

Face the Facts *by Joan Breibart*



So on the second day of a week-long advanced Pilates workshop, one of the teachers inquired nervously about the final exam. Sensing her concern, I suggested a question/answer session on the last day; she and the others seemed relieved. The day arrives and predictably her hand goes up first; her question, however, surprised me: “Could you tell us what skin care products you use?” Since that day ten years ago, I’ve explained my skin program about hundred times. It’s a natural question since we know that with Pilates we can hold back the clock on our bodies. Now what about our faces?

And to this question, I bring some professional expertise. Before starting the Institute, I worked in the beauty business during the 1970s when cosmetic ingredient labeling was instituted. At the time, I was with an exclusive French skin treatment company that had a product for every cell of your face and throat and décolletage: essentially the same cream in different size containers. Suddenly, we had to list *elegantly* 14 polysyllabic names like distearyldimonium choride on a tiny jar of crème and hope that consumers wouldn’t compare ingredients and buy the cheaper versions. At first they did and prestige products really suffered, but eventually ingredients news got old. Cosmetic companies, emboldened by a lack of industry oversight from the Reagan Administration, started making stronger and stronger advertising claims.

Decades ago, Charles Revson, the founder of Revlon, defended the price of cosmetic products despite the inconsequential ingredient costs. He explained, “In the factory we make products; in the store we sell hope and hope is expensive.” Today the cosmetic industry is really good at selling hope. Like \$300 billion good. Everything is advertised as “all natural” or “organic” or the result of some miraculous scientific

discovery. It is not only confusing; it's wildly expensive. There are products that sell retinoids for \$500.00 a jar!

But what about efficacy you say? Yes, and it is spelled retinoid (a name that is just as difficult as Pilates!) which is a form of Vitamin A that has proven results. No dermatologist—even those with their own brands—dispute this fact; the irony is that the discovery that Vitamin A prevented skin aging was an accident! Retin A, the original product—was developed to treat acne. Decades later, in a follow up study of the original test group of acne users the researchers discovered that these individuals had ageless skin. Now they could sell to adults too! Retin A was quickly released in a weaker strength as Renova.

Now you are thinking: Why do women spend so much for skin care when a proven, inexpensive product is available?? Three reasons: Renova is medicine and requires a prescription from a dermatologist; you can't just buy it. And, unlike cosmetic products, your skin for a while doesn't look better; in fact, it looks and feels worse: dry, itchy, scaly, reddish, blotchy, irritated are typical user comments. So women try Renova and quit. Finally, unlike cosmetics, Renova doesn't feel and look and smell elegant. But it works.

Since I don't own stock in Wyeth Pharmaceuticals, the company that patented this drug, why am I giving out the secret? Sharing and making it easier is still our mission. Before the Institute started, Pilates teachers adhered to the opposite credo: "Once you climb the ladder, you pull it up so the next person has a harder climb." (*This is an Australian expression I learned from Dorothy Curnow, one of my favorite down under Pilates teachers.*)

Six months ago I was asked that skin question again, this time by Certifying Teacher Charlotte Weikel of B-Fit Center in Tampa. When I saw her recently with her glowing skin, I asked her whether anyone had commented on its improvement. She told me that everyone had noticed and one client asked her whether she had had a face lift!