

Your Skin Needs Prebiotics Too

It's an ingredient that's gaining traction in the beauty industry, and may be just what we need to culture good skin.

It seems we're dirtbags, all of us.

According to research published by the US National Institutes of Health, the human body contains trillions of micro-organisms, outnumbering human cells by 10 to 1. Some of them are actually immensely beneficial to us.

In the gut, "good bacteria" known as probiotics is important for maintaining intestinal health, aiding digestion, keeping pathogens in check and boosting overall immunity.

These microscopic critters, however, need food to thrive -hello, prebiotics. Besides feeding probiotics, they indirectly promote the growth of beneficial micro-organisms and reduce the growth of harmful ones.

Similarly, the skin surface is home to bacteria, yeasts, parasites and fungi. Most are harmless and some are good, even necessary, for protecting against bad bacteria, curbing inflammation and keeping skin balanced.

Prebiotics play a helpful role in skin too. Says Dr Ker Khor Jia, a consultant dermatologist at Dermatology & Co: "Having the right balance of pre- and probiotics can modulate

bacterial proliferation and normalise the functional barrier of sensitive skin."

The problem, however, is that the types of helpful and harmful micro-organisms on the skin vary from person to person -and there's no way to measure the amount. "Having the right balance of microflora is a small part of the picture for healthy skin. There are no symptoms that can be attributed solely to the imbalance of microflora," says Dr Ker.

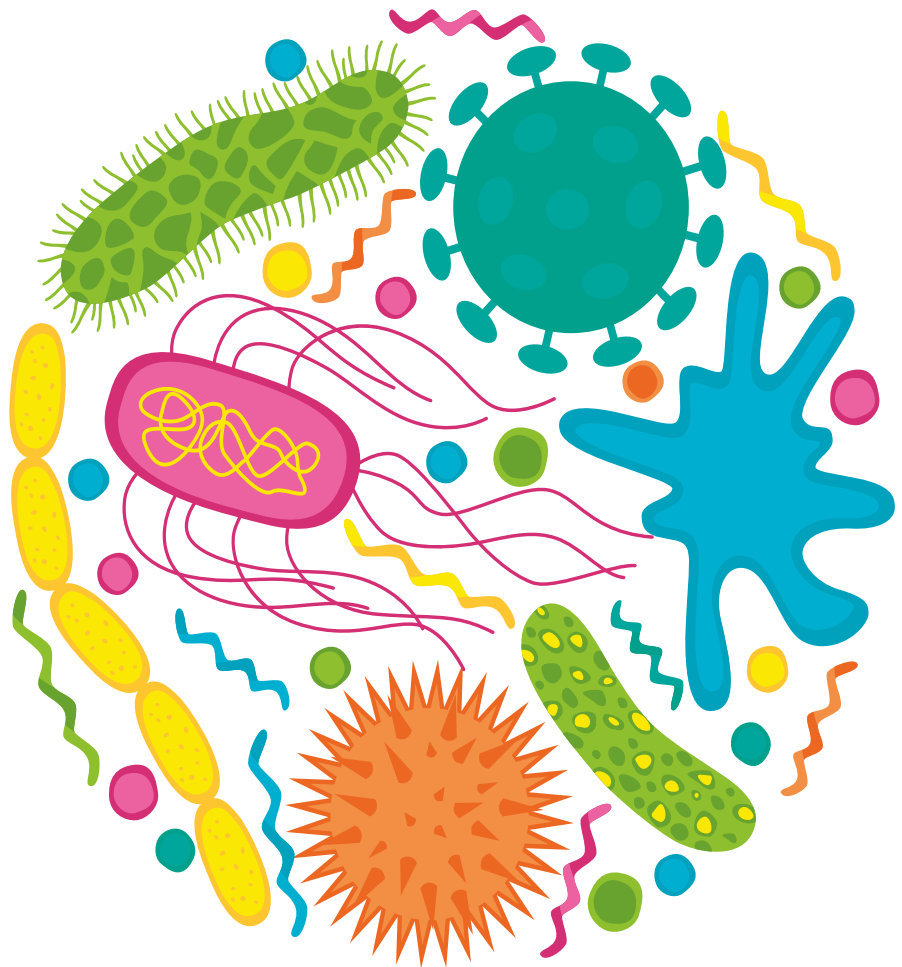
What of OTC skincare products containing pre- and probiotics then? There's no research yet that says these work and how useful they are, says Dr Ker, but she sees no harm in using them. "Prebiotics may or may not be soluble in skincare formats, so there are challenges in trying to incorporate them into skincare products and ensuring that they are

retained upon contact to produce a desired effect."

Beauty companies like Lancome, however, are optimistic about their potential. It recently boosted its star product, the Advanced Genifique anti-ageing serum, by enriching it with seven types of pre- and probiotics, selected for their rich content of sugars, amino acids and lipids that all skin types need.

Yeo Yin Hong, Lancome's product manager, says: "If the diversity of the skin's microflora or microbiome, is imbalanced, it can cause the skin to be sensitised."

The product supposedly works by boosting the first line of defence between skin and the environment. It does so by restoring the microbiome balance, which can be thrown out of whack by pollution, UV rays, diet, hormones and medication. The result: better, healthier skin.



THESE PRODUCTS CONTAIN PRE- AND PROBIOTICS - LIKE YOGURT FOR THE SKIN

Gallinée La Culture Hydrating Face Cream (\$65) matches skin's pH to soothe, hydrate and brighten.



Lancome Advanced Genifique (\$130-\$315) serum boost skin's defence and recovery functions.



Oskia Renaissance Bright Light Serum (\$166) combats hyper-pigmentation, dark spots and sun damage with natural actives.