

Stemming skin woes botanically

By CHEAH UI-HOON

WHILE the debate rages on about the use of stem cells — human and animal — in science, skincare companies are introducing botanical stem cells into skincare products.

You can find plant cellular treatments at at least two places here — The Sloane Clinic and Mask, by Spa Esprit.

“Botanical stem cell research is one of the most promising fields in the beauty industry,” says Cynthia Chua, director of Mask, which just opened a few months ago. “Stem cells are extracted from plants, and have the ability to morph into the kind of treatment cells your body requires.”

“Stem cells can be thought of as ‘master’ cells. They circulate and function to replace dysfunctional cells. Found at the very heart of young plants and more precisely under the pistil, plant placenta plays the role of a nourishing liquid, feeding the fruit during its growth through a veritable little umbilical cord,” explains Low Chai Ling, medical director of The Sloane Clinic.

“Botanical placental cells are prepared using plant cells and tissue from plants in their first stages of life, used in a fresh and native state. These are harvested from live plant cells which are rich in antioxidants and nutrients,” Dr Low adds.

Or so goes the promising premise. Mask uses these stem cells in its own salon products, under its “Plant and Grow” treatment. The Sloane Clinic has developed NanoCell Therapy which customers can use at home.

“We initially used these cellular treatments in-clinic to nourish and soothe the patient’s skin after surgery or laser treatment, and found that not only does the skin heal much better, these ingredients also had additional benefits of making the skin softer, firmer and more supple,” says Dr Low.

“Furthermore, because there is no artificial preservatives, colouring or fragrance and harsh fruit acids, even the most sensitive skins can tolerate this product with no problems. Patients who have found almost all product irritating to their skin respond very well to NanoCell Therapy,” she says.

Because of the quality of stem cells — which are thought to have “future capabilities” — they’re seen as effective against premature ageing.

“When used appropriately, stem cells are able to treat today’s biggest skin problems like fine lines, puffiness, pigmentation, uneven skin, dark eye rings and scars,” says Ms Chua.

Ms Chua notes that because bot-

ed by the skin, it allows the damaged skin to absorb all the nourishment. “Almost immediately, the stem cells lift and tighten the skin giving it a fresh glow of vitality,” she notes.

The active ingredients in botanical stem cell technology are Alpha Lipoic Acid (ALA) and amino acid. “The plus point is that it is all botanical and not chemically induced. Alpha Lipoic Acid is the main ingredient which sloughs off the dead cells off your skin, decongests clogged pores and thus induces the radiance in your face. This would be the key active ingredient,” adds Ms Chua.

ALA is the main ingredient as it is a potent antioxidant. It is both water and fat soluble, which makes it a universal antioxidant, able to work both on the surface of cells and deep within them, notes Dr Low.

As opposed to vitamin C (water soluble) and vitamin E (fat soluble), which can fight free radicals either on the surface or within the cell, but not both.

As a result of this universal solubility, ALA can increase the positive effect of other antioxidants. The presence of ALA in cells helps preserve other levels, such as vitamin C, E and glutathione, giving skin cells extra protection. The other ingredient in The Sloane Clinic’s NanoCell Therapy is hyaluronic acid, which helps collagen produc-

tion and binds to water, thereby hydrating the skin from within, plumping up fine lines and dull, tired skin dramatically.

Stem cells aside, there’s been a mushrooming of herbal-based products of late. It looks like Singaporeans are cottoning on to natural and organic skin products, more so than before, if you judge the number of stores selling “natural” or herbal-based products at the newly opened Raffles Marketplace.

Korean brand, Skin Food, banks on the natural and fresh appeal of fruits and vegetables for its products. Its new product would be the tomato sunblock, which contains lipoic acid as an antioxidant. Then there’s the delicious-sounding honey and black tea anti-ageing skincare range, and choco lip melt tube, a lip gloss.

Phyto Organics carries four brands, all of which are all-natural products with organic ingredients, says Jason Gan, managing director of Phytoceuticals Pte Ltd. Mukti Botanicals, from Australia, uses 100 per cent certified organic ingredients in its products. Lavera is also 100 per cent natural, with high organic content, although the brand doesn’t cite the percentage of organic ingredients used — in line with European standards. European manufacturers believe that the measurement of organic content is still nebulous.

“But skincare with plant-based

ingredients are the ones that really work,” advocates Mr Gan. “That’s because synthetic ingredients found in conventional products are just cheap substitutions that mimic plant-based actions. The long-term actions of these ingredients may be negative,” he says.

Examples include petroleum jelly, which stops the body from producing its own moisture upon long-term use, he says. Furthermore, continual use of synthetic ingredients is allegedly toxic or carcinogenic, being “non-biocompatible” with the body.

Labels will reveal whether a product is natural or not. Ingredients like propylene glycol or butylene glycol are synthetic, which mimic the glycerin, a natural humectant. Ingredients which contain the words ethyl, propyl, butyl and methyl should be red flags indicating the product isn’t natural, says Mr Gan.

“Natural skincare companies have got a much clearer picture of what ingredients work, and how they work or how they can be combined in a formulation to work better,” he says. For instance, while olive oil’s good for the skin, it’s quite heavy, so manufacturers now can combine it with other ingredients to make it lighter or heavier for day or night use. “We’ve also managed to extract the essence of the plants to ensure better results.”

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