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FATTY PHENOMS

As winter rages on, skincare providers look to fatty acids to be the saviors of the season. **BY MAYA STANTON**

OMEGA FATTY ACIDS—

components found in a variety of natural sources like fish, nuts, and seeds that help skin maintain elasticity, moisture, and softness—are hardly underrated ingredients. Their benefits as part of a healthy diet have been widely touted, and they've been featured for years in topical products and spa treatments, providing a serious dose of TLC to skin in need. "Omega fatty acids can be used in skincare formulations to treat any issues related to barrier function and barrier damage, such as dryness, lines and wrinkles, sensitivities, and skin discomfort due to aggression," says Ashley Stowers, national educator for YG Laboratories and CelleClé Skincare. According to Annet King, vice president of global education for Elemis, they are full of antioxidants and effective at treating dry and dehydrated skin. Essential fatty acids (EFAs), such as alpha-linolenic acid (omega 3) and linoleic acid (omega 6), are necessary to good health but cannot be synthesized by the body. "Because the sizes of the omega-3 and omega-6 molecules are similar to our own molecular composition, our body easily recognizes the product and absorbs the oil instantly," says Natalie Pergar, international trainer coordinator for Éminence Organic Skin Care. "This results in great targeted benefits for all skin types." ●

skin RX

Wondering what conditions fatty acids can treat? Turns out there are quite a few. Here, our pros share some of them:

- Omega fatty acids are particularly useful in treating dry, sun-damaged, and sensitized skin showing signs of environmental damage and over-processing due to harsh peels and more, says Ashley Stowers of YG Laboratories and CelleClé Skincare.
- According to Shannon McLinden, founder and president of FarmHouse Fresh, those with eczema and dry, irritated skin benefit the most from fatty acids. And the pores of acneic skin are often blocked from a decrease in linoleic acid in the sebum,

which facial oils with high linoleic-acid content can help counteract.

- Éminence Organic Skin Care's Natalie Pergar recommends EFAs for psoriasis and chemical, sun, and wind burns and in the instance of stretch marks or scarring.
- The most notable benefits are seen in consumers with aging, dry, or sensitized skin, as they need extra supplements of the fatty acids depleted over time or due to environmental exposure, says Alexis Mayne, vice president of research and development for Sanitas Skincare.
- Topical application of linoleic acid-rich oils can normalize transepidermal water loss, reduce skin scaliness, and reverse the

symptoms of EFA deficiency, says Vivian B. Valenty, Ph.D., president of VB Cosmetics and Dazzle Dry.

- Linoleic and oleic acids are essential for exfoliation, says Rhonda Allison, founder and CEO of Rhonda Allison Cosmeceuticals. "Healing and rebuilding the skin is imperative to a successful peel, and omega EFAs support wound healing and provide soothing comfort. Because they help facilitate the penetration of other ingredients, they're invaluable in the delivery of antioxidants and corrective ingredients to the skin. Omega EFAs are ideal for burned, dehydrated, inflamed, or wounded skin as well as post-peel and other rejuvenating procedures." ●

FATTY FAVES

Omegas can be harvested from any number of sources. Here, our experts highlight some popular picks:

AVOCADO OIL AND SHEA BUTTER

—FarmHouse Fresh's Shannon McLinden

ROSEHIP OIL

—Éminence Organic Skin Care's Natalie Pergar

STARFLOWER AND ELDERBERRY OIL

—Elemis's Annet King

SEA BUCKTHORN OIL

—YG Laboratories' and CelleClé Skincare's Ashley Stowers



Sea buckthorn berries

For more of their faves, check out www.americanspa.com

at your service

Check out these treatments that rely on omega fatty acids to improve the look and feel of the skin.

Omega fatty acids are the centerpiece of the OxyOmegaStem-C Treatment (\$150, 75 minutes) at **Donna Hughes Skin Care** (Rancho Mirage, CA). The therapy uses CelleClé Skincare products to counteract environmental, smoking, and sun damage; reboot the skin's oxygen supply; and recover firmness and elasticity. After a detoxifying cleansing, toning, exfoliation, and peptide-mask application, a massage with Omega Barrier Restore Crème saturates the skin with omega-3, -6, and -9 fatty acids. After a second mask application, the treatment finishes with a serum, a brightening complex, an eye-contour treatment, a moisturizer, and an SPF.

At **The Spa at Primland** at Primland Resort (Meadows of Dan, VA), the Kanati and Selu Duo Couples Treatment (starting at \$370, 2 hours) uses FarmHouse Fresh products to relax, moisturize, and heal. In the spa's Unity Suite, clients lounge in a mineral bath salt soak while organic smoothies and healthy bites are served. A customized duo massage with Blushing Agave Body Oil, featuring the triple-fatty-acid punch of organic safflower seed, sunflower seed, and sweet almond oils, comes next, followed by hand-and-foot massages with EFA-rich Sunflower Honey Butter to repair and hydrate.

At **Field to Face Organic Beauty** (Hartford, CT), the Field To Face Signature Facial (\$80, 45 minutes; \$130, 75 minutes) showcases fatty acids via an Omega-3 Mask made from the in-house Botanical Beauty Bar. A blend of finely ground chia, flax, and pumpkin seed, all high in EFAs, are mixed with raw honey for hydration and exfoliation and sea buckthorn oil for repair, resulting in a deep-yet-gentle glow-restoring exfoliation. The treatment also incorporates various aromatherapies, herbal steam, and chilled chamomile eye compresses; a face, neck, and décolleté massage with warm stones and energizing crystals; and a hot-towel foot massage, finishing with applications of lip polish and conditioner, balancing hydrosol, serum, and moisturizer. ●

potential PITFALLS

Omega fatty acids may benefit a product line, but there are a few hurdles to overcome on the road to formulation.

Several manufacturers say that it's necessary to use natural ingredients, which are often expensive and difficult to work with. Shelf life can be an issue, too. "Omega-3 and -6 fatty acid-rich oils are prone to early rancidity of the product, so it's important to use a high level of antioxidants, such as tocopherol, also known as vitamin E alcohol, to keep them from turning rancid," says Vivian B. Valenty, Ph.D., of VB Cosmetics and Dazzle Dry. Elemis's Annet King recommends being careful about exposure to light and air. According to her, Elemis uses special packaging and sometimes glass to ensure stability for body and facial oils. Stearic acid can also present an issue. "Over time, we've found formulas with a high concentration of this can begin to lose their viscosity, and the transport of these items in shipment—or in your purse, in the case of a hand cream—does not help," says FarmHouse Fresh's Shannon McLinden.

"Additionally, some vegetable oils have the ability to turn rancid faster than others, and when sourced seasonally, color changes can occur in the oils. While it may not make a difference in the effectiveness of a product, on a shelf, it can be perceived by the consumer as being 'older' if the oil has a deeper color due to the season." And when it comes to formulation, the oil-soluble fatty acids might not work in completely water-soluble products.

Ashley Stowers of YG Laboratories and CelleClé Skincare says the biggest challenge she has found "is related to the consistent supply of high-purity oils from the regions in which they are harvested and processed." She lists factors such as climate change, environmental activity, and regional conflicts as having the potential to affect availability, cost, performance, purity, and quality of the formula. ●