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Shun the Sugar for Sweeter-Looking Skin

By Tamar Nordenberg

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An Interview with Nicholas Perricone, M.D.

Yeah, right — now it's rice cakes that can be the downfall of your diet? Yes, that is right, according to dermatologist Nicholas Perricone, M.D., an expert on facial rejuvenation and best-selling author of *The Wrinkle Cure* and *The Perricone Prescription*. The doctor's Rx for winning skin (and, by the way, for staying thin) calls for staying away from sugar and high-glycemic carbohydrates, which the body rapidly converts to sugar. **Discovery Health Online** asked the doctor to share what he knows about sugar's destructive effects on the skin, and about the complexion-complimenting effects of staying away from the sweet stuff, as well as some foods you once considered to be stay-healthy staples.

Q: Does the fact that you eat too much sugar really show on your face?

A: Absolutely. I believe that inflammation is at the basis of aging in all organ systems, including the skin. One of the reasons inflammation occurs is from a rapid rise in blood sugar, which causes biochemical changes in the cell that result in accelerated aging. You can have deterioration of the brain or the heart muscle, and likewise of the skin. Of the internal causes of inflammation, one of the big ones is diet. In addition to biochemical changes, sugar causes damage to the skin in another way: When blood sugar goes up rapidly, sugar can attach itself to collagen in a process called "glycation," making the skin stiff and inflexible. Losing this elastic resilience of young skin will give you deep wrinkles and make you look old.

Q: Is it the standard sweets — like candy bars and chocolate cake — that sap the skin of its youthful resilience?

A: It's those, and it's what people eat that they don't realize is converted rapidly into sugar — pasta, bread, potatoes, rice. Even when people think they're being conscientious, they could be taking in high amounts of cell-aging sugar. Quite often, a patient will come into my office, very proud that all they had for lunch was a baked potato with nothing on it. What they don't realize is that the plain potato converts into large amounts of sugar — as much as a couple of candy bars.

Q: What steps can sugar junkies take to save their skin?

A: People will experience a rapid rise in blood sugar from eating skin-destroying sweets and carbohydrates, but what goes up must come down, and their mood will soon crash and give them a real addiction craving for more sugar. The best thing a sugar addict can do to deal with their cravings is to very carefully control their blood sugar and insulin by staying away from the bad carbohydrates and eating more protein for just a few days. At the same time their skin is becoming firm, their blood sugar will stabilize and their cravings will go away. They're free! Then they might have a piece of chocolate once in awhile, but it's based on their free will instead of "I have to have it."

Read more about sidestepping sugar to keep your skin dazzling — it's in Chapter 3 of *The Perricone Prescription*.

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