

Tell us if this sounds familiar.

You walk out of your appointment with your dermatologist and are greeted by a plethora of skincare products on display.

The packaging makes a lot of promises, with words like “resurfacing”, “repair”, and “younger” plastered all over.

Trusting that a doctor’s office wouldn’t sell you something that wasn’t safe, you give in to our inner desire to find that silver bullet, that Fountain of Youth in a tube.

You swipe the card, take it home, open it up, and..... it looks and feels less like an elixir and more like Elmer’s Glue.

You flip the tube around and you’re greeted with a word salad of ingredients you can barely pronounce: Dimethicone, polyphenols, cyclomethicone, and on and on it goes.

To help us understand how so many people have had this exact experience with the skincare industry, we talked with Sudhir Shah.

As a social entrepreneur and acclaimed biochemist, Sudhir’s goal is to help his customers nurture and bolster their skin with what he calls “topical food.”

However, we didn’t realize how literally he meant that until we met him.

## Skincare Products So Healthy You Can Eat Them - Literally

We first met Sudhir through a mutual friend. We were discussing whole-body health and how the prolificness of toxic chemicals in our environment inhibit our ability to live fully healthy lives.

Sudhir’s wife inquired about what products *were* available that weren’t littered with these chemicals. There weren’t any, as far as we knew.

Ruben, Sudhir’s nephew, then piped up and told us his uncle created one. Curious to see for ourselves, we followed Ruben twenty minutes back to his uncle’s house.

Within minutes of us meeting, Sudhir took out one of his products and said: “This is food for your body”.

Then, he did the unthinkable: he squeezed some out onto his finger and ate it.

Sudhir was unfazed by our big reactions.

He'd been defying norms of how people thought about skincare products for years by that point.

He got his start in skincare after his son developed eczema.

Like any good dad, he searched for solutions that wouldn't do more harm than good.

Unfortunately, all he found were products latent with steroids - something he knew could mess with his son's endocrine system.

So, he did what we all do when we feel stuck: he phoned home and got guidance from his mom. With her help, he was able to produce a solution that eliminated his son's eczema in six months.

Amazed at his concoction's effectiveness, he enthusiastically rushed to share it with dermatologists.

Their response?

"Come back when you can make it prescribable so we can make money off of it."

Sudhir was disappointed, but he expected as much.

After all, this was the same industry that had been telling patients that the best way to cure wrinkles was to have your nerves numbed.

Or that the solution to skin problems in general was to slather yourself in synthetically-sourced petrochemicals.

That last example may sound surprising or even shocking, but it really shouldn't.

Whether it's to eliminate pests for agricultural reasons or even just to clean our house, we've viewed synthetically-produced chemicals as the solution to our problems since the 1950s.

Unfortunately, Sudhir tells us, our mass production of these chemicals negatively impacts the bioavailability of their ingredients and upsets the natural balance of the environment.

Participating in a system like this not only felt wrong to Sudhir, but it was antithetical to the medical tradition he'd grown up around.

## Balancing the Old with the New - How Sudhir Defied the Status Quo

When Sudhir's mother assisted him with formulating a solution to his son's eczema, it wasn't just motherly wisdom that yielded the final solution. It was her strong background in the five-millenia-old Indian medical practice of Ayurveda.

Ayurveda is centered around the belief that humans shouldn't put anything on or in their body that they wouldn't eat. This rule is adhered to in the name of creating balance not just within your body, but also on your skin.

This should sound familiar to regular listeners of our show. We constantly talk about how probiotics and cultivating a strong, resilient gut microbiome is critical to facilitating total body wellness.

It's the same with your skin, Sudhir says. Your skin's microbiome is composed of between 300 and 400 trillion naturally-occurring bacteria and viruses. These microorganisms work together to prevent malevolent bacteria, viruses, yeast, fungi, and other undesirables from entering your body.

With this in mind, we'd expect that fact to lead skincare manufacturers to develop products that bolster these naturally occurring defenses. Unfortunately, roughly 98% of the skincare products we use are made using petrochemicals that kill off these beneficial microbes.

So, Sudhir did what every other great social entrepreneur does when they see something wrong: he fought to make it right, even if it meant going against the grain.

That's why, if you put the ingredient lists of one of Sudhir's products side-by-side with a product from a large manufacturer, you'll notice some major differences.

For one, Sudhir's products aren't water-based. Water-based formulas rely on parabens or phenoxyethanol to prevent the growth of bacteria. Since both of these substances are known carcinogens, Sudhir eschews making products that would need them.

You also won't find words like caprylyl, methicone, hyaluronic, polysorbate, or any other ingredients that sound like they belong in a witch's cauldron. Instead, you'll only find naturally-occurring ingredients.

## Skincare Is Meant to Be Easy

If you pick up one of his anti-aging products, the first ingredient you'll see is Aloe Vera. Why? Because it's absorbed literally in seconds at the hypodermal region of the skin where it begins working from the inside out.

Next up is kokum butter: an Indian mangosteen substance that assists in collagen buildup. After that is vitamin C that's extracted from pure acerola cherries.

From there, it's a hodge-podge of ingredients that might as well be from a hipster herbalist shop; things like jojoba oil, licorice, lavender essential oils, cucumber, Vitamin E, and more.

And, best of all: there are no traces of petroleum whatsoever. No PEG's, no mineral oils, no butyl anything.

Nothing. Nada. Zilch. Sudhir's stuff is 100% petrochemical free.

The reason for that is simple: if you wouldn't eat crude oil, why would you put it on your skin?

But Sudhir's all-natural modality also has a practical basis. He sees no need to rely on synthetic chemicals when naturally-occurring ingredients have been proven to the job, often better than their artificial counterparts.

Take for example acne treatment. Off-the-shelf treatments typically contain salicylic acid or benzoyl peroxide, both of which make your skin sensitive to the sun.

Instead, Sudhir says, you should just opt for willow bark. It contains high concentrations of salicin (a precursor to salicylic acid) without any of the pesky side effects.

Similarly, most popular anti-aging treatments are chock-full of retinol. But, as Sudhir pointed out to us, retinol is just a synthetic version of vitamin A!

Instead, Sudhir says you should just use carotenoids. They're a plant-based version of vitamin A that your body naturally converts into retinoids. Again, it gets the same job done without the risks posed by artificial chemicals.

That being said, you don't *need* to use any products at all. In reality, Sudhir notes, taking good care of your skin is actually incredibly simple (which is good news for those of us who are worried about mask-ne).

Sudhir says all that you need to do to maintain healthy skin is clean it properly and use a good moisturizer. And, if you do decide to use supplemental skincare products, Sudhir just wants you to only use products that support your skin's microbiome.

From Sudhir's perspective, shifting our thinking away from viewing our skin as just a part of our physical appearance to thinking of it as an organ will help us cultivate a better, more complete form of health and wellness.