

THE NEW YOU PILL



Can two much-hyped supplements really SLOW AGING? Wendy Schmid investigates.

You exercise and eat right, but your body is getting older each year. You just have to accept it, right? Maybe not. "Aging is typically seen as inevitable, but it's actually a condition that's treatable," says Harvard geneticist David Sinclair. "Our bodies have an extraordinary ability to repair themselves." Two increasingly popular supplements, resveratrol and TA-65, seem to tap into those healing mechanisms. In separate studies, these plant-derived compounds have been shown to activate enzymes in mice that trigger their bodies' DNA repair process. Those enzymes exist in our bodies too, and now everyone from pro athletes and A-listers to the doctors who treat them are downing pills in hopes of providing a kick-start. Should you?

RESVERATROL & TA-65

In 2006, Sinclair helped break the news that resveratrol, a polyphenol found in red wine, appeared to activate enzymes called sirtuins, which exist in our cells but tend to become less active in midlife. (Enzymes regulate chemical processes that help keep our bodies functioning.) Scientists think sirtuins, in addition to increasing DNA repair, promote cell survival, fat burning, and better sugar metabolism. "By activating the sirtuin SIRT1, resveratrol tricks the body into thinking it's exercising and dieting even when it's not," says Sinclair. People taking resveratrol in over-the-counter supplements have noted increased energy, metabolism, and concentration, all hallmarks of youth. Other positives: Resveratrol has been shown to slow or stop the growth of certain cancers in mice, and human clinical trials are under way. The new reason to take it is that recent research indicates it may also suppress inflammation, which could arguably lead to a more wrinkle-free face.

Meanwhile, T.A. Sciences' supplement TA-65, named for a molecule extracted from Chinese astragalus root, a potent antioxidant, reportedly activates our cells' telomerase—another enzyme with antiaging benefits. By doing so, TA-65 is said to restore telomeres, the protective "caps" at the ends of our DNA strands that shorten each time the cell divides,

leading to cell death over time. Many signs of physical aging can be attributed to shortened telomeres, so restoring them could potentially turn back the clock. (In the future, testing telomere length may be as common as testing your cholesterol.) But these pricey pills (from \$2,400 a year), which are distributed by doctors and marketed to the 40-plus set, are controversial: Telomerase activity is also associated with malignant cell growth, and some doctors fear this concentrated supplement could turn precancerous cells into cancer. "It's worrisome," says Andrew Weil, founder and program director of the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine, who recommends waiting for further research. Florence Comite, a Manhattan endocrinologist and age-management specialist who dispenses TA-65, doesn't believe there's a connection. Within six months of taking TA-65, she stopped using her reading glasses; after two years, she thinks her skin is smoother. "I've seen it extend the length of patients' DNA," she says, "but there are no long-term studies." In one small study, TA-65 appeared to rewind aging in mice—regrowing their hair, thickening their skin—and patients have reported similar results. "As research accumulates, I see it becoming more accessible and mainstream," predicts Comite.

HOPE IN A BOTTLE

Could this new focus on enzymes help us win the war on aging? "I don't think it's a matter of if but when," Sinclair says. Wondering what to take? Consider this: Sinclair religiously takes his own custom formulation of resveratrol. New York celebrity nutritionist Oz Garcia is also a believer; he takes and recommends Integrative Therapeutics' Resveratrol Ultra (\$24.50) to his clients. Genesis Today's 4Resveratrol (\$19.95) is a nationwide best seller at Whole Foods. Isagenix's new telomere-support supplement, Product B (\$99), contains resveratrol. And while TA-65 isn't part of Garcia's own regimen, astragalus-root supplement from the health-food store is. Used for centuries in Chinese medicine, astragalus, like resveratrol, "helps reduce stress, inflammation, and oxidative damage," says Garcia. And that, we know, is good for our DNA. ■