

WHAT'S IN THE BOTTLE? A New Wrinkle in Fight Against Aging?

BY DAWN WOTAPKA.

THE PRODUCT AND WHAT IT IS MARKETED FOR. StriVectin-SD labels itself as a two-for-one anti-aging powerhouse: an intensive stretch-mark repair cream that also reduces crow's feet, fine lines and wrinkles by increasing collagen and elastin production.

In magazines, its advertising slogan is "Better Than Botox?" A six-ounce, six-month supply is about \$135. It is sold at GNC, Saks Fifth Avenue and Sephora or at www.striVectin.com. There is a refund guarantee.

WHAT'S KNOWN. The discovery of a double use for both stretch marks and facial wrinkles was "dumb luck," says Gina Gay, a spokeswoman for distributor Klein-Becker.

The product was developed about three years ago to fight stretch marks, said Daniel Mowrey, Klein-Becker's director of scientific affairs.

In a report not published or subjected to peer review, Mowrey tested some of the product's active components on stretch marks - tears in the skin caused by intense pressure such as weight gain.

Fourteen female testers between the ages of 21 and 42 with stretch marks on the abdomen, thighs, hips, buttocks and/or breasts participated. The women applied the compound twice daily for 28 days. Thirteen of the women reported "marked improvement in the reduction of skin irregularities associated with stretch marks." The company says some users also report improvement in acne and burn scars and chicken pox marks.

The box warns the product is "not for use during pregnancy or by nursing women."

Before the stretch-mark treatment was marketed, it was distributed free to employees and employees' friends and neighbors. However, the instructions were vague and some used it on their faces with good results, Mowrey said.

Then at the 2002 20th World Congress of Dermatology, independent studies were presented showing Pal-KTTKS, a component of StriVectin-SD, reduced wrinkles after a four-month test. Once a day for two months, users applied the solution to one side of the face and retinol, Vitamin C or a placebo to the other side. The process continued for 60 more days, except application doubled to twice a day.

After four months, Pal-KTTKS users reported skin thickness increased an average 9 percent, and the depth, length and volume of wrinkles decreased 30 to 40 percent without inflammation.

"They had no idea people were using for wrinkles," Mowrey said, speaking of the Pal-KTTKS testers, who did not test the finished StriVectin-SD.

The principal ingredient is Striadril, shown to stimulate wound healing, regenerate tissue, increase collagen and restore elasticity, according to company literature.

The extensive ingredient list also includes shea butter; peppermint oil; sesame oil, an emollient with anti-fungal and antibacterial properties; and sweet almond oil. There's also: palmitoyl oligopeptide and stearic acid, both moisturizers; retinyl palmitate, a Vitamin A derivative that moisturizes; algae extract, to provide moisture and stimulate circulation; yeast extract, which helps retain moisture, may reduce hyperpigmentation by blocking melanin biosynthesis; and xanthan gum, a thickener also used in foods, according to www.makingcosmetics.com.

Klein-Becker says the product - which has a faint mint scent - works on all skin tones. Users of prescription facial products should first consult a doctor.

BOTTOM LINE. Because StriVectin-SD does not claim to cure anything, the Food and Drug Administration does not regulate it. So, Dr. Kenneth Beer, a Palm Beach cosmetic dermatologist, decided to test it and similar products to help answer his patients' questions. He's almost done recruiting 75 patients for the Frown Line Challenge Trial, which will test StriVectin-SD and similar products named HydroDerm and Wrinkle Relax. "I think that the patients that spend hundreds of millions on creams basically deserve answers," Beer said in an interview.

"We're just trying to figure out what works and what doesn't. In fairness to patients, they should have this information."

Beer, who is also a University of Miami faculty member, isn't against over-the-counter products. However, he advises potential users to first consult a dermatologist.

OTHER OPTIONS. There are thousands of products billed as "anti-wrinkle" creams. They include Ultra Aesthetics' Renaissance, which is advertised as an alternative to Botox and StriVectin-SD. At \$80, its ingredient list is longer than StriVectin's, though many are identical. Even cheaper options include anti-aging lines by Oil of Olay and Neutrogena.

At the doctor's office, laser resurfacing uses highly focused light to remove damaged skin, exposing healthier skin. Perlane and Restylane, grown in a laboratory and recently FDA approved, are wrinkle fillers that last up to nine months. (The difference between Restylane and Perlane is the particle size, according to Beer's site, www.palmbeachcosmetic.com.) Microdermabrasion, meanwhile, uses crystals to improve skin appearance.

It is impossible to prevent aging, but to avoid skin damage, use a SPF 15 or higher when outdoors - even if the sky is overcast - and don a hat, advises the American Academy of Dermatology. Don't sunbathe, limit sun exposure between 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and "avoid deliberate tanning," the academy advises.

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