Looking and feeling your youthful best are important elements of women’s health. Beautiful skin, thick hair, and abundant energy make us feel young and vital at any age. This special report from *Harvard Women’s Health Watch* brings you the latest developments from what you might call the science of beauty. We hope you enjoy using these advanced beauty secrets and sharing them with your friends.

**Erase years from your face without surgery**

If you’d like to remove the changes that time and sun have left on your skin, there are many things your doctor can do these days without ever touching a scalpel. Dr. Kenneth Arndt, clinical professor of dermatology at Harvard-affiliated Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, shares some of the most popular cosmetic techniques.

**Smooth and fill**

- **Neuromodulators** (Botox, Dysport, Xeomin) are injections that relax the muscles that create the appearance of expression wrinkles. “These products diminish frown and forehead lines and sometimes crow’s feet, and they do it well, reliably, and safely. People are almost always happy with the result,” Dr. Arndt says.

- **Dermal fillers** are injections that plump up sagging areas of the skin. They’re sometimes called “liquid facelifts” because they can create a more youthful look without the downtime and risks of cosmetic surgery. Often, these two treatments are used together, which enhances and prolongs their effects. The results, while effective, are temporary. You’ll need to return for repeat sessions several times a year.

**Rejuvenate**

For skin discoloration, including freckles, age spots, and liver spots, Dr. Arndt recommends one of two treatments. *Fractional laser resurfacing* aims very small beams of high-energy light at the skin to smooth and tighten the surface and stimulate the development of collagen, the protein that gives skin its elasticity. *Pulsed light therapy* exposes the skin to intense broadband wavelengths of light energy, which also stimulates collagen production and reduces the look of sun damage and brown spots.

**Less costly options**

- **Chemical peels** strip away the outer layer of skin with glycolic acid or other chemicals. They are reasonably mild and need to be repeated every few weeks or months.

- **Microdermabrasion** uses tiny exfoliating crystals to buff off the top layer of skin and reveal the smoother surface below. The results are similar to a chemical peel.
Where to go
Most of these techniques are available at both dermatologists’ offices and “medspas” – nonmedical facilities that offer cosmetic services. However, Dr. Arndt cautions, “In some spas, people who are not well trained do some of the treatments. That’s where it gets dangerous.”

New treatments for thinning hair
Throughout our lives we regularly shed 50 to 100 strands of hair a day. That process accelerates as we get older. Age-related hair loss is a slow, gradual thinning throughout the scalp. By contrast, female-pattern hair loss occurs mainly in the front of the scalp, much like its male-pattern counterpart. (Autoimmune diseases like lupus, and thyroid problems can also cause hair loss and should be treated by your doctor.)

Getting help for hair loss
There is plenty you can do to help restore some of the hair you’ve lost. Minoxidil (Rogaine) is the only FDA-approved treatment for female-pattern hair loss. Available without prescription, Minoxidil is a cream or foam that you rub directly on your scalp. It can slow the rate of hair loss and can even regrow some hair. Just be aware of possible side effects such as skin irritation and unwanted hair growth near the application site (such as the forehead).

Finasteride (Propecia), an oral medication, is currently approved only for hair loss in men, but some doctors are using it off-label for women who haven’t responded to minoxidil. In studies of women, higher doses – 2.5 mg to 5 mg – did seem to help promote hair growth. More serious side effects are possible so make sure to discuss them with your doctor.

More options
Dietary supplements containing ingredients like biotin are marketed for hair loss. There aren’t many medically sound studies to support these supplements, but they’re harmless, so if you want to try taking biotin, it probably won’t hurt. It is sold in doses of 2 to 10 mg for hair loss.

Women, like men, could benefit from hair transplants, especially for female-pattern hair loss. Additionally, you might camouflage hair loss with products like sprays and powders that give the appearance of thicker hair. For extensive hair loss, consider a wig or hairpiece in your hair color and style it to disguise the missing sections. Today’s wigs are convincing like real hair.

Emotional support
Losing your hair can affect your self-perception and self-esteem. As you explore restorative solutions, don’t overlook your emotional health. Talks with your doctor, therapist, and hair stylist can benefit the whole you.
Seven secrets of ageless skin

One of the first places you start to notice the passage of time is in on your skin. Aging skin dries, thins, and loses some of its resilience. The beauty regimen you used in your 20s and 30s won’t work for you today. But these eight effective strategies will help your skin look its best at every age…

1. **Shield your skin.** Exposure to the sun prematurely ages skin and contributes to fine lines and wrinkles, not to mention skin cancer. One of the best skin products you can buy is a sunscreen with SPF 30 or above and broad-spectrum UVA/UVB protection. Add another layer of protection by wearing a broad-brimmed hat and sunglasses when you go outside.

2. **Mind your meds.** Be especially cautious about going outside if you’re taking a medicine that increases sun sensitivity, including acne medicines, antibiotics, diuretics, heart drugs, and NSAIDS like Aleve. Until you finish taking these drugs, stay indoors or wear a higher-SPF sunscreen.

3. **After sun.** If you do get too much sun, rehydrate with a thick layer of moisturizer containing aloe vera. You can also apply a hydrocortisone cream. Just avoid ingredients like petroleum, which can trap heat in your skin, benzocaine and lidocaine, which can cause more irritation.

4. **Keep showers (and baths) short.** A quick, five-minute shower will hydrate your skin, but don’t dawdle. After more than 10 minutes, you’ll be leaching moisture away.

5. **Turn down the temperature.** Hot water strips your skin of its natural oils. Keep the water temperature comfortably warm, but not scalding hot.

6. **Moisturize.** As soon as you step out of the bath, apply a layer of moisturizer to your body to seal moisture into your skin. Look for ingredients like dimethicone, glycerin, mineral oil, or hyaluronic acid, which hold moisture in the skin.

7. **Keep it mild.** Stick with a gentle cleanser that’s free from strong fragrances and alcohol that can dry out skin. Be wary of anti-aging products with ingredients like retinoids and alpha-hydroxy acid, which can increase irritation.

Lose weight and live longer on a vegetarian diet

An estimated 2.5 million older Americans have abandoned red meat and poultry in favor of a predominantly plant-based diet. “There’s certainly some research on the benefits of the vegetarian diet,’ says Kathy McManus, director of the Department of Nutrition at Harvard-affiliated Brigham and Women’s Hospital. For instance, lower body mass index, lower blood pressure, reduced risks for heart disease, diabetes, and cancer, and longer life.

If you’re thinking about going vegetarian but are worried about making a big change, get your feet wet with one of these options:

- Semi-vegetarian. You still eat animal products but more selectively, for instance,
chicken and fish but not red meat.
- Pescatarian. You avoid meat and poultry but still eat fish and seafood.
- Lacto-ovo vegetarian. You skip all meat, fish, and poultry but include dairy and eggs in your diet.

**Lose weight deliciously**
Keep in mind that going vegetarian doesn’t give you carte blanche to eat whatever you want – especially if you’re trying to control your weight. Go heavy on fruits, vegetables, and whole grains but limit foods high in saturated fat, such as ice cream, whole milk, and cheese. And watch how much you eat at each meal. “People who are trying to lose weight can certainly do it on a vegetarian diet, but they have to limit portions,” McManus says.

**Eating out**
Ask the chef to substitute beans for the meat in an entrée. You can also stick with the salad bar or order a few vegetable-based appetizers and sides instead of an entrée. And don’t forget to explore ethnic restaurants. Indian, Thai, and Chinese cuisines all feature an abundance of vegetarian options.

The transition to a greener diet doesn’t have to be difficult. You can start by increasing the number of vegetables on your plate at each meal. Fill half the plate with vegetables – cooked, raw, or in a salad. Then incorporate an all-vegetarian meal once or twice a week. If you like it, keep adding vegetarian meals until you’re fully immersed in the diet. Play around with different vegetables and grains, and spice up your meals with seasonings.