

Read your face: The 4 signs of aging

1 SAGGING SKIN

Gravity does take its toll, but something else is at work here: Over time, the skin's underlying structure breaks down, robbing our faces of their definition, youthful plumpness, and resilience. Skin also renews itself much more slowly than it once did. Thanks to all these factors (not to mention genetics, weight changes, and sun damage), skin starts to sag and hang (that's where jowls come from). And some doctors say that once skin starts to slacken, pores often look larger, as if they've been stretched out of shape.

WHAT YOU CAN DO AT HOME No easy fixes here. "Tightening sagging skin requires more intervention than any other problem," says Ranella Hirsch, M.D., spokesperson for the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery. A good moisturizer will plump skin temporarily; Dr. Hirsch says. But if the cream is too heavy, it will clog those oversize pores. The best at-home solution: what the beauty industry calls an "active" treatment, such as an over-the-counter vitamin A (known as retinol) cream, vitamin C serum, and alpha or beta hydroxy acids (AHAs or BHAs). These usually go on at night and help skin renew itself faster and look firmer. Try Garnier Nutritioniste Ultra-Lift Firming Moisture Cream (\$15, drug-stores), which contains vitamin A.

As for pores, you can't shrink them, but you can minimize their appearance, says Jeanine B. Downie, M.D., a dermatologist in Montclair, NJ. "Pores will look smaller if you keep your skin clean and protected

from the sun," she says. If they really bother you, try pore-minimizing makeup or a cream like Dermadoctor Picture Porefect Pore Minimizing Solution (\$40, sephora.com). And, of course, daily sunscreen is a must. Try Skin Effects Sun Effects Sunscreen Lotion (\$16, CVS).

WHAT A DOCTOR CAN DO Not interested in a face-lift? That's fine—there are noninvasive procedures worth investigating. Both infrared and laser treatments help stimulate the development of new collagen and "get heat deeply into the skin to help tighten fibrous bands," explains Dr. Weiss, who is also vice president of the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery. Ask your doctor about the Palomar Lux DeepIR, Cutera Titan, or CoolTouch. "Although we haven't found the perfect device for dealing with sagging skin, the tech-

nology is getting better all the time," Dr. Weiss says. And while these treatments are pricey and you'll need several sessions, the results are visible and impressive. To help improve the look of enlarged pores (and speed up skin's renewal process) at a much lower cost, ask a doctor about a prescription for Retin-A. "Whether you're dealing with acne or wrinkles, it's been proven to work on many levels," says Dr. Hirsch.

2 ROUGH TEXTURE (AND YES, WRINKLES)

Why can't we all have baby-smooth skin? As your body ages, it produces less oil (which means the skin—especially the top layer—gets drier); plus, your skin's under-the-surface structure is not as elastic or supple as it used to be, so it takes longer to bounce back than it once did. ►

Your simple daily to-dos

While skin care is individual, there are easy steps everyone can follow to get her complexion in great shape. The starting point: You can and should use an "active" treatment (see "Sagging Skin," left), but you need to pick one your skin will tolerate. Otherwise, your face will just end up looking red and irritated. (The one group that should not use an active treatment: women with a tendency for redness; see "Redness & Sensitivity," page 66.) So pay attention to your skin's reactions and adjust your routine accordingly. "With any active [especially Retin-A], you'll experience a break-in period involving some irritation. But stick with it, being careful to use only a pea-size amount. Start with two or three applications a week and work up to using it every night," Dr. Hirsch advises. "Over six to eight weeks, your skin will adjust and the redness and flaking will disappear."

EVERY MORNING Use a gentle cleanser if your skin feels dirty. Otherwise, just put on your moisturizer, then sunscreen.

EVERY NIGHT Remove your makeup with a gentle cleanser (to get skin really clean, massage it for more than a minute, then rinse). Pat dry. Apply your active treatment (a gentle antioxidant cream if you have sensitive skin, or a retinoid or AHA/BHA if your skin is more tolerant). Finish with a basic (nonactive) moisturizer to hydrate skin and counteract any dryness or peeling brought on by the treatment (turn the page for recommendations).