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Beauty For OL

When purchasing beauty products, one does not often ponder on a products original use or ingredients within said product that may have been used for other purposes. What matters to the consumer is the products ability to do what is intended to do: enhance one’s beauty. A beauty product/ingredient that comes to mind is Retinol, a derivative of Retinoic Acid. What makes Retinol a multi use product is its connection to both the beauty industry and the medical industry.

According to the National Cancer Institute (2023), Retinoic acid is “a nutrient that the body needs in small amounts to function and stay healthy. Retinoic acid is made in the body from vitamin A and helps cells to grow and develop, especially in the embryo.” With this information, one might begin to wonder how a nutrient created within the body was later developed to be applied directly to skin and why said product is such a hot commodity.

In March of 2020, the world went under complete lockdown because of a contagious virus known as Covid-19. Covid-19 also known as Coronavirus caused “severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS, in humans” (Aizenman, 2020); consequently forcing many to stay home and with their families. A vast majority found solace in the social media app known as TikTok. John Koetsier (2020) learned that because of the pandemic, consumers began using mobile apps more frequently, with TikTok becoming the iOS App Stores top earning app globally. Because of this, people from all over the word were able to interact like never before, sharing recipes, music, fashion, workout videos, inspirational messages, food hacks and most importantly, skincare and beauty.

In the era of social media, many are constantly being influenced into purchasing a vast variety of products. Despite retinol and retinoids being recommended and used by dermatologists in the past, TikTok has made retinol and retinoids far more popular in recent years (Tabin, 2023). Typing retinol into TikTok’s search bar renders thousands of videos dedicated to applying the product. When applied to the skin, retinol is intended to treat fines lines, wrinkles, sunspots (photoaging), uneven skin texture, melasma and other types of hyperpigmentation (Cherney, 2022). While retinol does help one’s skin, there is a downside. When too much vitamin A is in the body, one can develop Hypervitaminosis A, symptoms can include vision change, bone pain, skin changes, and in severe cases, liver damage and pressure to the brain (Pietrangelo, 2018). With this extremely desirable product flying off of shelves, how exactly did it get there?

After years of dermatology experiments of inmates (mainly black) at Holmesburg Prison, Dr. Albert Kligman would begin testing vitamin A acid on prisoners in 1963 (Hornblum, 1999, p. 213). Initially, European researchers concluded that vitamin A was far too damaging for the skin and stopped experimenting (Maugh, 2010). “By 1968, after several years of study, Kligman and his colleagues at Penn had concluded that retinoic acid was an effective treatment for some forms of acne” (Granfield & Vreeland, 1989), leading him one step closer to getting his product out into the markets. As retinol was gearing up facial usage, Retinoic acid was already being used for another medical reason.

After helping Albert Kligman with the creation of Retin-A, a Johnson & Johnson subsidiary would be under fire for shredding documents and obstructing a federal investigation, due to the FDA being concerned about the brand since the 1980’s, causing extreme concern (AP News, 1995). In recent years, the popularly known brand Johnson and Johnson has been in numerous headlines due to their products being linked to cancer.

Acute Promyelocytic Leukemia, also known as (APL) is a blood that causes high levels of immature blood cells to grow (Haghighi, 2023). As cancer began to rise, many have been trying to find a cure for countless years. According to the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, the vitamin A derivative known as All trans retinoic acid is given orally to patients, working to eliminate leukemic cells in marrow. Chemotherapy has been a practice used to fight cancer so it is fascinating to see different forms of treatment for cancer.

In conclusion, Retinol has an incredible impact on the beauty and skin industry. It is apparent to consumers and brands that create and sell these products that social media, more so TikTok has had a huge hand in boosting the usage of retinol and all vitamin A derived products. While retinol is taking the beauty and skincare industry by storm, it is important to know that not all retinol products are available to every consumer. According to Sarah Ferguson (2020), Consumers should be aware that “over the counter retinol products are generally not as strong as prescription grade retinoids”. Although retinol has done a lot of good in regards to curing acne, reducing wrinkles, and stabilizing cancer, it is extremely unfortunate that inmates (mainly black) and institutionalized patients were treated with no regards and with extreme inhumanity. There is not denying developments and groundbreaking research that was conducted, but it makes one wonder if *the ends justify the means* because in almost every facet of our world, people have been used and exploited without proper compensation.

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