

COLORADO LIVING

Beauty creams only skin deep

Cosmetic firms duping public, author charges

By Diane Eicher
Denver Post Health Writer

Nelson Novick is not the kind of guy those white-coated clerks at the cosmetic counters like to see coming.

He's a dermatologist, so he knows the medical facts behind ingredients like collagen, elastin and royal bee jelly. Sales people may tout them as miracle additions to cosmetics, but Novick is more blunt.

"They add much to the ad copy and a lot to the price, but little to the benefit of the product," he said.

Novick, who is associate clinical professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York, was in Denver recently. Like his book "Super Skin" (Potter, \$20), which will be published as a trade paperback this fall, his conversation is no-nonsense.

And the prevailing theme is that the American public is being duped - to the detriment of both pocketbook and pores. All the so-called anti-aging creams in the world can't rejuvenate skin that's been abused by sunning, improper cleaning and even smoking, which can increase wrinkling.

"There's a vast array of products out there, but most of them are simply moisturizers, with collagen, protein elastin, eggs, royal bee jelly, liposomes - pick one - added in some combination or permutation. The consumer is told these will be anti-aging, skin-firming, whatever," he said.

"You may pay anywhere from \$25 to \$125 for a half-ounce of these. But it's fluff, fancy packaging - it's all marketing. You may feel like you're bound and gagged to get the whole line."

In its defense, the cosmetic industry says "there are a wide variety of safe and effective cosmetic ingredients available today for use in cosmetics."

A spokesperson for the Cosmetic, Toiletry and Fragrance Association in Washington, D.C., added that "any question about the use of an ingredient in a particular product or claims for that ingredient would have to be answered by the manufacturer of that product."

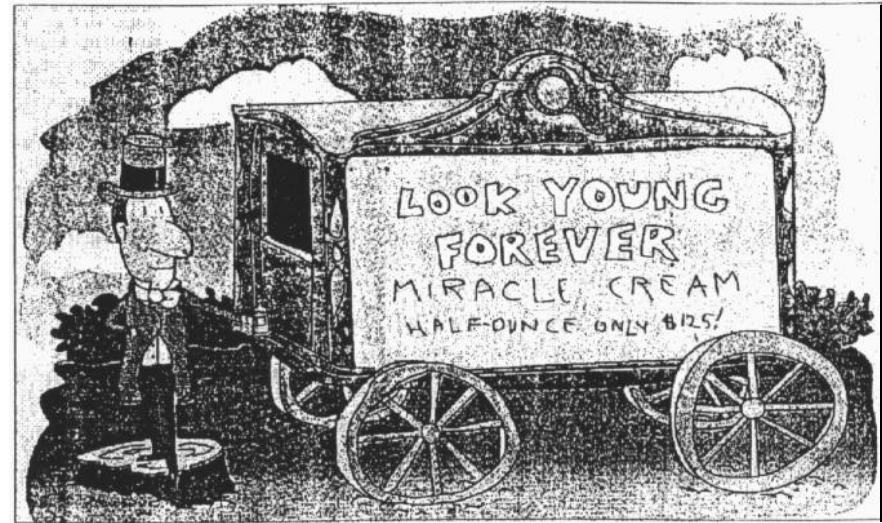
Novick believes that most people can benefit from a moisturizer, particularly in dry climates like Colorado. Older people with drier, or what he politely calls "mature," skin, as well as those who already have spent too much time in the sun or have over-irritated the skin by using harsh soaps or scrub brushes also are candidates.

But "no matter what you hear or read about them, moisturizers can neither retard nor reverse the skin aging process," he writes. Moisturizers "serve to soothe, smooth and soften your skin - nothing more."

Moisturizers work by locking in moisture that's already there, not by providing extra moisture. He advises applying an all-purpose moisturizer (his favorite is Moisturel) - and you can often use the same one on your forehead that you use on your forearms - while the skin is still damp from a shower.

The line between cosmetics and drugs is beginning to blur, and customers often are led to believe there are over-the-counter cosmetics that can change the structure of the skin, added Dr. Barbara Reed, a Denver dermatologist. While cosmetics fall under the purview of the toiletry industry, drugs such as Retin-A are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration and any claims of beneficial results from their use must be scientifically proven.

Reed said many of the hyped ingredients like collagen and elastin have molecules too large to penetrate the skin. So even if a pricey cosmetic advertises truthfully that "you need collagen for younger looking skin," that product isn't providing the collagen in a suitable form.



The Denver Post/ Cindy Enright

Despite the bounty of products that promise to make us look better, Reed believes, "the most important thing we can do for our skin is use sunscreen."

As for those facials that once were the province of ladies-who-lunch but now are offered in department stores, Novick says they're fine for normal skin and if done only three or four times a year.

Don't expect miracles, though, or delude yourself into thinking you're doing your skin a favor.

"I have no strenuous objections to them, as long as you know you're paying \$35 just to be pampered, slathered and creamed in a dark room with soft music, and then be hit up to buy an expensive cosmetic line at the door," said Novick.

BUYER BEWARE

- **These substances** in moisturizers add to the price, but are of little benefit because the molecules are too large to penetrate the skin: Amino acids, collagen, procollagen, elastin, hyaluronic acid, proteins, DNA, vitamin E (tocopherol), vitamin A, hormones, placental extracts, algae, allantoin, liposomes, eggs, milk, honey and royal bee jelly
- **Avoid moisturizers** with potentially irritating substances like lanolin, fragrance and preservatives such as parabens
- **For oily or acne-prone skin**, use oil-free or water-based moisturizers