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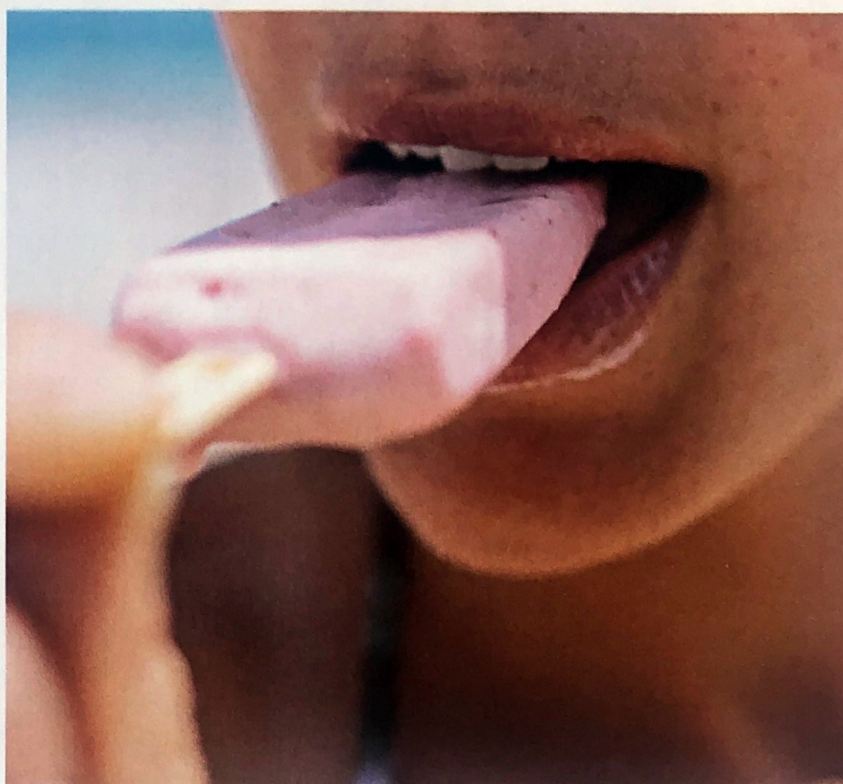
BHG SPECIALS

to sagging, skin laxity, and lines from repeated facial expressions, like those around the eyes and mouth. Extrinsic aging, meanwhile, occurs from external sources such as sun damage and pollution. This type manifests as wrinkles and fine lines too, as well as uneven skin tone—think sunspots and discoloration. And your diet can impact both.

One of the biggest contributors to intrinsic aging results from sugar. When you eat sugar or processed carbs, it leads to a big spike in blood sugar. That blood sugar can then pair up with proteins in the body and create complexes aptly named advanced glycation end products, or AGEs. Dr. Katta explains that these complexes are almost like caramel—they're really sticky. Think of what happens when caramel sets: You lose that flexibility and it can start to get brittle. These AGEs can wrap around the collagen in skin, which serves as the scaffolding and is charged with keeping it firm and plump.

Then, once secure around collagen fibers, the AGEs get brittle, effectively breaking them and leading to something Dr. Katta calls "sugar sag"—the wrinkling and sagging of skin that can give the face a more aged appearance—through a process called glycation. "Glycation is like termites that come in and start to weaken those collagen walls," she says.

The fear of sugar-induced AGEs shouldn't lead to an elimination of fresh fruit. "Avoid lumping all sugars together," says Keri Gans, M.S., a registered dietitian in New York City. "Fruits and vegetables that have naturally occurring sugar can also have vitamin C, vitamin A, and, for some vegetables, vitamin E—all those other important nutrients that



are beneficial for the skin." What *does* merit a closer look? Added sugars, which also include evaporated cane juice, molasses, and agave.

The idea of cutting out all added sugar can be daunting since it's found in everything from bread to soft drinks. Rather than trying to eliminate it entirely, "go after low-hanging fruit and say, 'OK, let's give up the sweetened coffee drinks, the sports drinks, the sweetened iced tea, or the sugary sodas,'" says Dr. Katta. "Start there."

Also worth keeping in mind: The foods you eat might not be the only ways to create AGEs. There's research that claims these glycated proteins can be formed outside of the body, too, during the cooking process. Blame it on the Maillard reaction. When food gets that brown, crispy look to it, that's called the Maillard reaction. Cooking food quickly at high temperatures—think grilling, frying, and roasting—triggers the Maillard reaction, which forms AGEs directly onto your food...which you

then eat. "If we're ingesting a lot of these AGEs, they're going to be absorbed down to our collagen and make our skin less elastic and less healthy," says Emmy Graber, M.D., a dermatologist in Boston, who notes that more research is needed, as its impact has not been definitively proven. Research also points to this problem occurring more in animal products, so grilled and roasted veggies are still safe from this skin-aging phenomenon. If you're looking to maximize your diet's impact on your skin, perhaps switching to steamed or poached fish could help.

In addition to AGEs, there's the matter of inflammation. "Inflammation in the body can manifest as an inflammatory skin condition, like eczema, dermatitis, or psoriasis," says Michelle Babb, M.S., R.D., a dietitian in Seattle. There are two types of inflammation: acute and chronic. Acute inflammation occurs as the body's response to a sudden injury, such as a cut or a bug bite; redness, swelling, and itchiness are