Feeling upset, soft and radiant when you're happy, and inflamed when you're upset, soft and radiant when you're happy. Here, new science on the psychology of skin—and how best to navigate it.

By Didi Glick

THE LINK BETWEEN our skin and our emotions is becoming more understood as researchers and dermatologists see firsthand the effects feelings have on their clients.

In fact, skin is one of the biggest indicators of mood, and our faces show up our emotions in ways we might not realize. When we're happy, our skin tends to be more even and healthy. When we're stressed, we're more likely to break out or have a greyish, unhealthy complexion. The good news is that we have control over our skin's health through a combination of diet, exercise, and stress management. In this article, we'll explore how we can use food and exercise to boost our skin and what effects our mind has on our skin.

WHY YOUR SKIN GETS MOODY

When we're stressed, our bodies react with the stress response, which triggers a cascade of reactions that result in our facial skin becoming inflamed. When we're happy, our bodies react with the happy response, which results in our facial skin becoming soft and radiant.

WHAT YOUR SKIN IS TELLING YOU

Your skin is a reflection of your internal state. It's a mirror that shows your body's reaction to stress, which is why it's so important to take care of your skin.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO IMPROVE YOUR SKIN

There are things you can do to improve your skin. Here are some tips:

1. Get enough sleep. Your skin needs time to repair itself while you sleep. Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep each night.
2. Eat a healthy diet. Eating foods rich in vitamins and minerals can help keep your skin healthy.
3. Exercise regularly. Exercise helps to keep your skin healthy and can help to reduce stress.
4. Drink plenty of water. Drinking water helps to keep your skin hydrated and can help to reduce stress.
5. Use sunscreen. Sunscreen protects your skin from the harmful effects of the sun.

Your skin is a reflection of your internal state, and it's important to take care of it. By following these tips, you can help to improve your skin and reduce stress.
can lead to excess oil production, decreased immunity [which can spur cold sores and psoriasis], and increased blood in your vessels [which can cause undereye circles and puffiness],” says New York City dermatologist Neal Schultz, M.D., a Shape Brain Trust member. You may also get acne breakouts or rosacea.

Compounding the situation, “recent Olay research has shown that cortisol can lower the energy metabolism of your skin cells by up to 40 percent, and therefore reduce their ability to respond to stress and the resulting damage,” says Frauke Neuser, an associate director of science and innovation communications at Procter & Gamble. Plus, our negative emotions—sadness from a breakup, deadline anxiety—can disrupt our positive lifestyle habits. “We tend to let our skincare routines fall by the wayside, failing to take off our makeup and clogging up our pores, or skipping moisturizer, which can leave us looking weathered. We might also lose sleep, which triggers the release of cortisol, or stress eat foods with refined sugar, which causes insulin to rise and then testosterone,” Dr. Schultz says.

At the same time, we’re finding that feeling joyful can manifest physically as well. “For cases in which something positive happens, you get the release of chemicals like endorphins, oxytocin, serotonin, and dopamine, the so-called feel-good hormones,” says David E. Bank, M.D., a dermatologist in Mount Kisco, New York, and a Shape Brain Trust member. These have been less well studied in terms of what they do to our skin, “but it wouldn’t surprise me if these chemicals could have an effect on barrier function, helping our skin stay better hydrated and appear more radiant,” Dr. Bank says. “It’s even possible that the release of feel-good hormones causes the little muscles around the hair follicles all over your body to relax, leaving your skin feeling softer and smoother.” Dr. Bank stresses that while these are just hypotheses, “there is plenty of science to support them.”

YOUR NEW MINDFUL ROUTINE
Taking steps to manage your emotions can help address the skin reactions they spur, says Jeanine B. Downie, M.D., a dermatologist in Montclair, New Jersey. The most common negative emotion we face is the daily stress of being pulled in a million directions. It’s imperative to find ways to offset it. “If the stress isn’t going to disappear, then the self-care shouldn’t either,” Wickes says. Research-backed relaxation treatments—like aromatherapy, sound baths, meditation, biofeedback, and hypnosis—are especially effective. “All of these have helped my rosacea patients who experience emotion-related flares,” Dr. Downie says.

Ideally, these mindful practices begin to act preventively. “In so many instances, we treat the manifestation, not the cause,” Dr. Schultz says. “And that’s not really solving the problem.” Acupuncture is especially preventive. “It has been shown to stimulate the release and synthesis of serotonin, which helps boost your mood and balance the nervous system,” says Stefanie DiLibero, a licensed acupuncturist and the founder of Gotham Wellness in New York City. She recommends scheduling a visit to a licensed acupuncturist every four to six weeks to maintain calm. Your skin-care regimen and diet can also help you sustain a positive status quo. Clinique iD’s fatigue concentrate contains taurine, an amino acid that may boost cellular energy, which in turn makes your skin look less tired. And cannabis (or CBD or sativa leaf extract) is rich in fatty acids that have skin-soothing properties. In testing, Kiehl’s Cannabis Sativa Seed Oil Herbal Concentrate ($47, kiehls.com) was also proved to strengthen skin, making it less susceptible to stressors. Applying or consuming adaptogens, which can reduce cortisol, may help too. Mix Sun Potion Yin Power ($115, thedetoxmarket.com) into your smoothie or coffee to help lower stress.