

8 Expert Tips About Taking Or Starting A Collagen Supplement



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Ready to start a collagen supplement routine? Welcome; we've got glowing skin here.* But it's not always easy to figure out how best to incorporate it into your routine. First, there are so many options on the market; how do you know what to look for? And once you make your purchase, how and when do you take it? How often? And what are all the other little best practices you need to know when adding a new product to your routine?

You're in luck. We pulled the best advice we've ever been given about starting a collagen supplement routine—from when you should start to what to look for and so much more:

1. Always find one with vitamin C.

Oh vitamin C, the beloved skin care ingredient. Your body cannot effectively produce collagen without the antioxidant.* Vitamin C is actually able to promote fibroblast production, tend to damaged collagen DNA, and

regulate collagen synthesis, or the pathway in which collagen is made.* "Vitamin C is a key cofactor in the synthesis of collagen and elastin, [which helps] give your skin that plump and youthful appearance," says Keira Barr, M.D., dual board-certified dermatologist.*

But it goes a step further, too, as vitamin C can also take on a protective role. (As if it hasn't done enough already!) Vitamin C stabilizes the collagen you already have thanks to its antioxidant properties, which can help neutralize free radical damage, a main source of collagen degradation and DNA damage.*

But your body cannot make vitamin C on its own; it must be ingested daily, which is why experts recommend finding a collagen product with the antioxidant already formulated in it so they can work together.*

2. Take it day, morning, night—it doesn't matter.

There are plenty of claims out there about the best time to take collagen, be it morning, as an afternoon snack, or right before bed. And these claims do have sound reasons in theory: If you take it in the morning, it'll be digested on an empty stomach and thus absorbed better, some say. Others claim that if you use it as part of a snack, it can help keep you full. Finally, still others think that using it at night is the most optimal as it can aid in your body's recovery process while in REM.

Here's the deal: There is no scientific consensus on the "best time" to take collagen or even that the time of day matters at all. "Think of collagen as more of a general in-your-system-type supplement," says Albert Matheny, M.S., R.D., CSCS. The "empty stomach" argument doesn't hold up because collagen is mostly broken down in the small intestine. The midday snack really only holds true if blended with a snack that can satiate you—as the collagen itself can't really. And there is simply no research to support the nighttime argument.

Ultimately, you should take your collagen supplements whenever it's easy and convenient for you. The key is to find the time of day that you can make it part of your routine—because any supplement works best when you actually take it.*

3. Stick to collagen types I and III for skin benefits.*

Collagen is not a monolith: In fact, there are at least 28 types of the protein that we know of present in vertebrates (us included), each specializing and located in different areas of the body. With respect to your skin, the ones you should focus on are types I and III, which are both found in collagen made from bovine sources (cow, cattle).*

Type I is the most abundant in the body, not just in skin: You will find it in joints, bones, tendons, you name it. However, it seems to do a number on the skin when ingested via supplementation.* One small study showed that when people took an oral supplement containing mainly hydrolyzed type I collagen, after 60 days their facial lines and wrinkles appeared smoother, and the skin maintained healthy moisture levels.*

Type III is a less understood collagen but no less interesting. This type of collagen "promotes skin health and elasticity—or what gives you that bounce-back in the skin," says Fran E. Cook-Bolden, M.D., a board-certified dermatologist. Few studies, though, have looked at taking type III exclusively—or at least in the same way that there's been research done on types I and II—but some overall research points to the benefits of type III collagen.* Most notably, research has found that type III collagen content in skin decreases with age; type I also decreased, but to a lesser degree, perhaps implying that type III might be more of a key factor in skin aging. While we don't know for sure if this is the case, we do know that type III collagen is very important for fibroblast function.*

4. If you're in your 20s, start now.

For those questioning when to start a collagen routine, here's an unfortunate yet true fact: Your collagen levels naturally decline with age. Generally, this begins in your 20s and continues to decrease by about 1% each year. When, exactly, this happens in your 20s varies greatly depending on your genetics, but most people will start to see this decline by the time they hit 30.

"Our bodies always balance collagen production and degradation," says board-certified dermatologist **Gary Goldenberg, M.D.** "When we are young, our bodies produce more collagen than we break down. That balance tips the wrong way with age since tissue regeneration decreases."

And another thing to note: Collagen supplements won't reverse deep, pronounced lines—nor can they lift very loose skin. Basically, they won't magically vanish existing, major signs of aging. "You can use collagen to improve skin in small ways but not once the skin's gotten too leathery and damaged," explains functional medicine doctor Robert Rountree, M.D., on mbg's podcast.* Therefore, it's best to use them as a proactive method to promote healthy skin aging—and to help attenuate the overall arc or trajectory of skin aging over time.*

5. And definitely use it if you're in menopause.

But just because you didn't start a collagen supplement in your 20s, that doesn't mean it's too late to start. This is especially true when entering menopause. "Studies show that women's skin loses about 30% of its collagen during the first five years of menopause and about 2% of their collagen every year after for the next 20 years," says Barr, who notes that this drop accounts for many of the things we classically define as "maturing skin" like sagging, enlarged pores, and deeper lines. "The bottom line is that there are changes in skin tone, texture, and pigmentation showing up as a dull complexion, skin sagging, wrinkles, thinning hair, and more prominent 'age spots.'"

Taking a collagen supplement during this time can help provide the key building blocks to help your body produce collagen naturally, and by supporting your skin cells' fibroblasts, or the parts of the cell that make collagen and elastin.*

6. Always make sure your collagen is grass-fed, pasture-raised, and clean.

Here's the deal: All collagen supplements that actually contain collagen come from animals. This includes bovine or marine and sometimes poultry (chicken). For bovine, it's best to choose grass-fed, pasture-raised cattle. "You are consuming a part of the animal," Amy Shapiro, M.S., R.D., CDN, previously told us. "Therefore, making sure that the animal was raised humanely and fed a grass-fed, wild diet is important. Grass-fed means the animal ate only grass and was allowed to feed as close to their natural state as possible."

Additionally, you'll want to make sure that the formula is clean and transparent. Less is more here: Skip artificial colors, flavors, gluten, GMOs, soy, and known allergens. If your collagen product has flavors, look for natural varieties (such as organic cocoa, organic vanilla). If there's a sweetener, we recommend plant-based, clean sources like organic monk fruit extract or organic coconut sugar. Also keep an eye out for brands that are open and honest about their product. If they make any benefit claims, there should be science to support them. They should be open about where the ingredients come from, and they should explain the packaging it comes in (i.e., is it environmentally friendly?).

7. Skip the creams.

The ingredient collagen as a beauty product marketing tool is fairly common. You'll see it pop up on creams, serums, and scalp treatments, all in the hopes of younger, healthier-looking skin. And it's not all for naught: Collagen does hydrate when used topically. However, it's not actually doing more than that—and it's certainly not aiding in collagen production.

"Collagen is a huge molecule that sits on the surface of the skin and cannot be absorbed into the dermis," board-certified dermatologist Dendy Engelman, M.D., previously told us about collagen creams. "When applied topically, it is not possible for collagen to penetrate, which is why we use other actives to stimulate collagen production."

8. Think about the whole picture.

Skin is a complex system that contains several parts to keep it healthy. Sure, collagen is the structural component—keeping things firm and lifted—but you also need things like elastin (to keep skin flexible and plush), ceramides (to act as a sealant, keeping the barrier strong), and hyaluronic acid (to help attract and hold in precious water so skin stays hydrated), as well as antioxidants to help protect the skin from internal and external aggressors.*

Without all of these parts working together, the skin cannot function optimally. So while collagen is a great place to start when considering skin health, you can and should think bigger.

mindbodygreen's beauty & gut collagen+ also contains hyaluronic acid and a cocktail of antioxidants, so it checks those boxes.* As for elastin, collagen has been shown to encourage natural elastin production as well as collagen.*

Regardless: It's important to understand that your skin is an intricate organ that has a lot of parts that help it remain healthy. And when you keep all those parts in mind, you're better able to make smart skin care choices.