

bottle measures how well they block the burning rays—because many don't actually protect skin from wrinkling rays at all. To do that and avoid the ensuing prune face, dermatologists suggest a sunscreen with zinc or Parsol 1789 (also called avobenzone). "Use at least an SPF 15," Rigel says, "and make sure you see the words 'broad spectrum' on the label."

### **Myth: Facials erase wrinkles.**

**Truth:** A trip to the spa will stop forehead creases in their tracks, right? Yeah, and a Stoli Orange is an excellent source of vitamin C. In fact, all the wishful thinking in all the spa waiting rooms in all the world won't prevent or erase wrinkles. "Garden-variety facials make skin look smoother and more polished," says Tina Alster, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Georgetown University School of Medicine. "But don't expect them to stimulate collagen or get rid of age spots." Regular facials do hydrate the skin, so it feels and looks better temporarily, but there are no proven, long-term benefits. Fancier treatments—ones that include a light chemical peel or an application of retinol—"might help the skin absorb antioxidants that are applied at the end of the facial," says Debra Jaliman, clinical instructor of dermatology at Mt. Sinai School of Medicine. But getting the collagen-building, wrinkle-fighting benefit of retinol requires smearing it on every day or two.

### **Myth: Vitamins nourish skin from the inside out.**

**Truth:** Popping a Centrum does as much for skin as swilling a shot of Cetaphil would. According to dermatologists, multivitamins benefit general health, but no study has proven that ingesting a vitamin makes a lick of difference in the skin. "Basically, the same amount of vitamin C is 40 times more concentrated on your skin than it is when you ingest it," says Tina West, director of cutaneous laser surgery at Washington Hospital Center in Washington, D.C. And a recent study conducted by the Dermatology Associates of San Diego County found that vitamin C results in "clinically visible and statistically significant improvement in wrinkling" when used topically for 12 weeks. Pressing for a definite answer on what a multivitamin

will do for skin can make even a doctor squirm. "We just don't know," says Robin Ashinoff, associate professor of dermatology at New York University. "A multivitamin is good for your health and may make you look better because you're healthier, but the convincing studies—ones that compare oral vitamins in humans in large groups with a placebo—have yet to be done."

### **Myth: Collagen in creams builds collagen in the skin.**

**Truth:** If you've ever tried unsuccessfully to wiggle into the slinky Dolce & Gabbana number that saw you through your early 20s, you have some idea of how a collagen molecule feels when it's rubbed onto the skin. Collagen is a very large molecule, one that isn't easily pushed into the dermis. "It sits on the surface and eventually is wiped away," says Ronald Moy, associate professor of der-

matology at the University of California at Los Angeles. "It simply can't get past the surface of the skin because it's too big." Dermatologist humor—or what passes for it—says that the only reliable delivery system for collagen is a syringe.

### **Myth: Some creams can only be used during the day, others are only for night.**

**Truth:** Marketers should be applauded for getting this myth to take hold, but as dermatologists like to note, skin doesn't know what time it is. "Usually, the difference between a day cream and a night cream is that the former has a sunscreen," Wexler says. "And there's no harm in using a sunscreen at night, so one moisturizer can easily do both jobs." The vampires of the skin-care industry, Retin-A and Renova, lose their effective-

ness when exposed to sunlight, which is why doctors usually prescribe them for use at night. But "in small concentrations, which is what you find in most night creams, retinol is stable in the skin whether you use it at night or during the day," says Elizabeth Tanzi, codirector of the Washington Institute of Dermatologic Surgery. "The same goes for glycolic and salicylic acids." There is some merit to the belief that certain creams are nocturnal, however: "Night creams tend to be heavier because most women want the hydration but don't want a greasy face during the day," Wexler says.

### **Myth: Anti-aging creams are for women over 40.**

**Truth:** Another advantage for early birds besides catching that disgusting worm: It's a medical fact that "the loss of collagen and elastin tissue begins around age 20," says Neil Sadick, clinical pro-

# "No pain, no gain" is great for selling gym memberships, but it does jack for skin.

fessor of dermatology at Weill Medical College of Cornell University. That doesn't mean you should've thrown your nineteenth birthday party in Rite Aid's retinol aisle—it means don't wait until you see the dark spots and sagging skin to do something about them. Most anti-aging creams contain retinoids, glycolic acid, and antioxidants—all of which are beneficial to young skin. The only potential problem in starting an anti-aging regimen young is that many of these creams are marketed to older women and come with a whopping dose of rich moisturizers. "If you use a moisturizer that's too heavy for your skin you could potentially clog your pores and get whiteheads," West says. Dermatologists instead suggest youth-friendly varieties—oil-free formulas, light lotions, or gel-based products. *(continued on page 165)*