

SKIN DEEP

SKIN CARE CAN BE SIMPLE AND INEXPENSIVE

Most of us who have cleared our teenage years worry at least a little about aging. And since our skin is our largest, most visible organ, it's the first place most of us show our age. Think wrinkles and age spots—oops, we mean laugh lines and freckles. However you say it, they can add years and make you look older than you feel.

Taking care of your skin can be expensive. Make sure you're spending your money wisely, not on feel-good products but on those that work, says Dr. Leslie Coker, a dermatologist with Associates in Dermatology Inc. in Hampton.

"More people out there, from their 20s to their 50s, come into my office confused about anti-aging products," Coker says. "They've spent hundreds of dollars on multistep systems, cleansers, creams, astringents—all these products with claims that have little if any evidence to back them."

It's important to remember, Coker says, that the only requirement of products sold over the counter is that they do no harm.

"One cream out there says it's better than Botox," she says. "You can't compare a cream with Botox. Botox paralyzes muscles. Don't believe

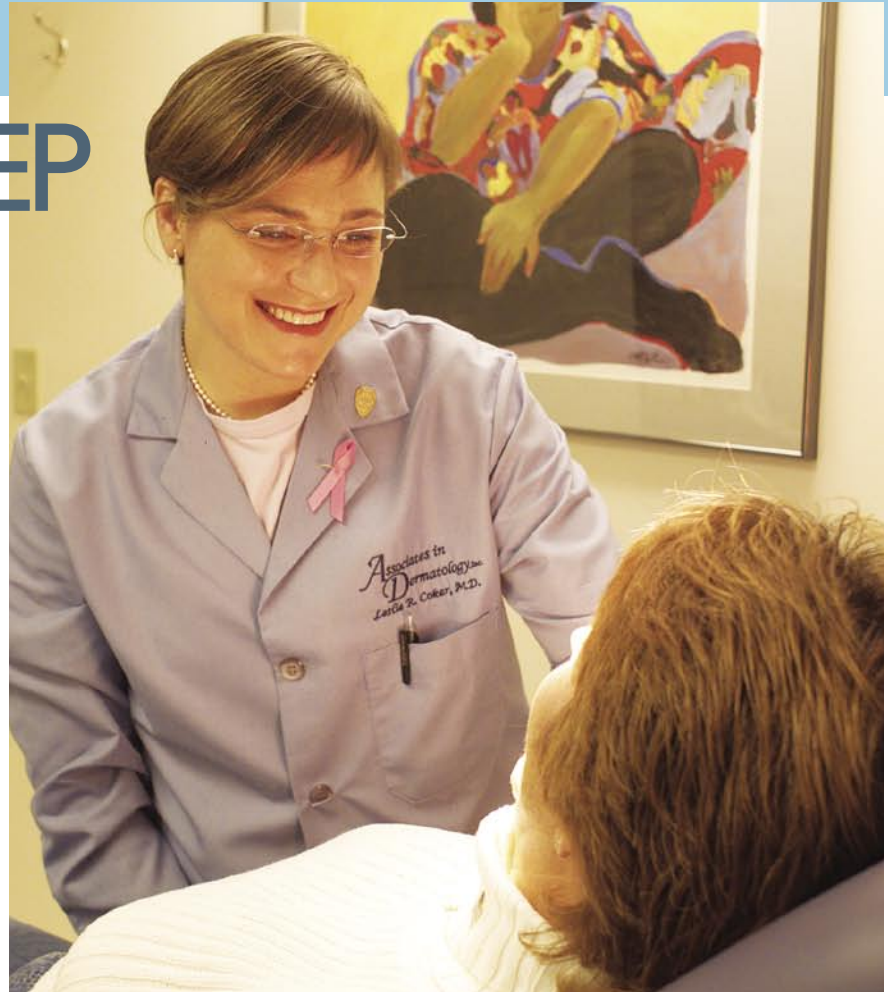
everything you hear. I try to steer people from spending their money, like 40 dollars on a little tube of eye cream. They get overwhelmed by what's out there. Add a really good sales person, a little desperation, and the bait has been taken. Most of them are simply moisturizers. Very expensive moisturizers."

So, *what should you buy?*

If you're looking to reverse or delay the effects of aging, there are prescription creams that will do the job, albeit slowly, Coker says. Topical retinoids, products also used to treat acne, are effective. They aren't recommended, however, for pregnant women or women who are planning on becoming pregnant.

"They are available only by prescription, which means research has been done to document and support such claims."

However, when you wake up you won't suddenly look like your daughter—or even your younger sister.



"It's not going to be an overnight thing," Coker cautions. "You can't look in the mirror every day and think you're going to see results. If you adopt it into a daily routine then down the road someone may ask 'What's your secret?'"

Over-the-counter anti-aging products that list retinol, vitamin A, as an active ingredient also may make similar claims. But don't expect comparable results, Coker says.

Although their chemical structure is similar the effectiveness of topical retinoids has been documented and there is no evidence that retinol works.

As for the prescription creams, topical retinoids, one of the side effects is the thinning of the top layer of skin, resulting in an increased sensitivity to the sun.

Another problem Coker sees is patients over washing their skin.

"Many of these products come with steps one

through six," she says. "There's always a scrub and an astringent and an exfoliating agent. Typically, you just don't need it and you certainly don't need it on a daily basis."

Women with dry skin should use a moisturizer once or twice a day. If they are prone to breaking out they should use a non-comedogenic moisturizer, she says.

The last step? Use sunscreen every day. People with sensitive skin should use a product that lists zinc oxide or titanium dioxide as a main ingredient because it's a physical, rather than a chemical, blocker and more easily tolerated, Coker says.

"Find a product that is SPF 30 or above that you are willing to put on your freshly washed face every morning," Coker says. "People think to wear sunscreen at the beach but they don't realize that ultraviolet rays go through clouds and window glass. Sun damage, or advanced skin aging is a result of everyday exposure.."

THREE STEPS TO BETTER SKIN:

1. Don't over-wash
2. Protect yourself from the sun with sunscreens and clothing.
3. Know the warning signs of skin cancer (discussed in the next issue)

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