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(page 189)

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(page 101)

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If you're like most women, you spend a fair amount of time taking care of the skin on your face while pretty much ignoring your neck and chest. But these regions are especially quick to show age, for different physical and environmental reasons. Fortunately "it's never too late to fight the effects of aging," says **Mary Lupo, a dermatologist in New Orleans**. Just follow this regimen, then put those turtlenecks back in the drawer.

why do your neck and chest look so old, so fast?

"The lack of oil glands on your neck can cause dryness, which may accelerate the aging process and make your neck appear more weathered," says Fredric Brandt, a dermatologist with practices in New York and Florida. Neck skin also has a tendency toward laxity. Couple that with all the twisting and turning that you do daily and you have a recipe for "crepey texture"—the lovely phrase used to describe skin that is both finely lined and saggy. Plus, contraction of the platysma muscle (which runs roughly from underneath the chin to the sternum) can cause the vertical cords of the neck to look more prominent, says New York City plastic surgeon Adam R. Kolker. The chest, or décolletage, is typically harder, but it may take more of a beating from the sun, since your neck is often shaded by your chin, your hair, or a hat.

daily maintenance

The most important product to apply to your neck and chest is good old sunscreen—better yet, a broad-spectrum moisturizer with an SPF of 30 or higher. This will help combat dryness and sun damage. If you already have some discoloration due to sun

damage or saggiess on your neck and chest, Jeanine Downie, a dermatologist in Montclair, New Jersey, recommends extending any facial anti-agers you use to these spots. "Most people take the words 'face cream' too literally," she says. "Anything for the face is generally fine for the rest of the body." Look for creams with retinol or plant extracts, to help firm, and lightening agents, such as kojic acid, to even out skin color. The exception to the rule: people with sensitive neck skin that blotches easily (if you fall into this category, you probably know it by now). This group may consider a neck-specific product. "Neck creams tend to have gentler active ingredients and be slightly richer than face creams," says Brandt.

intensive care

If your neck and chest are looking very weathered, an in-office exfoliating treatment may help, says Jordana Mattioli, a licensed medical aesthetician in New York City. One high-tech resurfacing option for the neck and chest is microdermabrasion (\$150 and up per session; you may need several to see results), which uses a device to painlessly help "sandblast" away discoloration with fine mineral crystals. Another is a chemical peel (about \$150 for one; you may require more), which can employ trichloroacetic, azelaic, or kojic acid to lessen

spots and improve firmness. Peels are more often used on the chest than on the neck, since the chest can take the more aggressive treatment.

Light therapy and lasers are a step up in intensity from exfoliation and can offer enhanced anti-aging benefits for the neck and chest. Over the course of several sessions (\$300 to \$500 each), IPL, or intense pulsed light, treats uneven pigmentation and the visible or broken vessels caused by sun exposure. Downie likes the Fraxel laser (\$1,000 to \$1,500 a session), especially for anyone age 40 or older. Typically you need more IPL treatments to see the same results you would from Fraxel, "so in the long run Fraxel can be a money- and time-saver," says Downie. But plan on a long weekend to recover from the redness, which is followed by a week of flaking skin. As for treating the "wattle," a Botox injection (\$300 to \$500) can soften the ropey look by weakening the muscle movement that can lead to a saggy neck. However, if you have serious wiggle under your chin, "surgery is probably your best option," says Kolker. Some surgeons do perform neck-lifts (\$4,000 and up), but the procedure is more often done as part of a face-lift (\$7,000 to \$9,000).



skin and tonics

There's an anti-aging skin-care regimen that's just right for you. Find it at realsimple.com/antiaging.

SELF-HELP

These potent anti-aging products contain exfoliants, plant extracts, or antioxidants to improve firmness or discoloration on the neck and chest.



Prevage Anti-Aging + Intensive Repair Daily Serum, \$225, elizabetharden.com.



Clarins Extra-Firming Neck Cream, \$85, clarins.com (available mid-August).



La Prairie Anti-Aging Neck Cream, \$225, laprairie.com.



Dr. Brandt Time Arrest V-Zone Neck Cream, \$60, drbrandt.skincare.com.