

MEET THE HEALTHCARE SYNERGIST

Q & A with Mark J. Tager, MD

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Among his professional wellness and aesthetic colleagues, he is known as “the healthcare synergist” for how he creates a synthesis that is larger than the sum of the parts. In his latest book *Feed Your Skin Right: Your Personalized Nutrition Plan for Radiant Beauty*, Mark Tager, MD, draws from his vast experience in both integrative medicine and aesthetics to provide a roadmap for the reader who wants inner and outer beauty.

Feed Your Skin Right is your 11th book, what inspired you to write it?

Over the years patients, friends, and family have consistently asked me four questions. What should I eat? What supplements should I take? What topicals should I apply? What procedures should I have? *Feed Your Skin Right* addresses each of these questions with a simple answer: It depends.

Most people won't want to hear that.

I know !! But there is great power behind this short phrase. No two people on the planet have the same identical skin. Over the last decade there has been an explosion in our scientific understanding of personalized nutrition, and how people can tailor their eating and skincare regimens to be right for them. Some of the newer tests include nutritional genomics, gut and skin microbiome testing, food sensitivity analysis, inflammatory markers in the blood, and ways to assess the gut-brain-skin connection. I set out to help people create a personalized plan that affords them skin health and beauty from inside out and outside in.

With that as a background, I almost hate to ask you this, but if my readers want beautiful skin, in general, what should they eat?

A skin-beautifying diet first of all depends on what people shouldn't eat, or at least what they need to minimize in the diet. The first being simple refined carbohydrates—sugars. Americans are number one in the world in their consumption. We eat 4-5 times the recommended amount, with much of it hidden in everyday foods.

From a skin perspective, the problem with excess sugar is that it causes glycation. Glycation occurs when the sugar molecules attach themselves to a protein and changes the way it functions. When sugar molecules bind to collagen in the skin, the collagen becomes brittle, and this can contribute to fine lines, wrinkles, and the loss of volume.

OK Sugar is bad. No surprise there – but what else?

The second biggest culprit are too much of the wrong types of fats. Your brain and your skin love good healthy fats. These are the ones that come primarily from Omega-3 fatty acids. There is a ratio of Omega-6 fatty acids to the Omega-3s. We need both types of fatty acids, but today the ratio for many people is 15 or 20 to one, when it should be 2 or 3 to one.

Why is bad to be so out of balance?

Omega-6 fatty acids primarily come from the highly processed corn, sunflower, soybean and cottonseed oils in the diet. The excess omega-6s get metabolized into inflammatory molecules that go throughout the body. With the skin making up the largest organ, they find their way there as well. Avocados, raw nuts, seeds, and fish are all great sources of Omega-3s. As far as what else to eat. More plants, rich in diverse colors. You gain the advantage of the 5,000 phytonutrients in the plants that contain the protective antioxidants, and you also get the fiber. The fiber in the plants is the preferred food for the good bacteria in the gut that then create short chain fatty acids that make their way to the skin and help protect it.

One of the topics in the book is “eating right for your genes.” What does this mean, and how can our readers go about doing this?

When you take a commercial DNA test, let’s say for ancestry, what the tests identify is your pattern of SNPs, which are pronounced “snips.” SNPs stand for single nucleotide polymorphisms, quite a mouthful. SNPs are the most common genetic variation and involve a simple substitution in the DNA. Each of us has 4-5 million of these variations in our genome.

We inherit SNPs from our parents, and we create them and pass them along to our offspring. Most of these are inactive and don’t affect how we make proteins, but some do. There are genetic variations that determine how we metabolize things like alcohol or caffeine, how we handle lactose, or how easily we regain weight. SNPs determine taste perceptions, and our genetic need for increased vitamins.

There are genetic variations that also affect the skin. These determine how rapidly we break down our collagen and elastin, how easily we develop brown spots, the rate at which we create harmful products through glycation, and our need for skin supporting antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals. This is extremely helpful information and can help people fine-tune their diet and guide supplement choices. In *Feed Your Skin Right*, I go over the importance of nutrigenomics and provide a list of companies that offer this information.

You mentioned that there are two sides to the gene and nutrition story. I have a good sense for how genes make us individual, but how does food affect our genes?

This is one of the most powerful scientific stories that I believe is neither told often, nor told well. Namely that the foods you eat turn on or off the genes in the body. They can switch on good genes that are key for important metabolic processes. They can also switch them off. They can also turn on or off potentially harmful genes. We've now moved to a level of scientific complexity that is what I would call cutting edge. It is an area of enormous promise, but we need a lot more work to really understand what's going on.. For example, there are a number of studies showing that a plant-based diet, along with other beneficial lifestyle changes can positively impact genes

In the book, you spend a lot of time going over how to select the right supplements. What guidance do you have for our readers on this subject?

There are few areas in nutrition that generate as much confusion as supplementation. I've really based my recommendations on what I call *intelligent* supplementation, meaning that each of us must be very clear on the "why" behind taking a supplement.

Sure, people take multivitamin, multimineral complexes for insurance, but a personalized approach takes into account other reasons. Chronic disease; aging; drug induced nutrient depletions—medicines that interfere with key nutrients—nutritional genomics; gut health—especially digestion and absorption—lifestyle issues like too much or too little exercise; stress; hormones...You can see that this is a long list, which is why the right supplement plan is one that is tailored to individual needs. And of course, the supplements must be high quality, safe and pure.

Let's now turn to my favorite topic, and the favorite topic of every woman I know. What topicals should I apply to my skin? With so many products out there to choose from, where should we begin?

I recently shared a statistic with some of my wife's LA friends. I mentioned that the average woman will spend between \$200,000 and \$300,000 on beauty products in a lifetime. The universal response was, "That's all?" No question, there is so much hype when it comes to topicals. Remember this, the vast majority of products don't do more than sit atop the skin, moisturize and protect it. That's a good thing. Certainly important. But you don't want to pay a lot of money for this basic function, and you also don't need a special formulation for each area of the face, or body.

There are four categories of skin topicals that should make up everyone's regimen—both men and women. The first is a good mineral-based sun block with an SPF of at least 30. The next are the topicals that provide good barrier protection. These are your moisturizers. The third—for those who can tolerate them—is a retinol. Retinols aid in promoting faster skin turnover, for a more youthful looking epidermis. The next category is where most of the excitement is in skincare. These are the antioxidants, the peptides, and the probiotics that can either penetrate the skin and affect the dermis to promote collagen and elastin synthesis, or can help regulate the skin microbiome. I provide what I consider the best product recommendations in each of these categories in the book.

I understand you no longer see patients, so if our readers wanted to work with someone who has this personalized nutrition approach, how do they go about finding the right person?

I've devoted the last chapter of the book to helping people craft their personal plan and get the professional guidance they need. This includes understanding the extent to which your healthcare professional has received specific training in personalized nutrition.

What's the best way for someone to contact you?

A few ways: Hit me up on Instagram at @drmtager; professionals reach out to me on LinkedIn. You can always go to my website drtager.com for more information.

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