Supplements 101: Collagen

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Of all the supplements out there, collagen is the one clients most frequently ask about. Though it may be buzzy, collagen is actually just a type of protein… and one that's already almost everywhere in your body.

Think of it as the glue that holds everything together: it gives your skin structure, strengthens your bones, and maintains your muscles and ligaments. So, as collagen production starts to slow after age 25, your body gradually loses a lot of that support. Over the long term this can translate into a loss of skin elasticity, wrinkle formation, cartilage breakdown, and weaker joints.

So where do skin products and supplements that contain collagen fit into this? The reality is that topical collagen doesn't really fit into this at all. Because of the size and structure of the molecules that make up collagen, topical products can't really deliver collagen below the surface of your skin. These products can hydrate, but they can't replace lost collagen, nor can they prevent its loss.

A good collagen supplement (collagen peptides), on the other hand, could offer some preventative as well as immediate benefits that might be worth your while.

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SKIN

Collagen supplements can't actually replace collagen that's already been lost, but they can help counteract future aging.

When taking collagen, people tend to notice that their skin is more hydrated. Aside from the fact that in the short term that means more supple, healthier-looking skin, in the long term that means a lower likelihood of developing wrinkles and fine lines. (For those who already have wrinkles, it means that they're likely to be less visible, and you might be able to prevent them from getting deeper.)

With regular use, collagen supplements also stimulate your body's own collagen production process, which helps offset the natural tendency for that process to slow over time.

JOINTS

Though people tend to be most excited about the aesthetic benefits of collagen, joint health might be one of its more important benefits.

With time, joints tend to weaken, but collagen can reinforce them by preventing cartilage breakdown. This means less joint pain, and a lower risk of degenerative joint disorders, as time progresses.

Of course, nothing can really guarantee joint health like investing heavily in strong bones and muscles through a balanced diet, and proper exercise, but, if you've already got that covered, then a collagen supplement can provide you with a little extra support.

MUSCLES

The real key to strong muscles (and most other things) is a combination of being attentive about your diet, and staying active. Whatever your fitness goals may be, getting in an adequate amount of protein each day is a critical part of this.

Since collagen is, after all, a form of protein, taking a collagen supplement will give your muscles a little extra boost of protein, if nothing else.

So, the verdict? I, personally, recommend taking a high quality collagen supplement, like Vital Proteins or Neocell, since there really are some great anti-aging properties you could benefit from. They come in a virtually tasteless powder form, so it's incredibly easy to throw a scoop into your morning coffee, or a post-workout smoothie.

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But to get the most out of adding collagen to your diet, make sure you've got the fundamentals covered first: drinking lots of water, getting enough sleep, smart nutrition, and physical activity. Just remember that there is no supplement in the world that can offset the aging effects of not so great lifestyle choices!

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