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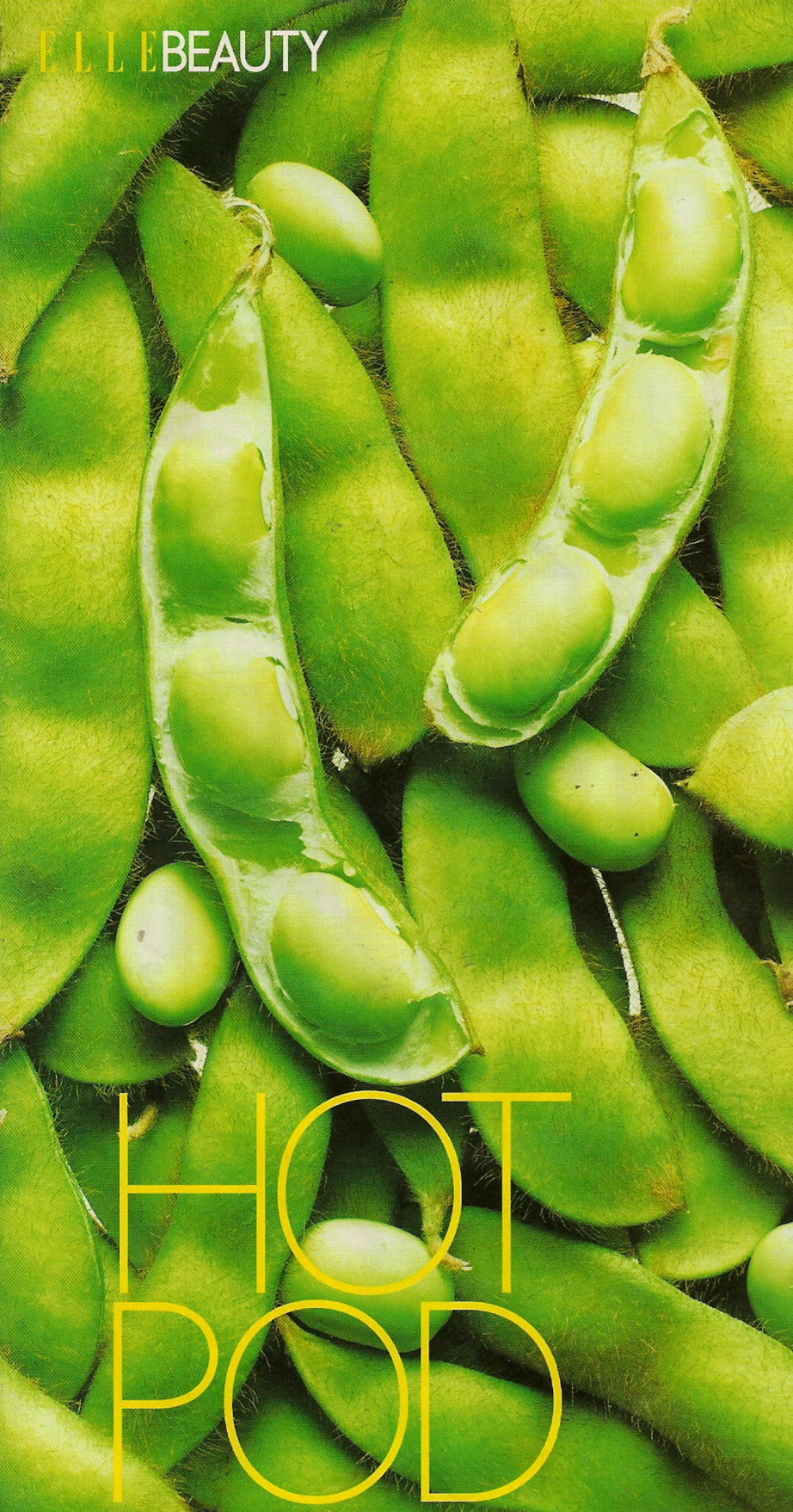
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# HOT POD

It can brighten and soften your skin and even ward off wrinkles. Is soy the newest skin-care multi-tasker? TEXT: MICHELLE VILLET

**E**ver since scientists discovered the many health benefits of soy—including lowering cholesterol, reducing menopause symptoms and protecting against certain cancers—it has been hailed as a superfood. Now, some beauty companies are calling it the next super-ingredient, thanks to its gentle yet effective results on everything from wrinkles to hyperpigmentation when applied to the skin. “Soy is a workhorse,” says Kristine Schmalenberg, a staff scientist for Johnson & Johnson. “More information is coming out about the positive benefits of soy as a food source, and we think that if it can do so much good for the inside [of the body], it should do the same for the outside too.”

Although products like tofu and soy milk have only recently become popular in North America, the soybean has been used for centuries in traditional Chinese medicine to help improve the complexion and act as a remedy for heart, liver, kidney and stomach ailments. Johnson & Johnson scientists became aware of its potential as a skin-care ingredient when they found research showing that workers in soybean factories who handled the legume developed smooth and even-toned hands. Today, almost every product in the company’s Aveeno line incorporates soy, says Schmalenberg, and companies like Lancôme, Elizabeth Arden and Origins are following suit with formulations of their own.

**Getting even** “Studies show that soy helps with hyperpigmentation,” says Dr. Frances Jang, a dermatologist based in Vancouver. Hyper-pigmentation occurs when cells called melanocytes are stimulated by ultraviolet rays—or, less commonly, hormones or certain antibiotics—to produce melanin. “Soy contains proteins and isoflavones [estrogen-like compounds] that work in the pigmentation cells,” says Schmalenberg. ▸



Lancôme  
Absolue  
Night  
Premium  
Bx (\$135)

Vichy  
Laboratoires  
Neovadiol  
Nuit (\$49)

Stella  
McCartney  
Care  
Nourishing  
Elixir (\$74)

Kimberly  
Sayer of  
London  
Gentle Face  
Cleanser  
(\$28)

L'Oréal Paris  
Age Perfect Pro-  
Calcium Radiance  
Perfector Tinted  
Moisturizer and  
Anti-Age Spot (\$30)

Aveeno  
Positively  
Radiant  
Daily  
Moisturizer  
(\$22)

Origins Organics  
Nourishing Face  
Lotion (\$52.50  
for 30 mL)

Elizabeth Arden  
Intervene Pause &  
Effect Moisture  
Cream SPF 15 (\$68 for  
50 mL). For details, see  
Shopping Guide.

"They don't stop pigmentation; they bring it down and spread it out across the skin to make it look brighter and more even-toned." According to Jang, soy is a good choice if you have sensitive skin and experience irritation from hydroquinone, a chemical-based brightening compound. "Soy is safe to use and worth trying," she

**Smooth talk** The same high-protein content that makes such foods as tofu and tempeh smart dietary choices also plays a role in soy's skin-smoothing properties, says Schmalenberg. "Soy contains proteins that help with skin texture," she says. "The isoflavones also help because they are anti-inflammatory

“YOUR SKIN IS GOING TO REFLECT LIGHT BETTER AND LOOK SMOOTHER AND MORE TRANSLUCENT.”

says. But be patient: It's gentler than hydroquinone, so it can take longer to see results, which may also be less dramatic, says Jang.

**Lost age** Excess estrogen may be to blame for premenstrual moodiness and acne flare-ups; but too little can be the culprit behind the dry, thinning skin associated with aging. "Soy has a few components that mimic estrogen, such as isoflavones," says Tony Vargas, vice-president of global research and development for Elizabeth Arden, whose Intervene line uses soy. "As women age, they produce less of certain skin-cell proteins that are responsible for creating collagen and elastin. Soy tells cells to produce more of these proteins. After three or four weeks, you'll start to see your skin become plumper." Antoinette Ritondo, a national training manager for Lancôme—which sells the soy-infused Absolue Bx line—agrees. "Soy helps restore skin's firmness," she says.

Jang's take on the anti-aging benefits of soy is cautiously optimistic. "We know that estrogens can promote collagen thickness," she says. "Some research shows that a soy isoflavone called genistein can stimulate collagen, but it has never been demonstrated in human studies." There is proof, however, that genistein acts as an antioxidant. "It's anti-aging because it neutralizes free radicals," says Jang.

and decrease the reactivity of the skin." Ray Mauro, manager of global product development for Origins, says that soy's moisturizing properties may also contribute to a smoother, softer-looking appearance. Origins uses soy lecithin—a substance extracted from soybean oil—in some of the products in its new Organics line. "It's dual-purpose," says Mauro. "We sought it out as an emulsifier, but it's also very hydrating." The smoothing powers of soy also extend to hair follicles. "It can reduce the amount of hair growth and the shaft size of the hair," says Schmalenberg, citing a 2001 study, published in *Experimental Dermatology*, in which 95 percent of subjects saw a noticeable reduction in the appearance of hair after four weeks of topical application.

No matter what skin-care concerns you're targeting with a soy-based product, you need to use it every day for at least one month to see results, says Schmalenberg. "Your skin is going to reflect light better and look smoother and more translucent," she says. And be prepared: Because soy is both natural and multi-purpose, you'll soon be spotting it in even more beauty products, she adds. So, believe the hype: This is one superfood that's good for your constitution *and* your complexion. □