BEAUTY

Should You Drink Collagen for Better Skin?

Collagen studies look encouraging until funding and quality enter the picture, leaving a less marketable but more useful answer.

The promise fits in a glass

You stir collagen into a drink and imagine it heading straight for the fine lines. The appeal is obvious: no procedure, no complicated routine, just a daily-looking ritual packaged as support for smoother, springier, better-hydrated skin. It feels both cosmetic and health-minded.

There is research behind the sales pitch. Several systematic reviews have pooled randomized controlled trials of oral hydrolyzed collagen, the form studied most often. Earlier analyses reported improvements in skin hydration and elasticity, with some also finding fewer wrinkles. Those results explain why collagen has moved beyond beauty counters and into ordinary kitchens.

But "there are studies" is only the beginning of an honest answer. Trial quality, funding and the people enrolled all affect how confidently you can apply a result to yourself. A statistically favorable average does not guarantee a difference you will notice in the mirror. Nor does it establish collagen as a treatment for every change grouped under "skin aging."

The newest and most searching review reaches a sharply different conclusion from its predecessors. Once its authors separated stronger trials from weaker ones-and independently funded studies from commercially funded ones-the apparent benefits disappeared. That does not prove collagen never helps. It means the evidence cannot currently tell you that it does.

Why the early evidence looked persuasive

A 2021 systematic review and meta-analysis included 19 controlled trials with 1,125 participants. The pooled results favored hydrolyzed collagen over placebo for hydration, elasticity and wrinkles. Yet 95% of the participants were women, and the studies involved adults ranging from 20 to 70 years old. That is a broad age span but a narrow picture of who was studied.

A larger 2023 analysis pooled 26 randomized controlled trials involving 1,721 participants. It again found better hydration and elasticity with hydrolyzed collagen than with placebo. Hydration results varied according to collagen source and the length of supplementation, while

the source did not make a significant difference to elasticity. The authors also identified several biases and called for larger randomized trials.

An earlier 2019 review was similarly optimistic, describing the findings from 11 studies as promising for skin aging and other dermatological uses. Some included trials reported improvements in elasticity, hydration or dermal collagen density. No adverse events were reported in those studies, but the review also pointed to missing regulation around supplement quality, absorption and effectiveness.

Put together, these reviews offer more than a handful of testimonials. They contain randomized, placebo-controlled research and broadly consistent pooled findings. Read only this far and buying collagen can seem like a straightforward evidence-based choice. The trouble is that pooled evidence can look solid while still resting on studies that share the same weaknesses.

The strongest-looking number is not always the strongest evidence.

Then someone checked who paid

A 2025 systematic review and meta-analysis examined 23 randomized controlled trials with 1,474 participants. Its overall analysis repeated the familiar result: collagen supplements appeared to improve hydration, elasticity and wrinkles. The researchers then sorted the trials by funding source and quality. That changed the story.

Studies funded by pharmaceutical companies reported significant benefits. Studies without that funding found no effect on hydration, elasticity or wrinkles. High-quality studies also found no significant benefit in any of those categories, while lower-quality studies reported an improvement in elasticity. The authors concluded that there is currently no clinical evidence supporting collagen supplements to prevent or treat skin aging.

Funding does not automatically make a result false. But when favorable effects appear in commercially funded or weaker studies and disappear in independent or higher-quality ones, confidence should fall. This is not a minor technical disagreement between reviews. It goes directly to whether the apparent benefit survives a tougher test.

The strongest-looking number is not always the strongest evidence. Earlier reviews asked whether the pooled trials favored collagen. The 2025 review asked whether that advantage remained when study quality and financial backing were considered. It did not. That finding deserves more weight than an attractive average assembled without those distinctions.

What collagen cannot settle

Skin naturally changes with age. It can become thinner, drier and less plump, and it may take longer to heal. Wrinkles and age spots become more noticeable. A supplement marketed for "anti-aging" bundles all of those changes into one promise, while the trials largely measured narrower outcomes such as hydration, elasticity and wrinkles.

Sunlight is a major cause of skin aging, and cigarette smoking also contributes to wrinkles. The amount smoked and the number of years matter. Collagen research does not erase those established influences, and the supplied evidence does not show that a drink can compensate for them.

Supplements also deserve more caution than the word "natural" suggests. Natural does not mean safe. Dietary supplements can have side effects or interact with medicines and other supplements, and taking too much or using one in place of prescribed medicine can be harmful. The collagen trials reviewed in 2019 reported no adverse events, but that is not a blanket guarantee for every product or every person.

If you have a skin condition that is worsening or not improving, this stops being a supplement-shopping question. Some skin changes can signal an underlying medical issue, so contact your health care provider rather than asking collagen to do the work of an assessment. If you take medicines or other supplements, discuss collagen with your provider before adding it.

Make Monday about the evidence that holds

If you still want to buy collagen, treat it as an uncertain cosmetic experiment, not a proven way to prevent or treat aging skin. The available reviews do not establish that one collagen source is reliably better for elasticity, and concerns remain about supplement quality and effectiveness. The evidence provided here also does not support choosing a particular product.

Do not let a collagen purchase displace the better-established step. Sunlight is a major cause of skin aging. Protection means limiting exposure when the sun is strongest, avoiding sunlamps and tanning beds, and using sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher. Protective clothing adds another physical barrier.

So make one concrete change next week: put sunscreen with SPF 15 or higher beside the things you routinely take out with you, and set out protective clothing for time outdoors. This step takes a bottle of sunscreen and clothing that covers exposed skin. It is less glamorous than a collagen drink, but its rationale does not vanish when lower-quality studies are removed.

You do not need to make a lifetime decision about collagen on Monday. You only need to avoid mistaking possibility for proof. Spend first on the step supported by what is already known about skin aging; leave the optional supplement where the evidence leaves it-unsettled.

Where this comes from

- Skin Aging

  MedlinePlus, U.S. National Library of Medicine · https://medlineplus.gov/skinaging.html
- Cosmetics

  MedlinePlus, U.S. National Library of Medicine · https://medlineplus.gov/cosmetics.html
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