



by Carol and Rob Trow

skin|skin wise

the winning tea in anti-aging skin care

THE OLD ADAGE SAYS THAT we learn something new every day. Hopefully that theory will be true today as we delve into the facts and fiction of the efficacy of tea in skin care. This article focuses on documented evidence in the professional community, rather than on anecdotal information and manufacturers' or product claims.

Tea in skin care

History, customs and literature are replete with assertions about the effectiveness of tea (based on both facts and personal information) as an herbal remedy for what ails both our health and our skin. Our attention has been focused on green, red—and to a lesser extent—black tea.

The use of tea in skin care formulations has been increasing over the past decade, and for good reason. Tea is a powerful ingredient full of antioxidants, which are radical scavengers that form on the skin for a number of reasons such as exposure to UV induced photodamage and environmental toxins. Tea serves to neutralize damage to the skin, so it is also a practical ingredi-

ent to include in sun care products. There are some researchers who believe tea—particularly green tea—can help in fighting skin cancer, though the jury is still out on this.

Molecular biologist Stephen Hsu, PhD., authored a paper which, while not reconfirmed by other researchers, alleges that tea may help in wound healing and skin rejuvenation. That finding would support the idea that tea can be used as an anti-inflammatory agent as well.

Benefits vary

Recent studies have demonstrated that each type of tea has different properties. Green tea, long thought to be the most potent of all teas, has been studied thousands of times, but the statistical value of the studies' findings are not as well known as the anecdotal claims of green tea's benefits. Human studies based on consumption show mixed and inconsistent results to support claims such as reduced heart disease risk, strong antioxidant properties, cancer fighting and even weight loss.

Red or red bush (rooibos) tea has also had a long and storied history of health benefits and is increasingly being used in skin care where it has been shown to be an effective antioxidant containing aspalathin and nothofagin. Beneficial features it includes are a lack of caffeine and low tannin levels. Some

of its purported claims are assistance in helping with nervous tension, allergies and digestive problems.

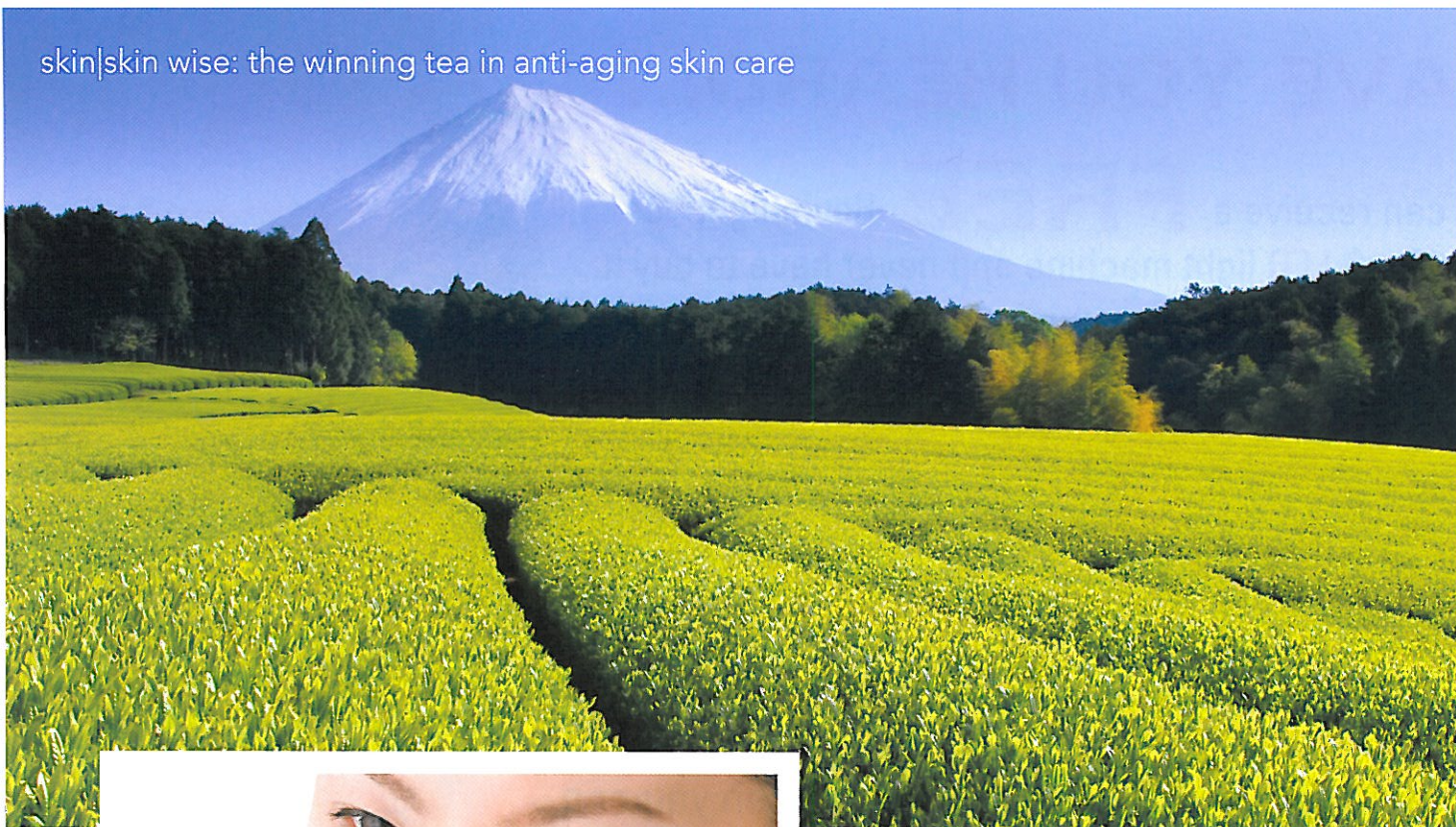
Traditional uses of red tea include managing the symptoms of colic, allergies, asthma and dermatological issues. Its high levels of flavanols, flavones and flavanones have also been proven to be beneficial. Animal studies suggest red tea has potent antioxidant, immunomodulating and chemo preventive effects with no negative elements.

Black tea has not seen a myriad of studies and articles in popular culture on its potential health benefits. In 2001, Boston University concluded that short and long term consumption of black tea may reverse certain forms of vasomotor dysfunction in coronary artery disease.

A star is born

After all the previous research on these other teas, it came as a great surprise to learn that the superstar of tea may actually be white tea. A recent study conducted in the United Kingdom by university researchers tested 23 tea extracts from 21 plants. Their findings demonstrate that white tea—not green or red or black—has significant potential to help offset skin aging, cancer and inflammation. In their own words, they were "blown away" by white tea's ability to inhibit enzymes that attach collagen and elastin and mimic the action

continues



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of the body's own antioxidant enzymes. Professor Declan Naughton, PhD., called attention to the fact that white tea was effective in breaking down reactive oxygen species into oxygen and hydrogen peroxide and hence is effective against free radical formation.

When white tea was compared to other teas, it showed a greater material effectiveness (87 percent) versus green tea (47.17 percent) in fighting enzymes that break down collagen. These tests also indisputably proved that white tea had the highest antioxidant capacity. So, expect many skin care companies to start singing the praises of white tea as the latest powerful antioxidant ingredient.

More research needed

A note of caution: as with most cutting edge studies, there is still more research needed to verify and confirm these findings. The authors hope that the results to date spur more study on the benefits of white tea in the skin care industry and beyond, as the potential benefits may extend to other conditions such as cancer, arthritis and heart conditions.

It is still too early to arrive at any definite conclusions. Nevertheless, the evidence that has been uncovered to date is enough to warrant taking a more comprehensive examination of white tea—the little sister of the tea family. ■

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