



Mirror, mirror

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Your face is sending you signs and signals about your health – what is yours saying? Dr Nicola Davies reports.

Poor lifestyle and diet choices reflect on your face, making you look older than you really are, but simple changes can improve your health and take years off your face. Following are five facial signs of poor health and how to handle them:

Puffiness

A puffy appearance may mean your kidneys' filtering system is damaged, which happens when you consume too much salt, caffeine, or alcohol. According to the National Kidney Foundation, puffiness around the eyes can indicate that protein normally retained in the body is leaking out during urination. To reduce puffiness, cut back on salt-laden snacks and caffeinated drinks. Drink water regularly and eat fresh fruit and vegetables, especially asparagus which cleanses the kidneys and bladder. Exercise and relaxation activities such as yoga regulate blood circulation and fluid retention.

Redness

This can indicate that you are eating too much processed or sugary food. Simple carbohydrates like cookies and cake are quickly absorbed into the bloodstream and can cause vascular dilation, resulting in a flushed look. Eating slowly and choosing healthy food options can help. Avoid spicy food, which can exacerbate redness and inflammation. If facial redness is prolonged, consult a dermatologist because it could be rosacea - a chronic skin condition which results in enlargement of facial capillaries. According to the International Rosacea Foundation, the condition can be triggered by stress, alcohol, caffeine, and histamine-rich foods like tomatoes and cheese. People with rosacea need to apply daily sun protection, eat skin-nurturing foods rich in vitamins and omega-3 fatty acids, and engage in regular relaxation activities.

Pasty skin tone

This is typically associated with anaemia, a condition characterised by iron deficiency or low red blood cell (RBC) production. Iron holds the oxygen contained in RBCs. If there is low iron in the blood, the heart needs to work twice as hard to deliver oxygen all over the body. Anaemia can be acute, or sudden onset, which could be a sign of lesions in the stomach or colon lining and of internal blood loss. Anaemia can be chronic or progressive over time, which means you aren't getting enough iron from your diet. Neglecting signs of anaemia could damage other parts of the body. To treat chronic anaemia, include iron-rich foods in your diet, such as red meat, a couple of times a week, green vegetables, wheatgrass, fish, and foods containing vitamin C that aid in iron absorption, such as citrus fruits.

Spots and whiteheads

Spots and acne can be a sign you are neglecting your health. A sunspot is a blemish where there is excess production of the skin pigment, melanin. If you have sunspots, this could mean you are getting too much exposure to UV light. Apply sun protection daily and at least 30 minutes prior to going out into the sun.

Whiteheads are a type of acne formed when excess skin oil and bacteria are trapped inside pores. An acne outbreak is usually a sign of hormonal shifts brought about by major changes, such as pregnancy, suddenly starting to work night shifts, or developing a smoking habit. Wash your face twice daily, especially after sweating or commuting, and use oil-free make-up and

sunscreens. It's important to see a dermatologist. According to Dr Wong of the dermatology clinic, Sydney Skin, if a woman suddenly gets acne around her jaw before menstruation, it could indicate polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), which requires professional attention.

Under-eye circles

Having dark and puffy rings under the eyes typically signifies fatigue, but could also point to allergies – specifically to house dust mites. Wong explains that this is often accompanied by scaliness around the eyes. This might call for fumigation of your bedroom to get rid of dust mites. Apart from allergies, dark eye circles can also point to anaemia, which commonly shows up on the face as pale skin.

Based on these five signs, the most common facial indicators of poor health are linked to food, exercise and stress management. Although these facial signs are symptoms of specific physical conditions, they also reveal the need to improve your

overall wellbeing. Apart from dermatologists, it is also advisable to seek help from nutrition experts, particularly those who are members of the Dieticians Association of Australia (DAA) accreditation system and the Nutrition Society of Australia (NSA)'s voluntary Register of Nutritionists.

To embrace a holistic approach to health, consider seeking advice from a naturopath. Naturopathy is founded on the principle that the body can inherently heal itself – as long as it is provided with the right fuel and not abused with alcohol or smoking. Trained and registered practitioners can be located through the Australian National Register of Accredited Natural Therapists, the Australian Traditional Medicine Society, the Australian Natural Therapists Association, and the National Herbalists Association of Australia. By consulting the right specialists, you can implement positive diet and lifestyle changes to get to the root of any health issues that are showing up on your face. ❄️

Acne around the jaw before menstruation could indicate polycystic ovarian syndrome.

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