

Your Skin Confidence: Five a Day

2. Sleep & Stress

Lack of sleep and high stress levels take their toll on the body and prevent it from performing its essential functions. By suppressing the immune system, they also have a major effect on the skin, and can often cause skin conditions like eczema, acne and psoriasis to flare up.

Sleep

Sleep is essential for keeping our bodies in balance and maintaining energy levels. Without it, our stress levels rocket and our biological processes slow down, causing us to feel sluggish and bloated.

Sleep is particularly important for skin health, as the skin cells' repair and regeneration rate almost doubles at night.

How to improve your quality and quantity of sleep

✔ **Avoid Caffeine**

Caffeine stimulates the central nervous system, leaving you more alert and excitable. Avoid tea, coffee and fizzy drinks during the 4-6 hours leading up to bedtime.

✔ **Keep cool**

The optimum temperature for sleep is 16-18°C, so avoid over-heating your bedroom and sleep with your window slightly ajar.

✔ **Exercise**

Regular exercise releases endorphins that combat stress. An activity which combines exercise with relaxing meditation, like yoga, is ideal for aiding sleep.

✔ **Embrace aromatherapy**

Scents are proven to affect the state of the body and mind. Try dabbing a couple of drops of lavender, chamomile, jasmine or bergamot on your pillow before bed to soothe the senses and prepare you for rest.

Stress

Many skin sensitivities flare in tandem with heightened emotion, and it's not uncommon for conditions to develop for the first time after periods of trauma or grief.

This is due to the stress hormone cortisol – which suppresses the immune system in order to redirect energy to the muscle and mental functions. The longer we're stressed, the longer the immune system is down for and the more susceptible the skin becomes to reactions.

How to combat stress and keep calm

✔ **Sleep**

Sleep and stress go hand in hand. Tiredness and a lack of energy are major contributors to stress levels, so follow the tips on the left to guarantee a good night's rest.

✔ **Take a break**

Dedicating all your time to work or stressful situations overburdens the mind. Regular breaks during the day and holidays during the year help restore clarity.

✔ **Meditation**

Meditation comes in many forms, and can be as simple as lying on your back and focussing solely on your breathing for ten minutes at the end of the day. Emptying the mind releases stress, and will also help you sleep.

✔ **Exercise**

Exercise releases mood-lifting endorphins that lift the mood and help you focus, and also reduces the release of chemicals that cause stress. Try and fit 30 minutes of physical activity into your day, five times a week.