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## The war against aging moves from the face to a new front

By Elizabeth Hayt  
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The face gets more than its share of attention. Creams and lotions are specially made to moisturize it, protect it from the sun and erase its wrinkles. Cosmetic surgery techniques are designed to keep it looking youthful for a lifetime. And it stands to reason: Your face is what looks back at you from the mirror and what everyone else sees first.

But what about your hands? They get noticed eventually, when they rise to shake another's hand, to wave or gesture, to give or receive. And then they, too, can make an indelible impression. And so it is not surprising that hands have become a new battleground in the great cosmetic war against aging. Lotion-makers have begun to put the same sunscreen and anti-aging ingredients they use in face creams - antioxidants, retinols, alpha hydroxy acids, collagen and the like - into new, more expensive hand treatments. Spending at nail salons continues to rise: In 2004, it reached nearly \$7 billion a year, up 8 percent from 2001, according to Nails, an industry trade magazine.

And beauty spas are coming up with services that go well beyond the basic manicure - including "hand facials" (clay masks meant to firm the skin), paraffin wax treatments and applications of anti-aging serums.

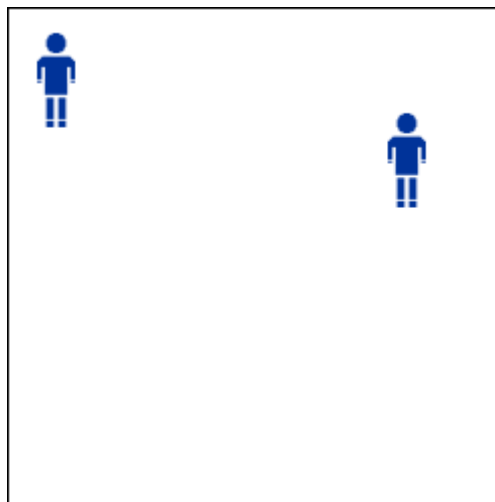
"You'd be hard pressed to find a little day spa that doesn't have a \$40 to \$70, 70-minute luxury hand ritual," said Melissa Felula, the beauty editor of Luxury SpaFinder magazine.

Not all of the esoteric spa treatments may be worth the cost, dermatologists say. They provide a "fleeting feel-good experience," but they work no better than a good moisturizer, said Dr. David Colbert, a Manhattan dermatologist.

But there are plenty of useful strategies - old and new, cheap and costly - that can help keep hands looking good.

The most common problem is dryness. Because hands do not have as many oil glands as other areas of the body - the face, for instance, and the back - and because they so often are washed in soap (or worse, detergents) and exposed to air and sun, the protective top layer of skin cells is easily stripped away. That causes a loss of moisture, making the skin feel tight, rough and possibly itchy and making it look dull, scaly or cracked.

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Moisturizing creams and lotions contain humectants, such as glycerin or hyaluronic acid, which attract moisture from the air and from the deeper layers of skin. And they have emollients - such as petroleum jelly, mineral oil, lanolin or shea butter - to soften the skin and provide a protective coating. Prices vary wildly, from a few dollars for drugstore brands to as much as \$85 for Dr. Perricone's Hand & Body Lipid Replenishment. Is there a difference? Many dermatologists say no. "Read any cream label," said Dr. Marinos Petratos, a dermatologist in New York. "There will be emollients, lubricating agents and preservatives."

Three drugstore moisturizers doctors often recommend are Aquaphor, Vaseline Intensive Care lotion and Cutemol cream (all under \$10).

To gauge how well any lotion or cream hydrates, try the "heel test," said Dr. Robert Weiss, an associate professor of dermatology at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, in Baltimore: For one week, apply one brand to your right heel and

another to your left. Whichever one does the best job of softening this very thick and impermeable skin is the one that will work best on your hands.

Doctors advise applying moisturizer when the hands are still damp from washing, so that it can trap the water in. Another trick, recommended by Dr. Frederic Brandt, a dermatologist with practices in New York and Miami, is to apply moisturizer to the hands before bedtime and then wear a pair of cotton gloves overnight to increase penetration.

In addition to dryness, hands suffer from overexposure to sunlight and from aging. Symptoms include wrinkles, brown spots and an increasingly leathery texture. Darker-colored skin tends to be better protected from these problems than lighter skin. And women's skin, which is thinner and drier than men's, typically shows signs of aging at least 10 years earlier, starting around age 40.

To deal with this damage, hand creams now include a variety of special ingredients - alpha hydroxy acids (to exfoliate), vitamins A, C and E (to reduce oxidative damage), amino acids and fatty acids (to block moisture loss), retinoids (to stimulate the production of collagen, which makes skin firm) and skin lighteners (to fade brown spots).

How can a consumer know whether any such anti-aging ingredients really work? "That's the million-dollar question," Brandt said. And the answer depends in part on how much of the ingredient the cream contains. "Ingredients are listed from the highest concentration to the lowest," he said. "You'd know if it's a fairly high concentration if it's at the top of the list."

Certain ingredients are unlikely to be beneficial no matter how concentrated they are. Collagen itself, for example, cannot penetrate the skin. "Those molecules are too big," said Dr. Mark Jewell, the president of the American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery.

Plastic surgeons and dermatologists have their own ways of beautifying the hands. Microdermabrasion, chemical peels and laser resurfacing can make skin smoother, even out its color, promote the growth of collagen and get rid of rough patches, dark spots and shallow wrinkles.

Wrinkle fillers used on the face, including Restylane and Sculptra, can also plump up the skin on the backs of the hands. "As you age, you lose subcutaneous fatty tissue," Jewell said. "You start out with not very much fat in the hands anyway, so when you lose some, the hands look hollowed out."

One of the most natural-looking injectables is the patient's own fat, removed via liposuction from, say, the stomach or the inner thighs. The cost of injections ranges from an average of \$539 for Restylane injections to \$1,226 for fat.

Sclerotherapy can reduce the appearance of veins on the backs of the hands. The treatment involves injecting a chemical solution into the blood vessels that causes them to contract. The average price is \$325.

Of course, the best way to have beautiful hands is to prevent damage in the first place. Keep them out of hot water whenever possible. And remember that nothing short of gloves beats the daily use of a high SPF sunscreen. Just like the one you would put on your face.