LIVING WELL

Which Skin Changes Are Just Part of Getting Older?

Here is how to recognise the skin's changing baseline, question supplement claims and know when a concern belongs in a medical conversation.

The face in familiar light

One morning, the face in the mirror looks different. A crease stays after your expression relaxes. A brown spot seems darker. Skin that once felt comfortable now feels dry, and a small scrape appears to be taking its time. The unsettling part is not necessarily the change itself. It is not knowing whether you are looking at ordinary ageing or something that needs attention.

Wrinkles, age spots and dryness are common as skin ages. Skin also becomes thinner and loses fat, so it may look and feel less plump or smooth. Healing can take longer. These shifts do not arrive as one dramatic event; they gradually redraw what is normal for you.

That changing baseline matters. Older adults can live active, healthy lives while experiencing ordinary changes in their bodies. But not every change should automatically be filed under age. General health guidance makes the distinction plainly: some changes are expected, while others may signal a medical problem.

You do not have to make that distinction alone. If a skin change concerns you, let your healthcare provider know. The useful question is not whether older skin should look younger. It is whether what you are seeing fits your usual pattern-or has become concerning enough that you want a clinician to assess it.

Time is only part of the story

Ageing happens, but time is not acting alone. Sunlight is a major cause of skin ageing. That makes a long history of sun exposure part of the story behind wrinkles and age spots, rather than evidence that skin simply reached a certain birthday and changed on schedule.

Cigarette smoking contributes to wrinkles too. The wrinkling increases with both the number of cigarettes smoked and the number of years a person has smoked. That relationship is useful because it moves the conversation away from the idea that every visible change is inevitable.

None of this makes ageing skin a personal failure. It simply separates changes you cannot stop

from exposures you can still reduce. Past sunlight cannot be undone, but future exposure is not fixed. The same principle applies at any age: protecting skin now is still protection.

The skin's slower healing also deserves respect. If a scrape appears to linger, remember that healing can take longer with age. But "ageing skin heals slowly" should not become a reason to dismiss anything that worries you. Concern itself is enough reason to bring the change into a medical conversation.

The best recent review found that the benefit disappeared in higher-quality and independently funded research.

The anti-ageing shelf overpromises

A visible wrinkle can turn an ordinary shopping trip into a referendum on your face. Products promise to revitalise ageing skin or reduce wrinkles, yet only a few have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration for ageing or sun-damaged skin. The size of the market should not be mistaken for the strength of the evidence.

Some approaches can soothe dry skin or reduce the appearance of age spots. Notice the limits of those verbs. Soothing dryness is not reversing ageing, and reducing the appearance of a spot is not the same as explaining what that spot is. Cosmetic improvement and medical assessment answer different questions.

That distinction protects you from two common assumptions: that an expensive claim must be well supported, and that making a mark less visible makes it medically unimportant. The available sources do not provide enough evidence to choose particular creams, procedures or ingredients. They do support scepticism toward sweeping promises.

The honest target is comfort and informed attention, not the elimination of every sign of time. Wrinkles, dryness and a loss of plumpness can belong to ordinary ageing. A concern that you cannot confidently place belongs with your healthcare provider, rather than at the bottom of a shopping basket.

The collagen evidence changed

Collagen supplements offer a particularly neat story: ageing skin changes, so swallow collagen to correct it. Earlier reviews appeared to support that logic. A 2021 review of 19 controlled trials, involving 1,125 participants, reported improvements in hydration, elasticity and wrinkles. Ninety-five per cent of participants were women, and their ages ranged from 20 to 70.

A 2023 review of 26 randomised controlled trials involving 1,721 participants also found

improvements in skin hydration and elasticity compared with placebo. But the authors identified several biases and said larger randomised trials were needed. That caution matters because a positive combined result can still rest on studies with weaknesses.

Then a 2025 review examined 23 randomised controlled trials involving 1,474 participants and separated the results by study quality and funding. When every trial was pooled, collagen appeared to improve hydration, elasticity and wrinkles. When the reviewers looked only at studies without pharmaceutical-company funding, however, they found no effect in those categories.

High-quality studies also found no significant effect across hydration, elasticity and wrinkles, while low-quality studies found an improvement in elasticity. The review concluded that there is currently no clinical evidence supporting collagen supplements to prevent or treat skin ageing. This newer analysis does not merely add another opinion; it shows how funding and study quality changed the apparent answer.

The hardest lesson is also the most useful: a stack of positive trials is not automatically a settled result. The best recent review found that the benefit disappeared in higher-quality and independently funded research. If you are considering collagen for ageing skin, the evidence does not justify treating it as a proven answer.

Make next week about protection

For the coming week, shift your attention from promises of reversal to one supported action: reduce avoidable sunlight exposure. This takes sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher and protective clothing. Staying out of the sun when it is strongest adds another layer of protection.

Avoid sunlamps and tanning beds. They are not a workaround for outdoor exposure; avoiding them is part of the same guidance. The aim is not to erase wrinkles or spots. It is to reduce an important contributor to further skin ageing.

Keep the medical boundary clear while you do this. If something about your skin concerns you-whether it is a change, a spot or healing that seems unusually prolonged-tell your healthcare provider. The available evidence does not supply a visual checklist that can safely settle the question at home.

Put the sunscreen beside the protective clothing you already reach for. That small arrangement turns an abstract intention into something usable: sunscreen with SPF 15 or higher, clothing that covers the skin, and a plan to choose shade when sunlight is strongest. That is enough for next week. You do not need a shelf of promises.

Where this comes from

- Older Adult Health

  MedlinePlus, U.S. National Library of Medicine · https://medlineplus.gov/olderadulthealth.html
- Skin Aging

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