



The Fountain of Youth

Anti-aging and Cosmeceutical Products

In 1493, Ponce De Leon accompanied Columbus on his second voyage to America. In 1513, he was conned by some Native Americans into looking for the “Fountain of Youth.” He did discover Florida... but folks, he’s still out there somewhere looking for that fountain!

Please forgive my cynicism, but I don’t believe we can find youth in a tube or bottle. I feel like Clara in the old hamburger ad... “Where’s the beef?!” Almost all of these products go through FDA approval as cosmetic products, presenting safety data alone. Then the fun begins, with claims about “anti-aging” and other beneficial effects.

If they really did have anti-aging effects on your face, wouldn’t you expect to see three sets of high-quality photographs? First, the before photos. Second, photos during use of the product. Third, photos 2-3 months after stopping use of the product showing clear evidence of improved, more youthful appearance compared to the baseline photographs. Don’t hold your breath waiting to see that third set of photographs!

Over the years, I have had hundreds of patients who tried retinol, alpha hydroxy acids, and other anti-aging products. Many of these products can, and do, give transient improvement in the appearance of the skin during use. Shedding of surface cells (exfoliation) gives a more even skin color, swelling (edema from irritation), smoothes out fine lines, and burning (most are acids) gives a “healthy glow.” But guess what? When you stop using them, the uneven pigment and fine lines reappear. I don’t call that anti-aging. I call it a transient cosmetic effect.

Hundreds of my patients have tried Tretinoin (Rx) and had the same experience...transient improved appearance, but no permanent improvement in their aged and sun damaged skin. Scientific articles claiming microscopic skin improvement are based on biopsies while using the product. If these changes are permanent, wouldn’t you expect to see some improvement a few months after stopping the Tretinoin? Where are these articles?

If you like the appearance of your skin from using these products as the cosmetics that they are, that’s fine with me... but the only true permanent anti-aging benefits come from sun protection.