



# What Your Aging Skin Needs (and Doesn't Need), According to 12 Top Pros

We asked a dozen dermatologists, plastic surgeons, and other aesthetic experts the eternal question: How do you age well?

While their philosophies differed, they all agreed on a few key habits, treatments, and goals for looking and feeling your best at every age. Here's what they do—and think you should do, too.

BY KATE SANDOVAL BOX

For years, the beauty industry has put products that promise to soften wrinkles, fade dark spots, undo dullness, and firm skin into a category called anti-aging. We'd like to propose a new name for the category: pro-aging. That's because these formulas are really about longevity: helping our skin act and look its healthiest—hydrated and bright, smooth and bouncy—for decades to come. Along with a healthy lifestyle and (perhaps) a judicious approach to in-office treatments, they enhance not just your appearance but your mental and emotional well-being as well. It's about so much more than vanity. As dermatologist Heather Woolery-Lloyd, MD, puts it, "You can have a great, even fearless outlook on aging and still want to address the signs of it." Here, she and a dream team of other experts across the country share their guiding principles to doing just that.

## First, subscribe to simplicity.

"Many people tell me they don't care about the way they look. But the way you look and the way you feel are in lockstep," says Nurse Jamie. If you want to do a 10-step routine, go for it, she says. But a simple one is very effective. Your primary goal is prevention: "The key habit above all else is the daily and routine use of sunscreen, plus a serum or moisturizer that contains antioxidants," says dermatologist Pearl Grimes, MD. Both help curb UV damage, which accounts for a whopping 80 percent of skin aging. "Aging happens no matter what," says dermatologist Daniel Belkin, MD. "But photoaging, which is mostly from UV light, frays the skin's elastin fibers, shrivels the fibroblasts that make collagen, and stimulates the pigment-producing cells." Your best countermeasures are a broad-spectrum sunscreen with at least an SPF 30 and a vitamin C serum, as research has shown that vitamin C is not only an effective antioxidant but also helps fade dark spots and boost collagen production. Consider this duo your first defense.

## No cream, laser, or needle can replace healthy habits.

"Having been in practice for so many years, I can see firsthand which of my patients have practiced good habits and which have not," says dermatologist Karyn Grossman, MD. What have the youthful-looking patients done? They wash their face at night, stay out of the sun, don't smoke, and get a minimum of seven hours of sleep, ideally on their backs, "which really helps prevent etched-in lines," says dermatologist Elizabeth Bahar Houshmand, MD.

What you put inside your body has a visible effect, too. "Fruits and vegetables help the body and skin stay hydrated. Antioxidant-rich foods, like berries, help protect against free-radical damage. And foods with probiotics, like kefir, yogurt, and miso, promote a healthy gut, which can help skin conditions like acne, rosacea, and eczema," says dermatologist Dendy Engelman, MD. Overall, you want foods that keep cells functioning well, inflammation levels low, and muscle and bone mass maintained.

Last, stay strong and energized. "Besides a low-carb, high-protein diet, I recommend resistance training three times a week," says internist and longevity medicine specialist Amanda Kahn, MD. "I also think it's critical to boost NAD+ and glutathione, two of the body's key molecules that decline in our cells with age. Glutathione is a powerful antioxidant that combats cellular damage and safeguards DNA. NAD+ is crucial for mitochondrial function, the cell's energy powerhouse. Patients who are on these therapies often report healthier skin plus heightened energy levels and mental focus."

## The most underrated sign of great skin is its bounce.

A lot of people don't realize this, but a key quality of healthy skin is what we call turgor, or its bounce and elasticity, says dermatologist David Colbert, MD. The classic test is to pinch the skin on the back of your hand and let go: Does it snap back right away or flatten ever so gradually? Our skin's ability to stretch and return to shape comes from strong collagen and elastin. We lose 1 percent of that collagen every year starting in our 20s, and the best way to help restore it is to stimulate your body to produce more. This is where many of the skin pros' favorite tools come into play. "Certain lasers, LED light therapy, microneedling devices, and injectables create controlled micro-injuries, which spur the skin's wound healing response and ramp up collagen production," Colbert says.

At home, you can stimulate cell turnover and collagen building with a retinoid, the world's most proven anti-aging ingredient. It can be irritating, so you'll want to use a pea-size amount a couple of times a week and ramp up as your tolerance increases. Several derms we spoke to say they apply it to their bodies, too. "I rub any excess on my neck, chest, and the backs of my hands, all areas that are exposed to the elements and among the fastest to show signs of aging," Engelman says. Peptides and growth factors can also help boost collagen. "I apply formulas with these plus a retinoid daily, and my skin has transformed," says facial plastic surgeon Jason Diamond, MD.

## Nobody needs preemptive injectables or surgery.

"You don't need Botox before you have wrinkles, nor do you need a facelift when you're 35, the newest recommendation by several plastic surgeons here in L.A.," Grossman says. "Start with great skincare and, sure, add small treatments, but go slowly." Another potential revelation? You may not want or need them at all. "So often, patients reach out to me saying, 'It's time; I need injectables,'" says dermatologist Loretta Ciraldo, MD. "And I'll say, 'Do me a favor first. Book an appointment with a haircolorist, and then come back.' Half of them don't return, because a face-framing haircut and contrasting haircolor was the less expensive makeover they needed." When asked what she does to her face, Ciraldo throws a curveball: "Personally, I have access to plenty of injectables in my office, and you know what? I haven't used them on myself for a couple of years. I don't want my 30-something daughter to think I'm trying to look her age, because I'm not."

## If and when you go there, stay true to your face.

"My goal is to reduce imperfections without losing what makes you look like you," says plastic and reconstructive surgeon Lara Devgan, MD. Be sure to communicate this to your provider, because they may not share this vision. "Right now, people seem to be more focused on creating a homogenous version of beauty, rather than cherishing each individual's natural beauty. Think of the '90s supermodels; they each had their own unique appearance. We should get back to that," Grossman says. Your best safeguard is to use your own photos as reference points. "Plenty of people on social media tell me that I could use some filler, but I looked back at photos of myself when I was younger, and my facial features were just as thin then. It's one thing to maintain your face shape, but when you alter it so that it isn't what you were, things can look off," Ciraldo says.

## Address the issue that bugs you most.

Because guess what—that might be all you need to do! Dealing with a real hangup—the thing you zero in on every time you look in the mirror, that zaps your confidence and might even hold you back from your goals (whether or not it should)—is the most impactful way to look and feel your best. "A lot of people are single-issue agers," says Colbert. "They'll say, 'I'm only here to deal with my saggy neck' or 'I hate this one frown line.' There's so much you can do for whatever sticks out to you, and it can be very empowering." Here's what our pros suggest if your *bête noire* is...

**Dark spots:** "Uneven skin, hyperpigmentation [dark spots], and melasma [brown or gray-brown splotches] occur in all skin colors but are especially common in darker skin tones like mine because we have more active melanocytes, or pigment-producing cells," says Woolery-Lloyd. Before you do anything else, get yourself a tinted mineral sunscreen. Wear it religiously and avoid the sun; otherwise, any dark spots you do get rid of will come roaring back. Next, use a cleanser, serum, or peel that contains glycolic acid, but don't go crazy: "Over-exfoliation exacerbates the situation, and no skincare can completely remove dark spots," so being aggressive isn't the answer. Woolery-Lloyd warns. Unless you have melasma, which should be treated with topicals and medication since heat and light make it worse, a dermatologist can zap spots with a laser or energy-based device. "My go-to is IPL [intense pulsed light]," she says.

Other pros name-check the Pico and Q-Switched lasers. Expect three to six sessions spaced a month apart. Zapped areas will appear darker and then slough off after a couple of weeks.

**Wrinkles and uneven texture:** We raved about them above, and we'll do it again here. "Retinoids are your time machine. They stimulate collagen production and cell turnover, effectively reducing the appearance of wrinkles and uneven texture," Devgan says. To tackle dynamic wrinkles, the deep ones formed from repetitive muscle movements like frowning, your best bet is to go pro and get strategic injections of neurotoxins like Botox Cosmetic, Daxxify, or Xeomin. They contain botulinum toxin, which limits muscle contraction for two to four months.

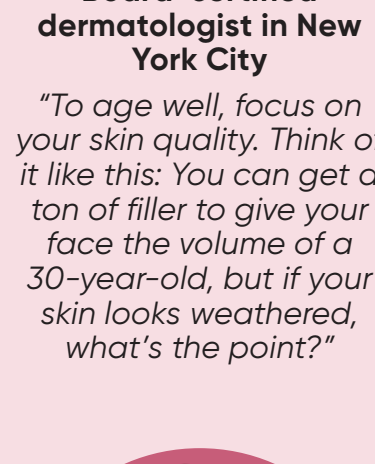
To resurface and smooth skin, experts turn to microneedling devices (expect a day or two of redness with results appearing after a few months) or lasers (like the erbium or CO2, which comes with weeks of downtime—but the prize is fresh, newborn skin). "Ideally, I like to do one of these treatments twice a year and combine it with Botox to help prevent wrinkles from getting deeper," Nurse Jamie says.

**Laxity and crepiness:** Inventing a great method for tightening and lifting the skin without surgery is the holy grail of cosmetic dermatology. "We don't have it yet," Belkin says. There are noninvasive devices for mild looseness (Sofwave, Thermage, and Ultherapy; each require a few sessions) and moderate sag around the jawline or under the chin (FaceTite, Renuvion, and Thermi; these are bigger procedures that apply energy below the skin, and come with a week or so of downtime) plus a new device called Ellacor, "which uses Micro-Coring—think tiny cookie cutters—to remove tiny pieces of skin throughout an area so the skin looks tighter and smoother once it heals," Grossman says. Ideally, you'd do two or three sessions with a week of healing for each. How do you know when these in-office treatments aren't enough? "If excess skin needs to be removed or features need to be lifted and repositioned, then it's time for the scalpel," Diamond says. Adds Devgan: "A meticulous plastic surgeon can advise you on options from suture suspensions to brow, face, neck, and body lifts."

There are subtler, more everyday ways to defy gravity, too. "Bad posture and the way we tilt our heads forward and down to look at our phones puts pressure on the muscles in our faces. Over time, this can lead to flatter cheeks, double chins, and facial strain," says Nurse Jamie, who adds that she can instantly spot a side sleeper for the same reason; sleep on your back with your mouth closed, she says.

**Dullness:** This you can fix yourself! The solve is a good moisturizer: "Skin gets drier and duller with age, so regular hydration is key," Bahar Houshmand says. Exercise and massage (with or without a skin tool) also help because "they boost circulation, bringing nutrients and oxygen to the cells," Nurse Jamie says. For the glow factor, incorporate gentle exfoliators. "Peels that contain alpha hydroxy acids help remove dead, dull skin cells," Engelman says. Depending on the formula, you can use it once a week or even nightly; just check the instructions and monitor your results to find the right frequency. Don't discount its power: "I've seen it time and time again," Engelman says. "A person's entire outlook on aging can shift when they're feeling good about their appearance." **O**

### The Experts



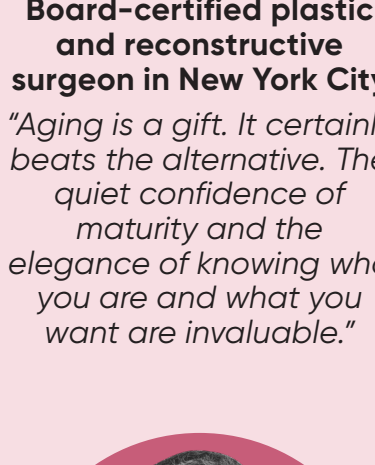
**DANIEL BELKIN, MD**  
Board-certified dermatologist in New York City

"To age well, focus on your skin quality. Think of it like this: You can get a ton of filler to give your face the volume of a 30-year-old, but if your skin looks weathered, what's the point?"



**LORETTA CIRALDO, MD**  
Board-certified dermatologist in Miami and founder of Dr. Loretta Skincare

"At 71, I feel confident about my appearance. My forehead and frown lines don't detract from me; I'm comfortable with my expression-forward face."



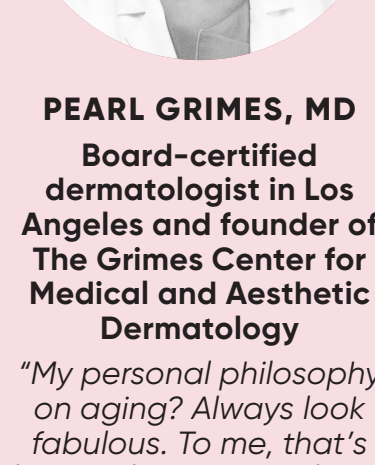
**DAVID COLBERT, MD**  
Board-certified dermatologist in New York City and founder of New York Dermatology Group

"There's so much you can do to look 15 years younger, and it doesn't have to be invasive."



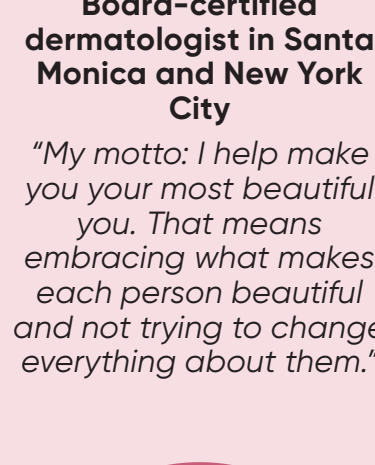
**LARA DEVGAN, MD**  
Board-certified plastic surgeon in New York City and founder of Dr. Lara Devgan

"Aging is a gift. It certainly beats the alternative. The quiet confidence of maturity and the elegance of knowing who you are and what you want are invaluable."



**JASON DIAMOND, MD**  
Double-board-certified facial plastic surgeon in Beverly Hills

"Look your best to feel your best. Feel your best to do your best."



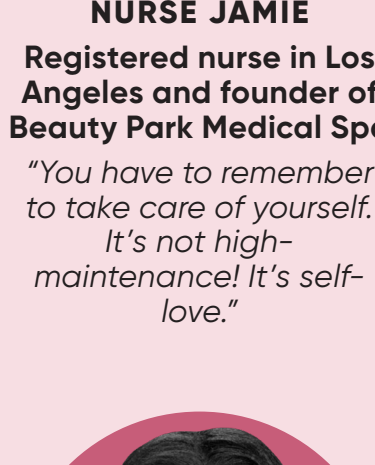
**DENDY ENGELMAN, MD**  
Board-certified dermatologist at Shafter Clinic in New York City

"The goal is to look like yourself, but the best, healthiest, most well-rested version. I believe in using injectables and treatments to help enhance, but my approach is always less is more."



**PEARL GRIMES, MD**  
Board-certified dermatologist in Los Angeles and founder of The Grimes Center for Medical and Aesthetic Dermatology

"My personal philosophy on aging? Always look like each person beautiful. My goals are to optimize my sleep and my diet—your can't out-treat a bad diet."



**KARYN GROSSMAN, MD**  
Board-certified dermatologist in Santa Monica and New York City

"My goal is to help make you your most beautiful you. That means embracing what makes each person beautiful and not trying to change everything about them."



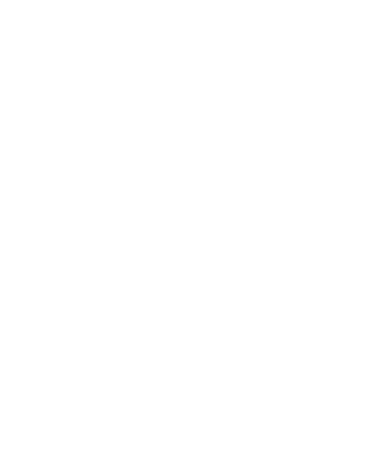
**ELIZABETH BAHAR HOUSHMAND, MD**  
Double-board-certified dermatologist in Dallas

"I don't focus on aging; I focus on being healthy. My goals are to optimize my sleep and my diet—your can't out-treat a bad diet."



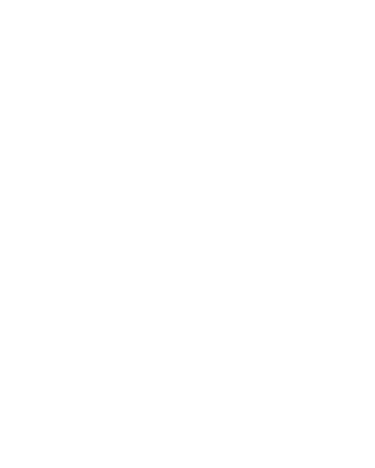
**AMANDA KAHN, MD**  
Board-certified internist and longevity medicine specialist in New York City

"As I age, I feel stronger and more attractive. I have more knowledge and more wisdom, and have a more balanced approach to caring for myself."



**NURSE JAMIE**  
Registered nurse in Los Angeles and founder of Beauty Park Medical & Spa

"You have to remember to take care of yourself. It's not high-maintenance! It's self-love."



**HEATHER WOOLERY-LOYD, MD**  
Board-certified dermatologist in Miami and founder of DermFriends

"I have always had a healthy approach to aging, so I have never feared getting older, but I do simple things to address the signs of it."