Can Losing Weight Hurt Your Looks?

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Americans are certainly fascinated with extreme weight loss stories. “The Biggest Loser” is a primetime hit, we are captivated by human interest stories focusing on 100-pound weight loss triumphs and we’re fixed on dropping those last five pounds. But did you know that losing weight can take a toll on your skin and hair? I got the scoop from leading dermatologists and plastic surgeons for diet tips and tricks to keep you looking slim, trim and beautiful.

BEAUTY BLUNDER: Weight loss causes sagging skin
We certainly experience sagging skin after significant weight loss, and many women have personally been through this post-pregnancy. But why do some women seem to recover so easily from pregnancy and weight loss, with minimal looseness, while others get floppy skin?

Age
“A lot of this has to do with age and genetics, and also a little good luck,” explains California-based board-certified dermatologist Dr. Sandra Lee. “The older we get, the less elasticity we have in our skin, so a younger person who has significant weight loss will have a higher chance for less skin sagging than someone 20 years older,” she adds.

Genetics
Genetics plays a significant role as well — the level of elasticity in tissues is as hereditary as Uncle Ted’s big ears. However, studies have shown that the more gradual the weight loss, the more favorable the outcome in terms of skin changes.

Rapid weight loss
“With the new gastric bypass and lap band procedures becoming so popular, weight losses in the 100- to 200-pound range are becoming a reality,” says Dr. Semira Bayati, board-certified plastic surgeon. After these types of surgeries, weight loss is usually rapid in the first year, leading to looser skin.

SAGGING SKIN FIX
Vitamin E
While age and genetics are fixed, vitamin E has been shown to protect skin elasticity and, much like healthy polyunsaturated fats, helps to strengthen skin cells from damage. To tap into its restorative properties, include vegetable oils, nuts, seeds, olives, spinach and asparagus as part of your healthy diet.

Low-impact exercise
Dr. Lee also recommends avoiding exercise programs that are high-impact and jostle the body, causing skin of the face or the body to move more. This can increase sagging of the skin. “Just as you would wear a support bra, I would recommend wearing workout clothing with a little more compression on areas that tend to flop around,” she explains. Stick to low-impact cardiovascular activities like the elliptical, spinning and yoga.

BEAUTY BLUNDER: Weight loss can cause acne
While eating a healthful diet has been shown in some cases to improve skin conditions, we also know that the more fat a woman has the more estrogen she produces, and estrogen and other hormones directly influence acne flareups.

Hormonal changes
Many women take birth control pills to get a little extra boost of estrogen to clear up acne, but others may find that an increase in estrogen may make their acne worse — especially as your weight goes down, and your estrogen levels haven’t evened out for your new, slimmer weight.

Fad diet foods
Additionally, while losing weight on a diet full of fruits, vegetables and whole grains might be just what the doctor ordered, fad diets consisting of liquid, all-protein or even just cabbage soup can create nutritional gaps that affect your skin negatively.

ACNE FIX
Check with your doctor before starting a weight loss program and always talk to her about changes in your health and beauty. Ask about hormonal imbalances and the recommended daily servings of each food group to avoid dietary deficiencies.

BEAUTY BLUNDER: Weight loss can lead to hair loss
Strict dieting can result in nutritional deficiencies that result in malabsorption of vitamins and minerals necessary for skin, hair and overall health of the body, Dr. Bayati explains.

Severe calorie restriction
Hair loss is very common with severe caloric restriction and also after gastric bypass operations.
A hair loss condition called telogen effluvium, which is triggered by a significant event that takes a toll on our body — for example, childbirth, a car accident, a death of a significant other and even dramatic weight loss can prompt hair follicles to go through the death phase (telogen phase).

"It is usually three to six months after the significant event occurs that we may notice increased hair loss," says Dr. Lee, "this is because more hairs went through this 'death phase' but it takes months for new hairs to grow and finally push the dead hairs out."

HAIR LOSS FIX
Consult your doctor if you notice you're losing your hair. He can put you on the right diet track that will keep you from depleting your body of the nutrients your hair needs. You might notice a significant increase in short hairs growing out all over your head, and you will have a few more months of more "bad hair days," but these short hairs are a great sign that things will eventually go back to normal.