten and ends up attacking the thyroid too, and hair can pay the price," Dr. Gottfried explains. To stop this cycle, she advises avoiding gluten for 8 to 12 weeks—particularly if you've been experiencing bloat after meals. In addition to obvious sources like bread and pasta, skip packaged foods that list "food starch" or "vegetable protein" on the label—both terms indicate the presence of gluten. If your hair and health improve during this break, Dr. Gottfried says it's best to steer clear of gluten going forward.

ALSO SMART

BOOST YOUR D. The likelihood of a thyroid slowdown nearly doubles when vitamin D dips too low. That's sobering news for the 86 percent of women who are lacking in this nutrient. Dr. Comite recommends asking your doctor to screen your level; if D concentration is under 30 ng/ml, taking a supplement (like Bluebonnet D₃ 1,000 IU, \$14 for 250 softgels, at iHerb.com and health-food stores) will help. To determine your body's daily needs, use this formula from James E. Dowd, M.D., coauthor of *The Vitamin D Cure*: Multiply your weight by 25. (For example, 160 pounds x 25 = 4,000 IUs.)

Fast beauty fix

CAFFEINATED HAIR-THICKENING TREATMENT

A key ingredient to look for in a topical hair thickener: caffeine, which increases circulation to the scalp so more nutrients reach hair follicles, says Marnie Nussbaum, M.D., a dermatologist in New York City. Caffeine also blocks DHT, a hormone metabolite that causes follicles to shrink. For the best results, Dr. Nussbaum recommends a treatment that blends

caffeine with vitamin B₃ (which strengthens the hair cortex) and *panthenol* (which hydrates and plumps strands). **FIRST picks:** Pantene Expert Collection AgeDefy Thickening Treatment, \$16 for 4.2 oz., Soap.com; Thicker Fuller Hair Revitalizing Shampoo, \$6 for 12 oz., drugstore.com



If you're experiencing

BREAKOUTS

Along with one or more of the following:

- Strong cravings for cheese or dairy
- Restless sleep
- Oily skin and/or hair

The cause could be
DIETARY HORMONE EXCESS

"The average cow in the United States is injected with six steroid growth hormones, which enter our bodies when we consume conventional dairy," cautions endocrinologist Sara Gottfried, M.D. (We're also exposed to lower levels of hormones in conventional beef and lamb, according to the FDA.) Depending on how much dairy you eat and drink, Dr. Gottfried says synthetic dietary growth hormones can overstimulate sebaceous glands to produce intermittent breakouts of cystic acne, particularly on the chin and jawline.

While cutting out cheese may seem like the simplest path to clear skin, that's easier said than done: "Cow's milk also contains high amounts of amino acids called *casomorphins*, which act like morphine in the body," Dr. Gottfried explains. "You can actually get hooked on the cheese plate, further increasing your exposure and making breakouts even worse." Fortunately, the following strategies can undo the damage caused by dairy.

Your Rx for beating blemishes

EXERCISE BURSTS. Mini blasts of vigorous movement crank up the body's natural output of human growth hormone, which helps buffer your system against synthetic hormones found in food, Dr. Gottfried says. Studies show that

10 to 30 seconds of intense activity performed in bursts of three every other day is all it takes to make a positive difference in the body's natural growth hormone levels. Jumping jacks, climbing stairs—any activity that leaves you winded does the trick.

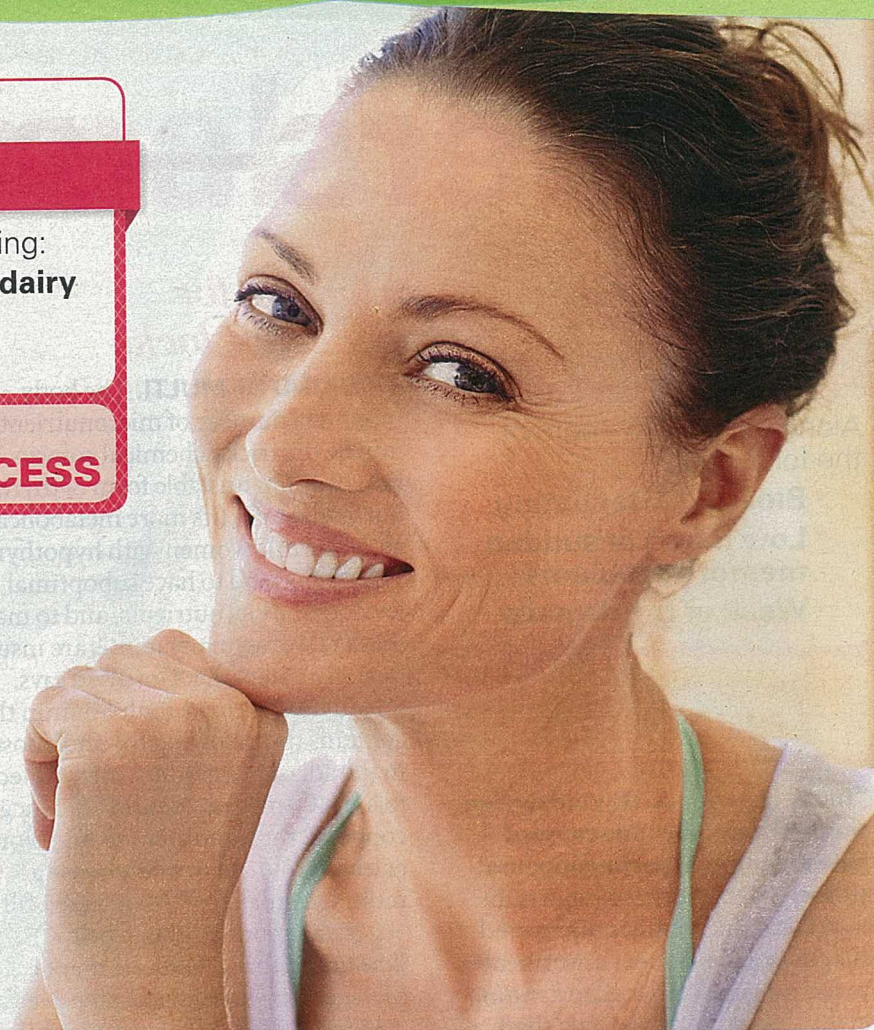
MELATONIN. Poor-quality sleep heightens sensitivity to synthetic growth hormones, Dr. Gottfried cautions. What's more, sleep disturbances can stoke the dairy cravings that drive skin flare-ups. To improve your sleep cycle—as well as your snack habits and skin health—researchers recommend taking up to 10 grams of melatonin in supplement form 30 minutes before bed. A brand to try: Olympian Labs Melatonin 10 mg Time Release, \$10 for 60 tablets, OlympianLabs.com.

Fast beauty fix

RAPESEED OIL HEALING CONCEALER

The newest concealers do double-duty by hiding blemishes and treating inflammation. Look for one with rapeseed oil, which boasts *phytosterols* (antioxidants with anti-inflammatory properties that improve skin tone and texture) and vitamin E (to prevent scarring).

FIRST pick: Sebamed Coloured Anti-Pimple Cream (it comes in one shade that blends with most skin tones), \$13, SebamedUSA.com



If you're experiencing

DULL, CREPEY SKIN

Along with one or more of the following:

- Belly fat/a muffin top
- A history of food sensitivities
- Dark under-eye circles

The cause could be
CORTISOL OVERLOAD

Once this stress hormone starts flowing, it almost works like an *anti-fountain of youth*. "Cortisol eats up collagen, the component of skin that's necessary for a firm, dewy appearance," Dr. Gottfried explains. What's more, studies show that cortisol depletes bone mass, which can make skin look saggy. While emotional stress is by far the biggest driver of high cortisol, any persistent bodily stressor—untreated food sensitivities being the most common—can cause cortisol to remain elevated. Many women notice the effects on their waistline, adds Dr. Gottfried, since cortisol drives cravings and increases the storage of fat in the abdominal area.

Your Rx for restored radiance

A TWO-WEEK WINE FAST. Sipping a glass of Pinot feels relaxing in the moment, but experts at the University of Missouri found that the body pumps out high levels of cortisol as booze breaks down. That can spell trouble for skin if cortisol is already high. For this reason, Dr. Gottfried advises abstaining from alcohol for 14 days, twice a year. "This is my least popular tip," she laughs. "But it allows the body to normalize cortisol levels and replenish the skin." Beyond that, she suggests limiting drinks to three a week.

EPSOM SALTS BATHS. A warm soak can bring on a healthy glow—and if you add some Epsom salts you'll also replenish your stores of magnesium, a mineral that's key to the body's ability to manage stress. In a U.K. study, volunteers who took a daily bath containing 1 cup of Epsom salts doubled their blood levels of the stress-regulating mineral in just over a week.

Fast beauty fix

MINTY BRIGHTENING MASK

The spa-inspired secret to firmer, more luminous skin can be found in your kitchen! Simply combine 1 Tbs. each of water, honey, yogurt and crushed mint leaves. Twice a week, apply the mask to your face and let sit for 10 minutes, then rinse. Honey is a humectant that locks moisture into the skin while yogurt's lactic acid dissolves dead cells and mint's menthol revs circulation for a rosy glow. **Bonus:** The mask works wonders on the body as well; simply double or triple the recipe.



PHOTOS, FROM LEFT: JUMP, GETTY; FOOD STILL: GETTY



Fast beauty fix

ANTI-INFLAMMATORY HAIR REMOVER

The new wave of at-home waxing uses natural ingredients like beeswax and aloe to gently remove unwanted hair on the face and body. The vitamin A in beeswax keeps skin moisturized while the soothing anti-inflammatory properties of aloe prevent irritation. Plus, because these waxes remove hair from the root, you can stay fuzz-free for up to 8 weeks.

FIRST pick: Nad's Natural Hair Removal Gel Kit #2242045, \$13, Ulta.com

If you're experiencing
ROGUE BODY HAIRS

Along with one or more of the following:

- Irregular periods
- Vaginal dryness or painful intercourse
- Itchy or tingly skin

The cause could be
WANING ESTROGEN

It's the classic picture of perimenopausal hormone imbalance: As estrogen starts to decline in our mid-30s, naturally occurring testosterone gains a larger piece of the pie. This stimulates androgenic (body hair) follicles and makes the menstrual cycle unpredictable. Women may also notice they feel itchy all over. "When estrogen dips, skin cells change—and don't retain moisture as well," explains endocrinologist Florence Comite, M.D. All experts interviewed by FIRST advise seeing your gynecologist or an endocrinologist if you have symptoms of low estrogen. Hormone testing may reveal that you'd benefit from an androgen-blocking medication (such as *spironolactone* or *finasteride*) or a low-dose oral contraceptive.

Your Rx for a fuzz-free chin

A SUGAR STRIKE. Sweets and other simple carbs fuel testosterone output in the body, exacerbating what might otherwise be just a mild hormonal imbalance. Restore equilibrium by swapping in foods that have a low glycemic index—for example, enjoy oatmeal at breakfast instead of cereal, and prep lunch with a corn tortilla instead of bread. In one study, people who ate low-glycemic foods reduced their testosterone levels by 20 percent in one week. If your sweet tooth acts up, sweeten foods with a plant-derived zero-calorie sugar substitute like stevia.

THIS SUPPLEMENT-SPICE COMBO. As the food swaps above put the brakes on testosterone production, a pairing of cinnamon and chromium can help counteract the excess testosterone that's already circulating, says Sara Gottfried, M.D. Her recommended daily doses: ½ tsp. of 100 percent pure powdered cinnamon (try it sprinkled on oatmeal or in a smoothie,) and 200 to 1,000 mcg of chromium (like NOW Foods GTF Chromium Yeast-Free 200 mcg, \$12 for 250 tablets, at Now-2-U.com).

FROM LEFT: JUMP: CORBIS

If you're experiencing
SKIN PIGMENTATION

Along with one or more of the following:

- Changes in body odor
- Increased urinary frequency
- Pronounced lethargy between meals

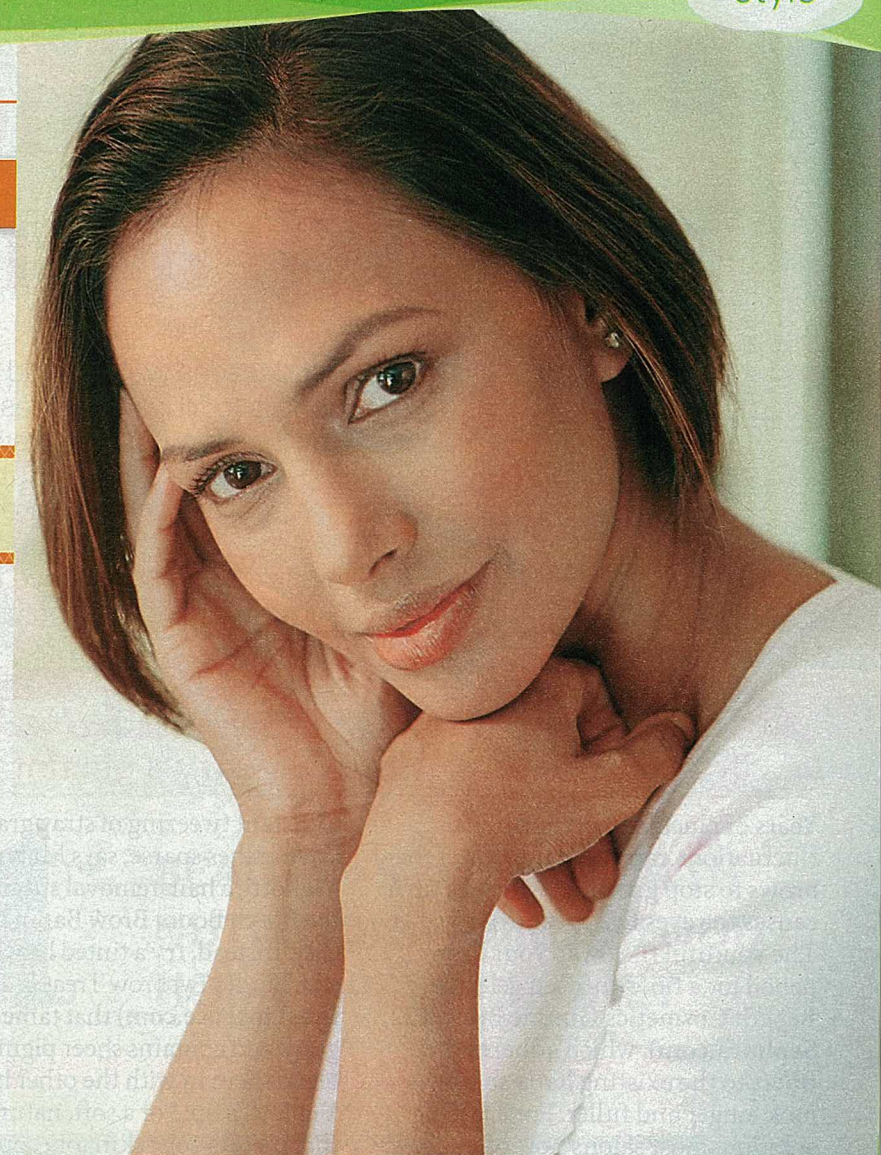
The cause could be
INSULIN RESISTANCE

Insulin is a hormone that normally unlocks the body's cells to let in fuel (aka glucose) after a meal—but it fails to do so in an estimated 71 percent of U.S. women. As Dr. Gottfried explains, cells stop responding properly to insulin, which in turn causes circulating levels of the hormone (and blood sugar) to stay high. This elevated insulin can result in darkened skin patches, known as *Acanthosis nigricans*, in the folds of the underarms, neck and groin, as well as over the joints of fingers and toes. Dr. Gottfried notes that affected areas may also develop a velvety texture and/or an off odor, which is a by-product of sugar-seeking yeast. See your primary-care doctor if you notice skin darkening—in some cases, *Acanthosis nigricans* is a sign of type 2 diabetes, which requires close medical management.

Your Rx for
even-toned skin

COLORFUL VEGGIES. A plant-based diet can improve symptoms of insulin resistance by up to 60 percent—and not just because the low calories lead to weight loss. New research at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore shows that antioxidants in pigmented vegetables help repair the cellular damage that's at the root of faulty glucose transit, so cells are better able to process sugar. Dr. Gottfried's rule for ensuring you get enough: Eat 1 pound per day of colorful non-starchy veggies like one large carrot (4 oz.), 1 cup of broccoli (4 oz.), a medium beet (6 oz.) and 2 oz. of greens.

THESE TYPES OF MOVES. Exercise of any kind can aid the body's insulin response, but several studies suggest that resistance training is the most effective. In one study, it was shown to improve volunteers' sensitivity to the hormone by 46 percent in 16 weeks. Kim Watkins, a certified fitness trainer in New York City and owner of inSHAPE Fitness, recommends 5 minutes per day of moves such as squats and lunges, ideally before breakfast. "In the morning, blood sugar levels naturally rise as the body prepares itself for waking up and moving around," she explains. "Light strength exercise followed by a healthy meal can stabilize glucose until lunchtime."



Fast beauty fix

CITRUS SPOT ERASER

When applied topically, vitamin C-rich grapefruit cream helps inhibit the over-production of *melanin* (the pigment that gives skin its color). Plus, the fruit's flavonoids promote cell turnover for healthier skin while its alpha hydroxy acids dissolve dead skin cells. Applied twice daily, most users see brighter, more even skin in as little as 4 weeks.

FIRST pick: Yes to Grapefruit Dark Spot Correcting Body Creme, \$9 for 6 oz., Walgreens.com





No more drawn-on brows

For decades we've relied on pencils to fill in our arches, but it can be difficult to get drawn-on brows to look natural. But times they are a-changin'! Here, three new beauty breakthroughs that make it easier to achieve fuller, softer, youthful-looking brows

Short brows?

Try "extensions"

Years of plucking and hormonal fluctuations can cause the tips of the brows to stop growing, which in turn causes the eyes to appear droopy. The youthful fix: Swap your brow pencil for a fiber-infused gel (like Benefit Cosmetics Gimme Brow, \$22, Benefit.com), which adheres tiny fibers to the existing hairs so brows look longer and fuller. For a lasting solution, most salons now offer brow extensions, where individual silk hairs are glued to the brows. Prices start at \$25 and results last up to a month.

Graying brows?

Try a gel tint

Constant tweezing of stray grays can leave arches sparse, says Malynda Vigliotti, a hair-removal specialist at the Boom Boom Brow Bar in New York City. Instead, try a tinted brow gel (like e.l.f. Studio Eyebrow Treat & Tame, \$3, EyesLipsFace.com) that tames coarse grays and contains sheer pigments that blend them in with the other hairs. Vigliotti's tip: For a soft, natural look that flatters your skin tone, opt for a gel that's one shade lighter than the darkest hair on your head (like a rich dark brown if your hair is black).

Bald spots?

Try a protein serum

Thanks to pregnancy, stress and age, most of us have experienced thinning hair on our heads, but we often don't realize our brows can end up sparse and spotty as well, says celebrity brow expert Tonya Crooks, who's groomed Gwyneth Paltrow's arches. "The good news is that there are affordable protein-infused brow serums that strengthen the hairs and stimulate new growth—and they *really* work."

The key is to use one that has amino acids (they boost the hair's ability to retain moisture, adding volume), castor oil (its *ricinoleic acid* and omega-6 fatty acids increase blood circulation to stimulate growth) and vitamin B₅ (a humectant, soothing agent and moisturizer). Brushed on brows once a day before sleep, this nutrient combo helps thicken brows in about a month.

ONE TO TRY: Ardell Brow & Lash Accelerator Treatment Gel, \$4, drugstore.com

READER POLL

WOULD YOU EVER...USE A PRE-OILED CURLING IRON?

We asked 100 FIRST readers & staffers to weigh in and

Anything that saves us time and money is a plus in our book. That's why we're fascinated by Revlon's new Nutrifusion Curling Iron (\$25, Ulta.com), which has moringa, macadamia and argan oil infused right into the plates. We wondered: Can we save money and skip heat-styling products? Will it help hair look healthier? Will the curls last? Our consensus:

We love it!

"I curl my hair often and find it dries out easily from all the styling, especially during the winter. After a few days of using this iron, I had really silky, shiny curls and my hair felt much healthier than it did with other irons. No need for my styling oils, I'm a convert!"

—Kate Trombly, FIRST assistant food editor

"I loved the idea that this curling iron would help protect my hair from damage, but I didn't notice any dramatic differences. While my curls turned out beautifully and lasted all day, I still feel like I should use my normal heat protectant or a little extra oil to ensure my hair stays smooth, shiny and healthy."

—Lauren Gatcombe, FIRST editorial assistant

**78%
said
yes!**