

# is home-made always best?

If natural skincare is the best, then shouldn't our kitchens churn out the most potent skin creams and hair masques? MARY LIM finds out which remedies are home truths and which are not

**I**t was no secret that Egyptian queen Cleopatra loved her milk and honey baths. Milk soothes irritated skin while honey has healing and nourishing properties. Little wonder then, this famed beauty managed to keep her porcelain-fair complexion while spending her whole life out in the sun-baked desert. Over in the Far East, imperial court ladies in China and geishas in Japan cleansed their faces with rice bran, which they believed could eliminate wrinkles. They also routinely scrubbed with azuki beans for a clarifying effect, and slugged on facegel made from wakame seaweed to purify and detoxify their complexions.

**FOR BLACKHEADS**  
**HOME REMEDY: MASKING TAPE**  
**HOW TO USE:** Use it as you would a nose strip — stick masking tape over your nose and pull it off after a short while.  
**REALITY:** Some people believe that the action of ripping away masking tape off your face may help dislodge blackheads. "But this is an abrasive thing to do to your face and can cause tears and raw patches," warns Dr Low Chai Ling. "Other side effects include burns, redness and allergies." For more effective removal of blackheads without risk of damaging the skin, opt for microdermabrasion. It uses aluminium oxide crystals to clean, unclog and polish skin, so the result is more even and comes with less risk of bad reaction.

Tea bags may be able to help reduce some transient puffiness of the eyes caused by late nights or water retention, but they will not work to remove eye bags, says Dr Low. For the latter, blepharoplasty is the only treatment

All this happened even before scientists and dermatologists could prove that, for instance, the lactic acid in milk makes it an effective exfoliator. These days, lactic acid is hailed as one of the five major alpha hydroxy acids (the others being glycolic, malic, citric and tartaric) commonly used in anti-ageing skincare products. So, do home remedies really work? We ask the skincare experts Dr Eileen Tan from Eileen Tan Skin, Laser & Hair Transplant Clinic, and Dr Low Chai Ling of The Sloane Clinic.



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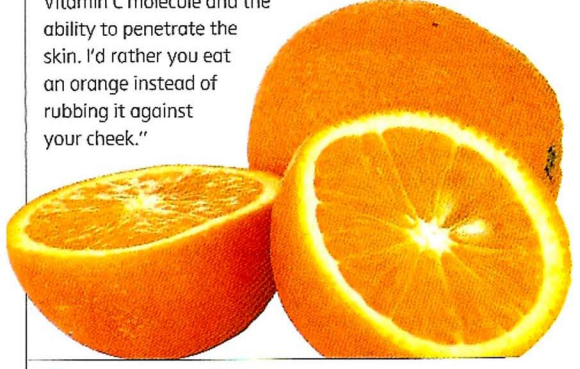
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## FOR BRIGHTER SKIN

**HOME REMEDY: ORANGE**

**HOW TO USE:** Cut an orange and rub each piece against the skin. It works like a topical Vitamin C serum and results in brighter skin.

**REALITY:** The Vitamin C in regular oranges may not be absorbed to any significant degree to result in lightened skin. Says Dr Low Chai Ling, "Vitamin C is found in many naturally occurring compounds but there are differences between that in a fruit and that in a bottle, in terms of concentration, stability of the Vitamin C molecule and the ability to penetrate the skin. I'd rather you eat an orange instead of rubbing it against your cheek."

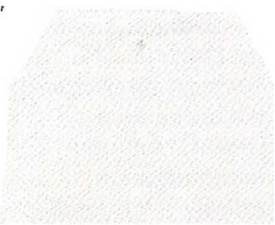


## FOR PUFFY EYES

**HOME REMEDY: TEA BAGS**

**HOW TO USE:** Save used tea bags when you make black or chamomile tea. Black tea contains tannin and caffeine, which shrinks blood vessels and helps flush out excess water from the skin, while chamomile has anti-inflammatory properties that help reduce puffiness. Keep these tea bags in the refrigerator but remove them for a slight squeeze before using. Leave them on your eyes for five to 20 minutes. The longer they stay on the eyes, the more effective they are.

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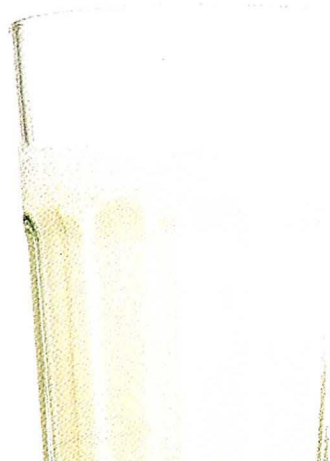


## FOR SMOOTHER, SOFTER SKIN

**HOME REMEDY: MILK**

**HOW TO USE:** Add two to four cups of milk to a warm bath and soak for 20 minutes. After that, scrub away loosened skin cells with a washcloth or loofah in circular motions. Be gentle with delicate areas such as neck and thighs to avoid abrasion burns. When finished, rinse the milk from your body thoroughly with a quick shower.

**REALITY:** Milk does not effectively exfoliate skin, says aesthetic physician Dr Low. "While lactic acids found in milk may help exfoliate skin, they are not present in sufficient concentrations in ordinary milk to result in any significant exfoliation," she says. Instead, "try a [commercially-prepared] peel such as White Peel, which uses lactic acids derived from milk and yoghurt. It is specially formulated to perform clinically effective exfoliation even on sensitive skins."



PHOTOS CHARLES CHUA/A THOUSAND WORDS