

The sun conundrum - beating back the damage caused by Old Sol

by MAUREEN DUNN

It's a done deal. After hours enjoying the euphoric feel of the sun beating down on your skin, you've roasted yourself to bronzed perfection. But as the tan fades, the skin begins to feel its negative effects: dry, tired and lifeless.

There's no denying it. The sun feels good. It warms the skin and brightens the mood. Yet it's responsible for more than 80 per cent of all signs of aging.

That's the sun conundrum: we love it, but dread its consequences - dehydrated skin with fine lines, wrinkles, leathery surface, broken capillaries, uneven tone and age spots, to name just a few.

How can something that makes us feel so good be so bad?

Sunlight is made up of two kinds of ultra-violet radiation: UVA and UVB. It's the UVA rays that do most of the damage. These penetrate deeply, through the epidermis (top layer of skin) into the foundation of the dermis (the deeper and most important layer).

As the years roll by and the sun keeps shining, UVA rays cause a break down in the structure of collagen and elastin fibres in the dermis. It's this destruction that causes wrinkles to form. Aging skin loses its elasticity, becoming saggy and wrinkled.

UVB rays cause the skin to tan or burn. They also over-stimulate cell division throughout the epidermis creating more cells than the skin can shed leading to a thick, lack-luster, leathery surface.

It's too late to take back those sun-worshipping afternoons in the back yard or at the beach. Even if we made a pact today to avoid excess sun exposure, most of the damage has already been done (we get an estimated 80 per cent of our lifetime sun exposure by age 18).

But, say experts, it's never too late to start

protecting the skin. Avoiding exposure during peak hours of 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. is a good idea as is wearing sun protective clothing such as shirts with longer sleeves and hats. And, one of the most important protections is wearing a broad spectrum sunscreen, with an SPF (sun protection factor) of at least 15. A broad spectrum screen will filter out both UVA and UVB rays.

But what can be done for skin that has already suffered sun damage?

The 1980s saw the advent of a number of new and effective skin care products. Designed to address the need to exfoliate the excess skin cells in the epidermis, first Retin-A (originally marketed for the treatment of acne), then AHA (alpha-hydroxy acids) and now BHA (beta-hydroxy acids) creams are changing the face of cosmetics.

By dissolving the "intercellular glue" that binds dead, flaky cells on the skin's surface, these products peel away the uppermost layer, revealing a more youthful glowing complexion underneath.

Yet even as effective as they are, these products do nothing for the lack of firmness and suppleness caused by the breakdown in the structure of the dermis. The only way to really restore sun damaged skin is to find something that will revitalize its ability to produce collagen and elastin in the dermis.

Most of us have grown up with awesome claims from the manufacturers of moisturizers, creams and lotions. Moisturizers do temporarily plump up dehydrated skin and this can make wrinkles harder to see, but when it comes to keeping skin looking youthful, moisturizers alone won't do the job.

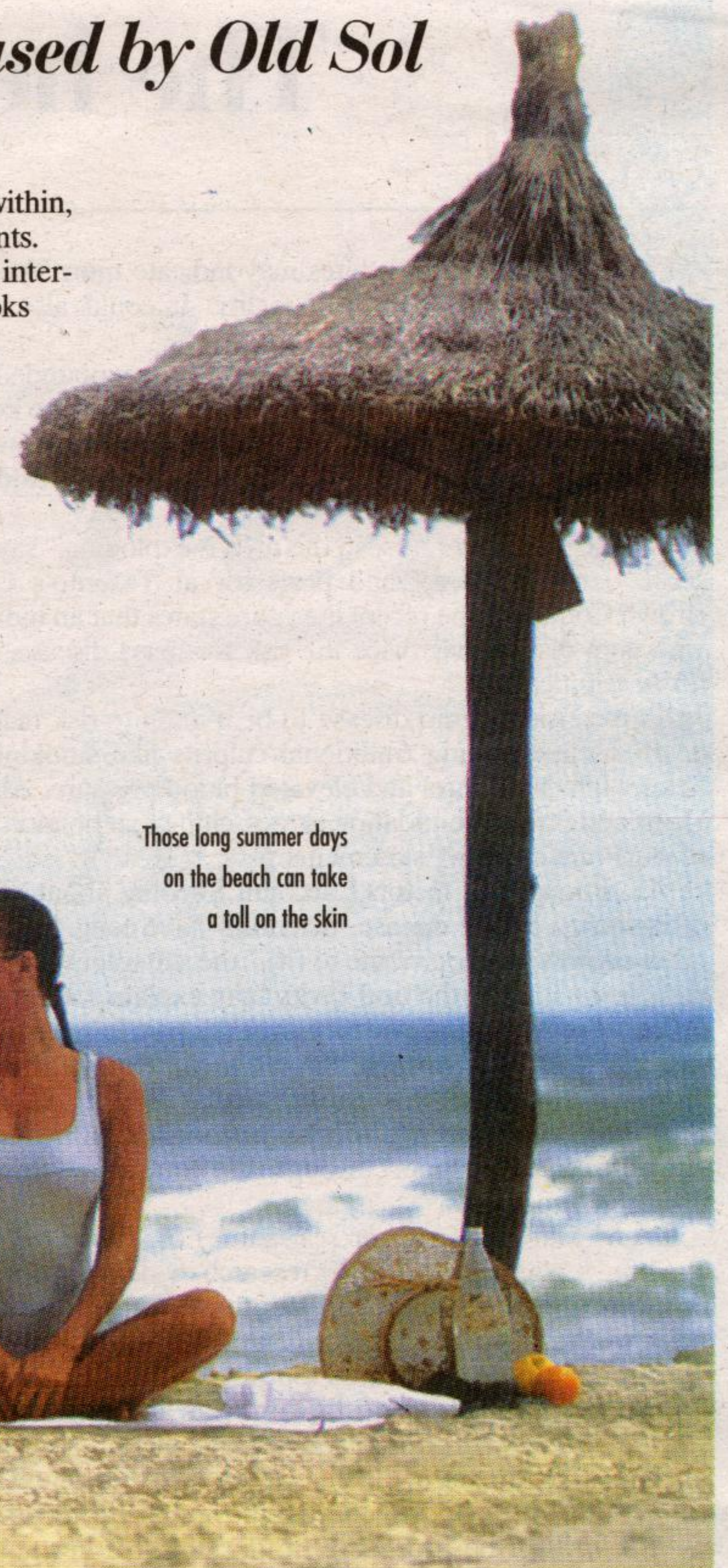
If the 1980s were responsible for innovative creams, the 1990s can be characterized as the

decade to introduce rejuvenation from within, in the form of daily nutritional supplements.

Do they really work? Can taking a pill internally really affect the way your skin looks externally?

In a recent survey conducted by MPI Inc., a Toronto-based research company, over 70 per cent of women taking an oral nutritional supplement from Europe called Imedeem reported a positive "yes." Devotees claim that taking two Imedeem tablets daily helps relieve dryness, smoothing out the skin and reducing fine lines. A miracle, maybe, modern science, quite likely.

Imedeem is available at the cosmetic counter of selected pharmacies and health food stores. For more information, call 877-IMEDEEN (877-463-3336).



Those long summer days on the beach can take a toll on the skin

Kidsmart sunfun

Kids love to play outside and it's healthy for them. But with all the warnings about the dangers of sun exposure, particularly at a young age, what is a parent to do.

Fortunately, with proper precautions, youngsters can enjoy the great outdoors. The Canadian Dermatology Association offers some advice for concerned parents, stressing as well that it's important not to let the guard down in winter. Although the kids are bundled up and the sun's rays may not be as strong as in summer, as much as to 85 per cent of harmful rays can be reflected off snow onto the exposed skin on faces.

FOLLOWING ARE OTHER TIPS FOR WINTER AND SUMMER:

- Keep babies under a year out of direct sunlight, either in covered stroller under an umbrella or in the shade.
- Teach children to seek shade from trees, buildings, and porches and urge them to seek it out, particularly when their shadows are shorter than they are.
- In summer protect children with comfortable long shirts and pants, to cover most of their bodies (closely woven materials are best), wide-brimmed hats, sunglasses and sunscreen (SPF 15 minimum).
- Apply sunscreens liberally to your child's skin at least 15-30 minutes before going outside. Don't forget to apply an SPF 15 lip balm as well.
- Cloudy days are no exception. Up to 80 per cent of the sun's rays can penetrate light clouds, mist and fog.
- Do not apply sunscreen around a child's eyes as it may sting and burn. Instead, protect the eyes with sunglasses. The association, however, maintains that, although the chemicals will irritate sensitive eye tissue, reports of permanent damage to children's eyesight from sunscreen are unfounded. If children or adults get sunscreen in an eye, it should be flushed with plain water for 10 to 15 minutes and if irritation persists, have a doctor check it out.



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