Flogging yourself on the treadmill, taking on too much at work, chocolate, dieting and even juice cleanses can undermine your natural beauty. While you may be in denial about what your bad habits are doing to your body, you can’t escape the hallmarks that show in your face.

Sydney-based dermatologist Ann-Maree Kurzydlo names stress, over-exercising, lack of sleep, poor diet and even too much screen time – TV, laptop, tablet or smartphone – can take a visible toll.

“The appearance of a patient can offer you some insight into their general wellbeing,” says the fellow of the Australasian College of Dermatologists (dermcoll.asn.au).

Wrinkles & Premature Ageing

SMOKING, DIETING, SUNBATHING

“Smoking rapidly increases ageing of the skin and so over time you’ll see more wrinkles and sagging,” says Sydney-based dietitian and nutritionist Joanna McMillan (drjoanna.com.au).

“In the shorter term, since smoking uses up vitamin C much more quickly, skin can miss out on it and other nutrients, so it appears dull and sallow.”

And the more cigarettes you smoke, and the longer you smoke for, the more wrinkling you are likely to have, particularly around the eyes and lips, Kurzydlo says.

“Patients who smoke tend to look older for their age (typically add 2.5 years for every 10 years of smoking),” she says, adding that smokers often have dry, greying skin and a gaunt appearance.

“There are over 4000 chemicals in cigarette smoke, which cause a breakdown of collagen and elastin, the supportive structures of the skin. As a result, the skin loses its strength and elasticity, and wrinkling occurs.

“Nicotine in cigarettes narrows skin blood vessels, which impairs blood flow. Less blood flow means the skin doesn’t receive as much oxygen and important nutrients.”
Kurzydlo also cites excessive sun worshipping among leading face saboteurs. Pigmentation, prominent blood vessels, wrinkles and other signs of premature ageing due to collagen and elastin damage can all result from baking.

"One of the most common questions I am asked as a dermatologist is: What can I do to rejuvenate my skin and prevent ageing?" The answer is sun protection. The ageing 'process', or what we perceive as older skin, is probably 90 per cent accounted for by chronic sun exposure and 10 per cent by genetics," she says.

Dieting also has ramifications for face as well as body. Aside from causing metabolic mayhem, yo-yo dieting -- swinging between one weight and another -- can seriously mess with your vision according to Melbourne cosmetic physician Dr Tass Tasiopoulos (dtass.com.au). "Cyclic periods of weight gain and loss age your face and skin and may be the cause of stretch marks and ageing jowls on your face."

Dry Skin

In the short term, alcohol can cause dehydration, which can cause the skin to be dry, which is why Kurzydlo says it's important to limit consumption and alternate alcoholic drinks with water to help stay hydrated.

"For women, the recommendation is no more than two standard drinks a day on average," she says. "One or two alcohol-free days should be had per week."

Caffeine is a diuretic and can also lead to dehydration of the skin. Sources include energy drinks as well as tea and coffee. Dr McMillan says diet also impacts skin's appearance.

A "lack of fats in the diet can lead to dry skin, whereas good fats such as oily fish, avocado and olive oil deliver fatsoluble nutrients, are anti-inflammatory and promote skin health," she says.

"Certain nutrients are important for the skin including vitamins A, C, E and many antioxidants. A diet rich in plant foods -- veg, fruit, nuts, seeds, legumes and whole grains boosts intake of these factors."