

Q & A with Dr. Rajani Katta

Who is this book for?

Whether you're in your 20s or in your 70s, all of us want to maintain healthy, glowing, youthful skin. We have more research than ever showing us that the right foods and dietary patterns are an important part of that.

How do your recommendations compare to paleo, keto, vegan, or some of the other popular diets I've been hearing about?

It's really important to recognize that you can eat for younger skin no matter which of these diets you follow. All of them provide a potential framework for weight loss and health promotion, but if you're not careful, you can easily start to damage your skin.

As one example, you can technically be vegan by eating a grilled "cheesy" sandwich with french fries. Technically vegan, yes, but also skin-damaging. That kind of meal causes your body to produce collagen-damaging compounds called AGEs. And if you're going keto, watch out for the bacon! On page 140 of the book you'll find a list of the foods that are especially high in collagen-damaging compounds. Bacon is one of the worst offenders.

So there's a right way and a wrong way to do each of these diets. This book highlights the keys to eating for younger skin, which can then be incorporated into any weight loss diet.

It seems that there are more products than ever before to help keep skin clear and spot-free. Is diet really that important?

Absolutely. I always talk about a holistic approach to maintaining healthy skin. Creams and serums and procedures may be a part of that, but they're only one part. Prevention, of course, is a major part, and while that includes protecting your skin from UV radiation, it also includes protecting your skin from the inflammation and glycation that can result from eating the wrong foods.

You can also actively promote youthful, glowing skin by choosing the right foods. Foods that are naturally rich in antioxidants, foods that are anti-inflammatory, prebiotics and probiotics: all of these have been shown in research studies to promote youthful skin.

A holistic approach means that you use all of these, working together, to promote your best skin possible.

What are the keys to eating for youthful skin?

There are three main ones. Eat power. Stop sugar spikes. Stop skin sabotage.

Eat power means eat more of the foods that are naturally rich in powerful nutrients. This includes prebiotic foods, probiotic foods, herbs and spices, foods that are naturally rich in antioxidants, and more.

Stop sugar spikes is important, because spikes in blood sugar levels can lead to some serious collagen damage.

Stop skin sabotage means avoiding foods that are highly processed, that are heavy in trans fats, or that contain high levels of added sugar or refined carbohydrates. All of these are known to age your skin.

I'm hearing a lot about prebiotics and probiotics. How can these help my skin?

That's such a great question, because it can be a bit of a leap to think that what's in our guts can have such an important effect on our skin. But it absolutely can. In fact, research now shows that there is a definite gut-skin connection.

It turns out that prebiotics and probiotics are extremely important for healthy skin. That's because both help promote the growth of what are known as "good gut microbes". There are trillions of microorganisms in your gastrointestinal system, and research has shown that they have an important role to play in maintaining our overall health.

I like to think of them as policemen, teachers, and factory workers. They battle the bad bacteria, they help train your immune system, and they actively work to break down the foods that we eat and extract nutrients.

In terms of your skin, research has shown that when these microbes are given lots of fiber, they breakdown that fiber and produce short chain fatty acids (SCFAs). These help protect the lining of your gut, and they also help protect the skin barrier. This results in less skin irritation and less water loss.

This has been studied most extensively in children and adults with atopic dermatitis, also known as eczema. In some studies, the use of prebiotics and probiotics have helped in the treatment of eczema (in conjunction with standard therapies).

What are some examples of probiotic and prebiotic foods?

Prebiotic foods are defined as those that help promote the growth of good gut microbes. The biggest group of prebiotics is plant foods that are naturally rich in fiber, such as onions, garlic, artichoke, berries, oats, and others. Probiotic foods, on the other hand, are those that contain live microorganisms that have been shown to promote health. This includes foods such as yogurt with live active cultures, sauerkraut, kimchi, some vinegars, miso, and others.

There's a tremendous amount of research presented in this book in a very accessible and practical manner. How can readers use this cutting-edge information to take action?

I like to use the phrase "good food and glowing skin". Because ultimately that's what it's about: good food!

On page 73, you'll find charts with the top food sources of antioxidants. On page 83, you'll find some of the top anti-inflammatory foods. Pages 112 and 117 list examples of prebiotic and probiotic foods. These are foods that you can easily add to your next meal.

Section 4 has over 30 recipes, and it would be pretty easy to add a skin saving sauce to lunch, and a skin saving snack to your afternoon break. The majority of the recipes focus on simple, easy techniques, because I don't have much time and I know most readers don't either.

My biggest hope with this book is that you read, and then, with your very next meal, take one small action.