

Skincare Throughout the Seasons

by Angel Guzman

What is skincare? Usually when we think of skincare, the first thought that comes to mind is our daily routine of cleansing and moisturizing. As important as that routine is, the key to great skin actually begins on the inside. Our skin reflects everything that goes on internally, including our emotions. In humans, the skin is the largest organ of the Integumentary system. It plays an important role in protecting our bodies from environmental pathogens. Not to mention, great skin can always boost our confidence! However, as the seasons change, our lifestyles also change and we must take the necessary steps to properly care for our skin, beginning from the inside out. Each season, our bodies go through changes such as daily activities, diets, and emotions that we may or may not be aware of. All of which will affect the overall health and appearance of our skin. Traditional Chinese medicine teaches that the seasonal changes affect our human growth and overall well-being. This system is called the Five Element Theory; which may be recognized as the five movements or phases of yin and yang. It “relates all energy and substance to one of the elements- Fire, Earth, Metal, Water, and Wood” (Haas, p. 24). The circulation of energy, called chi, is the life force and is present in the two primary forces yin and yang. These dualities reflect opposite states in constant transition. “Yang, representing the pure energy communicating to Heaven; is the “male, active light principle, the force that wishes to expand into everything”; while yin is substance, representing earth, the “female, receptive, dark principle that wants to contract into nothingness”. The interaction between yin and yang “determines the nature of the universe” (Haas, p. 24). “Their relationship is manifested as the five essential elements which make up all things.” “Each element is associated with a direction of the compass, “with the element Earth being the center direction” (Haas, p. 24). In addition, each element is associated with a specific season in the year, organs in the body that are dominant during that season, and experiences of activity and emotions; therefore determining which organs and glands are under stress, what

our disposition will be like, and what our skin will express. By recognizing and dealing with these changes, you will be able to control the health of your skin.

Beginning March 21st, spring is “the time of creation and development” (Haas, p. 33). Linked to the Wood element, the spring season is a good time to reflect on your life, clear out the past, and make a new start. The Wood element allows us to do this because it creates our mental clarity, and our ability to focus, plan, and make decisions. Governed by the Wood element, this is the time when the liver and gallbladder are dominant, and spring is the time to cleanse and support these organs. The liver and gallbladder carry out body functions such as digestion and processing. The liver deals with metabolism, the storage of nutrients, detoxification, and the balancing of hormone levels; the gallbladder stores bile for the liver. The liver is also responsible for distributing and regulating the flow of chi throughout the entire body, which is the core of Wood health. The environment, as well as your thoughts and emotions affect the flow of this energy, which in turn may weaken these organs leading to emotional and physical imbalances. For example, one may experience the lack of inspiration and desire for life, poor judgment and inability to make decisions, anger (the emotion dominated by Wood), frustration, and depression. Whereas one with an over developed Wood element may be an over-thinker or workaholic, therefore experiencing headaches or migraines and muscle fatigue, resulting in lethargy, forgetfulness, insomnia, and a dull complexion. The essential oils of bergamot, chamomile, helichrysum, and sweet orange can be extremely beneficial for these complaints. Bergamot is cooling and refreshing, and has the ability to smooth the flow of chi, harmonizing the liver; especially when combined with chamomile which regulates the movement of chi. Sweet orange unblocks and circulates stagnant chi energy accumulated in the liver while Helichrysum has the capability to regulate the flow of chi as well as the flow of blood. Bergamot is known as an anti-depressive, releasing any pent up anger, helping us to rediscover hopefulness. Chamomile aids our release of built up tension and depression giving us a sunnier disposition. Helichrysum relaxes and comforts, easing

depression created from long-standing frustration; it is able to penetrate through to our deepest negative emotions related to Wood such as harboring resentment and anger, as well being stubbornly negative. Yarrow is also beneficial to release deeply repressed anger. Grapefruit and sweet orange will aid in easing frustration and moodiness. Chamomile, sweet orange, and helichrysum are beneficial for headaches; helichrysum particularly for migraines. Other challenges that may occur are poor digestion and appetite, nausea, vomiting, and constipation. When one experiences poor digestion, this can lead to a buildup of toxins, which will then be excreted through the skin causing dryness and inflammation. Sweet orange is one of the best oils for the digestive system, encouraging the flow of bile, aiding a poor appetite, flatulence, nausea, and vomiting, constipation and irritable bowel syndrome. Other essential oils to consider would be yarrow and helichrysum, which also encourage the flow and production of bile. Yarrow eases indigestion while helichrysum and chamomile ease irritable bowel syndrome. Chamomile and grapefruit are also good for constipation. Yarrow stimulates the liver, while German chamomile, helichrysum, and grapefruit aid in clearing heat from the liver. Bergamot will also aid the digestion, but it is better reserved for nervous indigestion or loss of appetite due to emotional stress. Since the liver also creates and balances hormones, when weakened, women may experience cramps, bloating, mood swings and irritability, headaches, and abdominal pain. A hormonal imbalance may also lead to eczema outbreaks. The essential oil of chamomile combined with clary sage will help to reduce PMS and menstrual pains, while German chamomile combined with lavender or geranium will help to ease eczema and itchy skin. For nighttime you may want to consider incorporating the essential oils of lavender, neroli, and melissa, which will aid insomnia. Lavender and neroli will soothe any feelings of anger and frustration. Neroli and melissa will be both liver tonics and will help to ease any digestion or hormonal complaints. Spring is the season to cleanse the toxins, support the hormones, and strengthen the digestion. Plenty of sleep is also required to recharge the liver. Eat a moderate amount of sour foods to cleanse the tissues, plenty of natural foods, fresh fruit and vegetables,

seed, nuts, and whole grains as these foods are easy to digest. The key to achieving great skin throughout the spring lies in maintaining a healthy liver physically and emotionally. “Wood is indicative of energy in a rising and accelerating yang phase; as in the sense of awakening that comes with spring or morning” (Mojay, p. 30).

Summer, beginning on June 21st, correlates to the Fire element. Fire “gives energy and enthusiasm, vitality” (Haas, p. 66), and the ability to laugh and accept change well”. Fire is also responsible for providing strength and creativity. This is the season of growth and maturation. As we are also growing and maturing, summer is the time when we need activity and ample solar energy. The sun, which is yang, “provides energy, causes action and outward movement, and creates the hot, dry climate” (Haas, p. 63); enabling us to partake in outdoor exercise, sports, water recreation, and the enjoyment nature. When the Fire element is imbalanced we lack strength and the motivation to “get up and go”. The essential oils that will bring back our vitality and strength are basil, cardamom, or black pepper. Basil and cardamom will relieve nervous exhaustion. Basil is also beneficial to fight mental fatigue and feelings of melancholy. Cardamom and black pepper will help to energize. “The function of the Fire element in the body is to maintain heat, but also give warmth to others” (Haas, p. 66). However, excess heat will lead to feelings of exhaustion, aggression, impatience, and perhaps inappropriate behavior. It is especially important to pay attention to these feelings because Fire represents the emotion of joy and the sound of laughter. To restore the natural sense of harmony and rebalance back into joy, you may want to consider using neroli to strengthen the emotions and help to encourage confidence, joy, and peace; melissa which will balance the emotions, harmonizing the mind and soul; or rose to rid any feelings of sadness. Excess heat may also create a craving for bitter foods, the taste dominated by Fire. Bitter foods are seen as strengthening to the heart and small intestine. Bitter foods are stimulating on the appetite and the secretion of digestive juices throughout the gastro-intestinal system. They enhance digestion and the flow of bile. Although an excess of bitter foods may injure the proper flow

of digestion. The physical complaints of an imbalanced small intestine include irritable bowel syndrome, constipation, indigestion, and diarrhea. Essential oils that can ease the complaints of indigestion, constipation, and diarrhea are black pepper, fennel, ginger, marjoram, and melissa. Irritable bowel syndrome can be soothed with lavender and clary sage. The fire element “provides the energy governing the heart and small intestine” (Haas, p. 64). The heart’s function is to circulate blood to the body; “it moves the blood as it carries the oxygen and other nutrients to the rest of the body”. “The heart has the ability to rule and understand; it sees clearly, and serves compassionately” (Haas, p. 64); the heart houses the mind. The small intestine connects the stomach to the large intestine. Its function is to receive, digest, and assimilate nourishment. It transforms food matter, separating the pure from the impure. However, Fire is different from the other elements in the sense that there are two other systems, seen as physiological aspects, related to it, the pericardium and the three heater. These function to circulate and heat the body. “The pericardium protects the heart, regulates blood flow, heat, and nourishment through the body” (Haas, p. 64). The three heater, located at mid-chest, functions to produce heat and energy for the body through respiration, digestion, and elimination. It is also responsible for maintaining proper “temperature and warmth, balancing various forms of chi, including the harmony of hormonal function”. When the heart, small intestine, pericardium, and three heater are imbalanced physical and emotional problems may occur. Imbalances of the heart can include the obvious; cardiac or circulatory disease, as well as arrhythmias, heart palpitations, and poor circulation; fatigue and confusion may also occur. The essential oils of lavender, neroli, rose, palmarosa, and rosemary are all beneficial for heart palpitations. Ylang ylang is also beneficial for heart palpitations that are caused by nervous tension. Neroli, with rose, lavender, and melissa, will calm and stabilize the heart and mind. It is important to keep the heart clear of excess as well. Employing the use of melissa, neroli, or rose will help to do this. Jasmine and lavender will soothe and support the flow of chi energy in the heart calming the nerves and releasing tension. One of the best essential oils for the heart is hyssop. Hyssop

has the ability to regulate blood pressure as well as strengthening the heart emotionally and physically. Dry hair and skin can also be a result of an imbalance of Fire. Incorporate chamomile and lavender for these complaints. The Fire element focuses on the heart and small intestine, as well as the regulation of body temperature and circulation. The key to keeping the Fire element strong is diet and exercise. Therefore, during the summer months, we need to make sure we nourish our bodies with a light, cooling diet consisting of plenty of liquids, especially water, salads and fresh fruits, some seeds, nuts, and grains, but not as much as your spring diet, and less dairy products and meats. You will also want to eliminate coffee, tea, alcohol, and tobacco. Eating a sensible amount of bitter foods will aid in the detoxification of the tissues. While Fire provides us energy and the joy of life, we need to be aware that this season is also the “beginning of the cycle of growing darkness, which will peak six months later in the winter” (Haas, p. 63). “The Fire element relates to the energy of creativity, intuition, and motion; it is the action that carries out the “idea” from the Wood element. This action leads to the Earth element. Wood creates Fire, which creates Earth” (Haas, p.66).

Late summer, also called “Indian Summer”, comes at the end of summer just before autumn. This is the time to go back to school or work and to make new plans; the sense of returning to the “norm”. This is an important season to prepare and ready us for the year’s work. Earth is the element of Late Summer. It is the center direction, central to all of the elements. Earth is our support, the balance of yin and yang, bringing us harmony and stability. It is the support we stand and rest on, the sense of being “centered” or “grounded”. Earth provides us the abilities to form thought, views, and opinions. When this element is imbalanced we may be subjected to “obsession going over and over certain ideas which can be stubbornness toward accepting new ideas viewpoints, or life changes”. Thinking this way may have a contrary effect on the digestive system causing indigestion and belching. This is important to be aware of because Earth governs the stomach and spleen. Chinese philosophy teaches the stomach is the receiver of nourishment, taking the energy from food for the spleen to

distribute. The stomach, on a physical level, is responsible for receiving, storing, and partially digesting food, passing it to the small intestines and spleen.

Emotionally, the stomach tolerates or “stomachs” our thoughts and feelings.

Therefore, any imbalance of the stomach will affect us physically and emotionally. Physically, we may not be nourishing ourselves properly leading to weakness and lethargy, as well as digestive complaints including indigestion and upset stomach, bloating, flatulence, and nausea. Cardamom, fennel, and peppermint are excellent for the digestive system, stimulating the movement of chi energy in the stomach. Cardamom relieves indigestion and nausea.

Peppermint and marjoram will calm and soothe an upset stomach and relieve nausea. Emotionally stomach imbalances include feeling of disorientation, exhaustion and confusion, and perhaps impaired in our thinking. Frankincense is wonderful to rebalance the Earth element in the sense that it is tranquilizing and clarifying to the intellect calming and focusing the mind releasing any feelings of worry and anxiety; while peppermint is invigorating to the mind. Marjoram also balances an Earth deficiency when there is worry and over thinking.

“In Chinese medicine, the spleen is a central organ both physiologically and anatomically, and any defects in its energy can affect the whole body” (Haas, p. 97). It absorbs, transforms, and transports food and water, as well as chi. The other organs depend on the spleen for life. The spleen stores blood, forms antibodies and creates the white blood cells needed to protect us from harmful bacteria. Imbalances may include a sluggish and fatigued mind and body. The spleen also manages our “will, memory, and our ability to form opinions” (Haas, p. 97). It houses are intellect. Imbalances include the loss of strength of will, forgetfulness and the feeling of worry. Benzoin is strongly related to the Earth element benefitting lethargy that stems from weakness in the spleen. Benzoin and marjoram are sedative oils that ease over thinking and worry and calms, centers, and reassures those that may feel emotionally needy and neglected, which are the feeling that denote an Earth deficiency. Cardamom supports the spleen by aiding concentration when our minds our sluggish and relaxes us when we are worried and tense. Coriander would also be useful, similar to cardamom

it strengthen the spleen and stomach to refresh the intellect. Fennel and patchouli is greatly suited for those who over think. Late summer characterizes the transition “from the outward expression of spring and summer to the inward focus of autumn and winter” (Haas, p. 120). Earth is the harmony of yin and yang, bringing stability; therefore it is important that we stay in “grounded”, in contact with the earth. Earth represents energy in its descending yin stage (Mojay, p. 32). This is the time we are beginning to let go of summer, preparing ourselves for the colder months ahead. Our diets should include a moderation of sweet foods, the taste of the Earth element, to build tissues and calm the nerves, and just a little more fats than spring and summer. It is important that during this time we focus on opening ourselves up to give and receive the Earth element’s emotions of sympathy and compassion.

Autumn is the season of harvest usually beginning on September 22nd. Fruit is beginning to part from the trees and vegetables are unearthed to be stored for the cold winter months lying ahead. It is the time in which we settle back into our routines and “scale back energetically as the yang energy begins to fall” (Bovenizer). In autumn we begin to reap the benefits of our “work and projects, relationships, and our health from the energy we put into these areas the last six months” (Haas, p. 125). The element of autumn is Metal, which governs the lungs and large intestine as well as focusing on structure and communication. Grief being the emotion associated with the Metal element; we tend to mourn the loss of summer, knowing that long, cold nights are ahead of us. The lungs are what encourage us to experience grief, while providing us the capability to move on and recognize that the fullness of summer only transfers to a place internally. There are quite a few essential oils that can aid us in moving through a sense of heaviness, while exploring the emotion of grief to ease the depression that leads to a sense of worthlessness and despondency. The essential oil of myrrh works to convey peace, easing sorrow and grief. Clary sage strengthens and circulates the chi energy of the lungs therefore acting strongly on the soul to relieve worry and despondency, mental confusion, and mood swings. Eucalyptus, hyssop, and pine are all beneficial for dispelling any

feelings of melancholy or pessimism, restoring vitality. Metal also governs one's personal "boundaries", and when imbalanced we may feel unprotected. To restore our sense of boundaries hyssop and pine would be beneficial. Yarrow is also beneficial for restoring boundaries, but acts physically instead of emotionally. Yarrow has the ability to regulate the pores of our skin, which is our physical boundary. Physically grief may also affect the lungs resulting in cold and flu symptoms. The lungs will become congested reflecting heaviness. Clary sage will ease fatigue and aid shallow breathing. Pine is one of the best essential oils to clear any cold phlegm from the lungs, and when combined with thyme, eucalyptus, and tea tree it will aid cold and flu characterized by chills or clear or whitish catarrh. Hyssop also strengthens the lungs aiding cold and flu as well as any other immune deficiencies. Eucalyptus is a tonic for the lung chi, enhancing the breathing. The large intestine is the lung's partner. Its job is to separate the pure from the impure and removing the matter we don't need. Grief can affect the large intestine by causing irregularity in the digestion, resulting in constipation and diarrhea. "In the Chinese system, the energy pathway for the large intestine is the head, nose, sinuses, and neck" (Haas, p. 132). Imbalances will include pressure in these pathways, as well as sore throats, irritability, and the loss of a passion for life. The skin is also dominated by the Metal element, playing a vital role in the elimination of wastes. When imbalanced, dryness in the body may occur along with dry skin and hair, and dry, scratchy eyes. However, an over active Metal element is also considered to be an imbalance resulting in oily skin. To soothe dry skin you may want to consider using the essential oils of chamomile, lavender, or myrrh. For oily skin and hair cypress or clary sage would be a suitable choice. Autumn begins in the dark yin cycle and so mental well-being, sinus, and colds are all indicative of the organs that are affected, large intestines and lungs. Metal represents energy in a gathering and synthesizing yin phase of transformation; taking the formative nature of Earth and refining it by adding order and definition. Metal provides happiness; a positive self-image. While worry, grief, and sorrow are healthy feelings to have, too much of these feelings will injure your lungs or large intestine, showing whiteness (the

color of Metal) in the face, especially around the eyes and cheeks. Like spring, the beginning of autumn is a good time to eat some cleansing foods. Although as it becomes later in the season it is important to focus on a “building” diet consisting of proteins, grains, vegetables, squashes, nuts, and seed. A moderation of spicy foods (the flavor of Metal) is also needed to stimulate the lungs, digestion and metabolism, clear the sinuses, and open the senses.

Winter, beginning December 21st, is the time of year when it is cold and wet. We look for internal warmth, and enjoy our time with family and friends. Winter, representing the Water element, affects the bladder, kidneys, and tone of the body; the dominant organs being the kidneys and the bladder. The role of the kidneys is to filter waste from the blood and send it to the bladder for elimination. The bladder, according to Chinese medicine, is the “storehouse” of our emotions, which functions to collect and hold the waste fluids to then excrete them as urine. Imbalances may include cold hands and feet, soreness in the lower joints, and frequent urination. To ease the complaints of an inner chill you will want to use warming essential oils including ginger, which is stimulating to the kidneys, is good for warming cold hands and feet. Cedarwood tonifies the kidneys, relieving lethargy and lower back aches, and is also used for complaints of the bladder. Other kidney deficiencies such as blurred vision, poor memory, the inability to make decisions or think clearly, and a feeling of weakness in the spine may also occur. Essential oils that can stimulate the mind and relieve mental fatigue are cedarwood, which assists poor concentration, and Ginger, which is beneficial for mental fatigue and improving memory and mental clarity. When the kidney chi is balanced one will have the sense of being centered, fearless, and rational and clear thinking; one may have compassion for themselves and others. An imbalance of this energy will create feelings of fear, paranoia, jealousy and suspicion. You will need to incorporate essential oils that will promote feelings of courage and self-acceptance. Cedarwood is an excellent choice because of its properties to assist us in not being swayed by any external forces and provides us with unwavering strength in times of crisis. Ginger also helps to restore our will power. Winter is the season when we generally feel more emotional. The

days are dark and the climate is cold and wet. It is important that we keep our bodies warm to ward off illnesses. The Water element needs to be recognized as it is the “essential medium of the body, which all things pass”. “This fluid of life is important for functions of circulating the blood, so that it may heat and nourish, the lymphatic flow to process and eliminate wastes, which gives the capability to fight illness, and the flow of all bodily fluids” (Haas, p. 158). Your diet should be a “heating” diet including cooked foods, fish, steamed or baked vegetables, more whole grains and less fruit, and more dairy and meat products. You will also want to eat a moderate amount of salty (the flavor of Water) foods to lubricate the tissues and stimulate the digestion.

When seasonal changes occur it is important that we increase our self-awareness and look at our priorities in life. However this can also be a time of more stress and the possibility of illness or physical difficulties. The control of your health and skin depends on your adaptation of these changes. Always keep in mind, that no matter what the season, our organs, emotions, and diets must be balanced and in harmony to achieve overall well-being. The *Nei Ching* states that “If people pay attention to the five flavors and blend them well, their bones will remain straight, their muscles will remain tender and young, breath and blood will circulate freely, the pores will be in fine texture, and consequently breath and bones will be filled with the essence of life” (Haas, p. 66). According to Ayurveda, healthy internal radiance is the true definition of beauty and the skin is viewed as the mirror to our inner health. As a result, this Chinese system of the Five Element Theory, in conjunction with the use of essential oils can be one of the most proactive tools in achieving your best skin.

Works Cited

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