

# VOGUE

A full-page photograph of Simone Biles is the background of the cover. She is shown from the waist up, turned away from the camera but looking back over her right shoulder. She has long, dark hair and is wearing a bright red, backless leotard with thin straps. Her hands are on her hips, and her expression is determined. The background is a solid, warm yellow-gold color.

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THEIR  
WAY

WOMEN  
PHOTOGRAPHERS  
GET CREATIVE  
WITH FASHION

PEOPLE  
EMPOWERED

WHY LEADERSHIP  
IS GOING LOCAL

SIMONE  
BILES

STANDING UP, SPEAKING OUT,  
AND SETTING HER SIGHTS ON  
OLYMPICS 2021



BEAUTY

# Keep Calm and Reapply

Is “anti-stress” skin care the beauty salve for our times? asks Jancee Dunn.



**STRESS TEST**  
NEW PRODUCTS AIM TO  
COMBAT THE EFFECTS OF  
“PSYCHOLOGICAL  
FATIGUE” ON YOUR SKIN.

“I’ve aged ten years in three days,” Kelly Oxford lamented on Twitter back in March, after COVID-19 began its pernicious spread. The best-selling author and screenwriter was reflecting on the collective anxiety, fear, and pervasive sadness that befell all of us once the global pandemic began. But the idea of looking in the mirror to see an unrecognizable face—one that’s somehow older, creased, slack, and inflamed—specifically struck a chord.

As I’ve become consumed by worry, my skin has relentlessly reflected the jangling nerves beneath. Dry patches and redness have bloomed all over, making me thankful for the mercy of Zoom’s blurry screen. I am not alone. A University of Chicago COVID Impact Survey from May found that roughly two-thirds of Americans had strong negative emotions at least once during the seven days prior to the survey. And this is showing up on our skin, says New York City dermatologist Amy Wechsler, M.D., who is also board-certified in psychiatry. “I’m hearing it from patients all day long,” she says.

For anyone who has ever endured a breakout before a big event or presentation, the mind-complexion connection seems obvious. But increasingly, research reveals that the link between skin and stress is perhaps stronger than we realized. Several studies have found that emotional stress slows wound healing, and conversely, a 2018 study found that taking antidepressants can improve skin-barrier function. When we experience mental or emotional duress, during a global pandemic or otherwise, it unleashes a toxic cocktail of stress hormones, explains Wechsler, which cause dryness and sensitivity, as well as laxity-inducing cortisol—“the collagen killer,” as it’s been called. Cortisol can also ramp up activity in the sebaceous glands, causing blemishes—which, by the way, have appeared on my face for the first time in years, as pointed out by my sharp-eyed mother, a former Southern beauty queen.

“Wait, is that acne on your chin?” she asked, peering at me during our now-weekly FaceTime call.

“Yes,” I said shortly, suddenly 14 again.

The “anti-stress” skin-care category is nothing new, of course. When Manhattan-based dermatologist Dennis Gross, M.D., launched his B3 Adaptive SuperFoods skin-care line earlier this year, it was meant as a topical solution for “what used to be our standard day-to-day stressors, like an overflowing inbox,” he says. “I never could have imagined what the world would look like just months later.” Thankfully, he says, the collection’s high concentrations of the antibacterial herb ashwagandha, enzyme-rich kiwi, and four varieties of mushrooms,

which boost elasticity, are potent enough to provide relief “in times of extreme stress as well”—essential in the COVID-19 era, which has seen a surge in skin-care sales as women seek solutions, and some semblance of normalcy, in their facial routines.

Givenchy’s new Ressource line—which purports to combat the effects of “psychological fatigue” on skin—is well positioned to tick both of these boxes; LOUM Beauty of Calm, a New York City-based start-up, goes even further. Named by a notable linguist to sound “tranquil,” the eight-piece line leverages the expertise of a psycho-dermatologist as well as Francisco Tausk, M.D., a professor of dermatology at the University of Rochester with a focus on psychosomatic medicine. “The brain-skin connection is so tight that I’ve had patients able to clear their psoriasis with a placebo,” claims Tausk, who has studied the effects of stress on the skin for three decades, and who did not take equity in the company to retain his academic independence. Standouts include a calming mask, a brightening serum, and an oil-regulating priming moisturizer that uses CBD to shrink sebaceous glands and minimize breakouts, micro marine algae to reduce inflammation, and Indian wild indigo, which Tausk is particularly taken with. The ingredient can regulate cortisol levels by up to 70 percent, he says.

Wechsler, who has also spent decades exploring the link between our mental health and complexions, agrees that these launches are an exciting development. But a trip to the beauty counter—virtual or otherwise—won’t be enough, she cautions. “Really, what’s going to make the most impact right now are lifestyle changes,” Wechsler says. “If you’re sleeping four hours a night, your skin’s not going to see the benefit of these products.” Instead, she recommends the usual suspects: healthy diet, decent rest, and exercise (which raises levels of beta-endorphins that can fight cortisol’s effects)—all things I know I ashwagandha, enzyme-rich kiwi, and four varieties of mushrooms, which boost elasticity, are potent enough to provide relief “in times of extreme stress as well”—essential in the COVID-19 era, which has seen a surge in skin-care sales as women seek solutions, and some semblance of normalcy, in their facial routines.

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