



It's the age-old conundrum: Everyone knows stress is bad for you, and yet everyone is stressed. It's unavoidable. Between the office, family time, and your social life, stress is far too common to come by. And although we all know that an excess of stress can cause serious internal health concerns (digestive issues, insomnia—just to name a couple), it's a little less obvious as to whether the stress from the morning board meeting or argument with your S.O. can take a toll on your *external* health as well.

To get to the bottom of this stressful question, we chatted with the experts to see if stress actually can affect the state of your skin.

So, What's the Deal?

In a quick word, yes. Stress can manifest itself in the form of several skin issues. According to Dr. Yael Halaas, a facial plastic surgeon in New York City, your body releases the hormone cortisol when you're stressed or anxious. "Cortisol prepares the body for a fight or flight response," Dr. Halaas explains. "This means your body is going on overdrive producing more glucose and narrowing arteries." So what does this mean for your skin? Well, it's this production of cortisol that leads to an overall tired appearance, dehydrated skin, baggy eyes, a prominence of fine lines and wrinkles, and inflammation (i.e. breakouts).

But it's not just emotional or mental stress that can cause skin concerns. Physical stress on the body can also affect your skin. Dr. Elizabeth Tanzi, Founder and Director of Capital Laser & Skin Care and Assistant Clinical Professor, Department of Dermatology at the George Washington University Medical Center, explains that physical stressors come in many forms, such as too much sun exposure, overly drying products, extreme weather conditions, and even too much exfoliation. As expected, the effects of physical stress on the body can have unsavory results on the skin.

Although both emotional and physical stress can cause inflammation and puffiness, they can also have some less common results, such as excessive perspiration (that can lead to clogged pores and, guess what, more pimples!)

and stress rashes. “Stress can also be the cause of hives and other types of skin rashes,” Dr. Halaas says. “Additionally, emotional stress can prompt a flare-up of fever blisters on some people.”

Yes, You Can Treat It

Before you start to get all panicky and Google yourself into a stress-induced pimple, stress-induced skin woes can be treated fairly easily.

The obvious answer to treating stressed skin is to de-stress. Although this can vary from person to person, taking some time to decompress with meditation, yoga, exercise, journaling, or spending time with family can be a fantastic way to shake yourself away from mental and emotional stress. If you've booked a dozen yoga classes and feel like your skin problems have persisted for longer than four to six weeks, hit up your dermatologist for a consultation.

For those of you who prefer to tackle your breakouts OTC, fear not, it can be done. Dr. Halaas suggests looking for products that contain active ingredients such as salicylic acid in strengths from 0.5 to 5 percent to help prevent plugged pores, benzoyl peroxide to kill bacteria and remove excess oil and dead skin cells, and alpha hydroxy acids to stimulate new skin growth, which can help with the appearance of acne scars and give the impression of smaller pores.

But really, treatment could actually be as simple as catching some extra z's. “The most important trick to de-stress the skin is to get enough sleep,” Dr. Tanzi explains. “Lack of sleep leads to increased stress hormones that cause acne, dull and lifeless skin, and dark circles. Getting enough sleep is a luxury that is also good for us, too.”

We'll take that Rx any day!