

# Prevention

## 8 Ways To Keep Your Skin Firm As You Shed Pounds

DECEMBER 22, 2015 By [CINDY KUZMA](#)



You've finally found a workout you love and an eating plan that syncs with your lifestyle. The extra pounds you've carried for years have begun to melt away.

Just one problem—the same surface area covers your new, smaller self, leading your skin to sag or lag behind. Folds can form on your belly and [arms](#), and even your face can seem a bit slack.

While you won't be able to completely prevent [loose skin](#) if you're losing large amounts of weight, there are steps you can take to firm up your dermis. A healthy lifestyle and specific strategies to boost collagen, the structural protein responsible for skin's plumpness and elasticity, can make a difference, says Lisa Chippis, MD, a UCLA dermatologist and American Academy of Dermatology board member. Here, 8 ways to hold your skin tighter as you work toward your goal weight. (Continue your weight loss and lose up to 15 pounds WITHOUT dieting with [Eat Clean to Get Lean](#), our 21-day clean-eating meal plan.)

### **1. Lose weight gradually.**

Most experts recommend aiming for 1 to 5 pounds per week, depending on your starting point. "Losing weight quickly, by means of fad diets and cleanses, will compromise the contours of your face, affect the health of your skin, and impact your overall success in keeping the weight off," says Slone Mathieu, a medical aesthetician at [Boston's Dream Spa Medical](#).

## 2. Build muscle.

Replace the fat that once filled out your skin with lean mass by focusing your fitness routine on [strength training](#), says [Lori Shemek](#), PhD, author of *How to Fight FATflammation!* "You want the muscle to essentially replace the fat that is being lost to prevent loose or sagging skin," she says. "When your underlying muscle is toned and tight, it really helps give your skin a strong foundation to rest on." Building strength as you target flab not only keeps your skin taut, it also amps up your calorie burn long after you leave the gym, aiding your weight-loss efforts. (Check out these [exercises that burn more calories than running](#).)

Depending on your preference, you can use dumbbells, machines, or body weight—but aim to do 4 days of resistance training per week, Shemek advises. Add 2 to 3 days of high-intensity interval training, short bursts of near-maximum effort, to stoke your metabolism and build even more muscle mass. (Check out our beginner's guide to [HIIT workouts here](#).) For best results, pair this routine with adequate protein—eat some at every meal and snack—and you'll get stronger, tighter, and firmer, inside and out.

## 3. Practice good sun protection.

If you exercise outdoors, take steps to reduce your exposure to the sun's collagen-destroying UV rays. Plan your walk or run for the early morning or late in the day, when the sun's less scorching. [Slather on sunscreen](#), and make sure the label says "broad-spectrum"—that means it protects against UVA and UVB rays, which both damage your dermis. And consider protective clothing. "There's a lot of great UPF clothing that gives you an SPF of about 50, just by putting on a shirt," Dr. Chipps says. (One option: The Sunshade Hoody, \$69, from [Patagonia](#).)

## 4. Eat plenty of produce.



Pile your plate with a rainbow of colorful fruits and vegetables, which contain nutrients vital to skin health, Dr. Chipps says. Specifically, load up on vitamin A or lycopene—a [recent research review](#) in *Experimental Dermatology* reports this antioxidant offsets damage from UV rays. (Try these [25 best foods for healthy skin](#).) You'll find it in tomatoes, red peppers, and other rosy-hued veggies. Meanwhile, leafy greens and citrus fruits boast plenty of vitamin C, which helps build collagen, Dr. Chipps says.

#### **5. Smooth on a serum or revel in retinoids.**

Though there's no such thing as a magical skin-tightening potion, topical products can stoke collagen growth and improve your appearance if you use them daily and consistently, Dr. Chipps says. Your dermatologist can prescribe retinoid-containing creams or gels, such as Retin-A or Tretin-X. Or, look for over-the-counter serums containing epidermal growth factor, which stimulates fibroblasts deep in the skin to ramp up collagen production. (One to try: [DNA Regeneration Serum](#), \$149.)

#### **6. Stay smoke-free.**



Toss your cigarettes and take an extra step away from any cloud of fumes you pass. Lighting up makes your skin less resilient, says Eugene Elliott, M.D., cosmetic and reconstructive surgeon at Orange Coast Memorial Medical Center in Fountain Valley, Calif. What's more, emerging [research](#) suggests exposure to secondhand smoke raises levels of inflammatory proteins in your skin, reducing collagen levels and contributing to thin skin and wrinkles.

### 7. See an MD.

You won't want to spring for a facelift or other surgical procedure until you've reached your goal weight—skin responds best to these operations from a "steady state," Dr. Elliott says. But minor in-office procedures can address troublesome areas while you're still shedding, Dr. Chipps says. Ask a dermatologist about radiofrequency devices, which warm and expand collagen fibers to immediately improve your appearance while also stimulating new collagen production for longer-lasting results. (Here are [5 solutions for excess skin after weight loss](#).)

### 8. Drink up.



Water, that is. Dehydration can strike skin cells, too, leaving them shriveled and inflexible. Shemek suggests aiming for half your body weight in ounces of H<sub>2</sub>O each day.