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How Holiday Carbs Can Wreak Havoc On Your Skin, And How To Combat It

What you eat makes a big difference in your skin’s appearance, especially when cookies and pies are abundant.

By Julie Kendrick

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Salves, serums and elixirs are great, don’t get us wrong. But if you want a clear and luminous complexion, what you put *in* your body can be just as important as the products you put *on* it. It turns out that a diet high in processed foods, especially refined carbohydrates like sugary holiday drinks, salty snacks and packaged baked goods, can wreak havoc on your skin.

All those foods are known to have a high glycemic index, which means they raise your blood sugar quickly. According to the [American Academy of Dermatology Association](#), studies have shown that [a high glycemic diet may cause more pimples](#). Dr. [Courtney Rubin](#), a dermatologist and the co-founder and chief medical officer of [Fig.1](#), explained why: “Those foods may have a pro-inflammatory effect on the body, leading to flares in inflammatory skin conditions like acne.”



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“People who consume larger quantities of refined carbohydrates tend to have higher incidence of acne,” confirmed Dr. [Jaimie DeRosa](#), a double board-certified facial plastic surgeon. DeRosa explained that high-glycemic foods cause a rapid increase of blood glucose and release of insulin, causing the body to produce more oil in the skin. “That overproduction of what’s known as sebum can clog your pores and cause outbreaks,” she said.

What you eat and drink affects how your skin looks.

Refined carbs as a culprit for skin problems is a connection that’s still being explored. “It’s been proven and reported in scientific literature that consuming sugar, for example, triggers acne and inflammation in the skin,” said Dr. [Rebecca Marcus](#), board-certified dermatologist and founder of [Maei MD](#).

Then there’s the matter of your favorite tippie. “Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol, and beer in particular, will dehydrate the skin, and that decreased fluid content will speed up the appearance of wrinkles and fine lines,” DeRosa said.

Research continues to find new connections between diet and skin health. “Eating these refined carbohydrates also can damage skin by increasing the production of advanced glycation end products, known as AGEs,” Marcus said. “There’s [research](#) indicating that AGEs form when glucose or fructose cause collagen and elastin to be unable to repair themselves easily.” That process is accelerated when blood

processed foods.

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Here's how to adjust your diet for clearer skin.

What you feed your body shows up on your skin, so the more you can focus on nourishment and hydration, the better off you'll be. "Dermatologists recommend a healthy balanced diet, keeping not only skin, but overall health in mind," said Dr. [Ramone F. Williams](#), a Mohs surgeon, cosmetic dermatologic surgeon and faculty member at Harvard Medical School. "If you're noticing breakouts after eating certain foods, keep a food diary and discuss the findings with your dermatologist."

As always, moderation is key. "Sometimes people believe that removing carbs completely will improve their skin," said dermatologist Dr. [Nicole Negbenebor](#). "This may be the case for some patients, but there are other conditions that can be worsened with a lack of carbohydrates, such as a condition called ketogenic diet-induced prurigo pigmentosa, or keto rash, that may develop when patients initially begin to cut out carbohydrates from their diet. Most people need a healthy balance of minimally processed carbohydrates, fruits and vegetables to see the best condition of their skin."

"Having a well-balanced diet does wonders for skin," said [Jennifer Weiss](#), a physician's assistant at [Marmur Medical](#). "Staying hydrated by sipping on water throughout the day will hydrate you from inside out and make your skin look plumper and healthier. Green, leafy vegetables, such as spinach and kale, are rich in vitamins C, E and A, which all combat free-radical damage to balance our skin's microbiome. Low glycemic index foods such as fruits, whole grains, lean protein and healthy fats will help the skin glow, decrease any inflammation and help prevent acne breakouts."

So you've already partaken in the holiday goodies. Now what do you do?

If you have a big event coming up and your skin has already started to break out, there are some things you can do. First, see if your dermatologist can squeeze you in (before you start squeezing those zits yourself). "They may be able to inject the acne with a medication that can shrink it quickly," said dermatologist Dr. [Brendan Camp](#). "A quick and easy cortisone injection into an acne cyst can reduce the inflammation rapidly and help the blemish shrink within 24 to 48 hours," Weiss added.

to a lower-carb, high-antioxidant, anti-inflammatory diet well in advance of a big social event, DeRosa said, but if that’s not an option, she suggested a shorter-term option like an oxygenating facial.

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Check your medicine cabinet to see if you have emergency supplies on hand. “You also can try using an acne stick or patch, which helps draw moisture out of the pimple to shrink it,” Camp said. “Or using an over-the-counter hydrocortisone cream on the affected area may help reduce inflammation and lessen redness and swelling.”

“Some short-term things you can do before a big event can include getting more sleep, increasing water intake, exercising and using a product with hyaluronic acid,” Negbenebor said. “A mask may provide a temporary look of plumpness or increased hydration for a few hours.”

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