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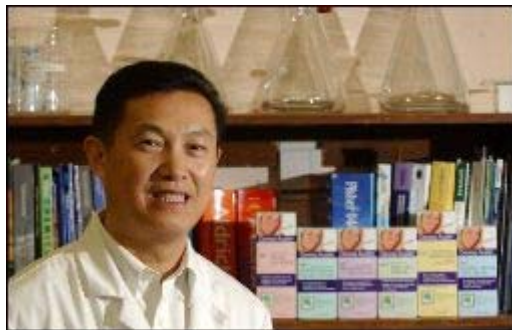
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Dr. Stephen Hsu, of the Medical College of Georgia, has helped develop a full line of green tea skin creams with fitness guru Denise Austin. The Skin Fit for Life line went on sale Friday.
Andrew Davis Tucker/Staff

Green tea researcher brews new skin cream

Web posted Friday, March 4, 2005
By Tom Corwin | *Staff Writer*

Stephen Hsu believes green tea is good for you, inside and out. So, apparently, does fitness guru Denise Austin.

The ubiquitous Ms. Austin, who has daily television fitness shows, tapes and books, recently launched a line of skin-care products incorporating the active ingredients from green tea. Dr. Hsu, a researcher at the Medical College of Georgia who had previously helped create a green tea gum, was a consultant on the formula. The products debuted this week in 15,000 stores nationwide, including CVS and Wal-Mart, said Malcolm Julian, brand manager for the manufacturer, CCA Industries in East Rutherford, N.J. Because they get daily reports from some chains, they know it is already selling well, he said.

"We know from the moment it hit, it started moving right off the shelf very quickly," Mr. Julian said. The company is already planning other bath and spa products with the same formulation, he said.

Naturally occurring chemicals in green tea, known as polyphenols, have previously

tumor properties. Dr. Hsu recently found that one of those chemicals, abbreviated as EGCG, encourages skin cells to divide. That should lead to greater "cycling of skin cells" to counter the thinning caused by aging and damage to the cells, Dr. Hsu said. He is planning a clinical trial to look at the impact of the cream on pore size and the length and depth of wrinkles.

"We know the change occurs," Dr. Hsu said. "How quickly and how much the changes occur is dependent on the clinical study."

Craig A. Elmets and colleagues at the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Medicine were one of the first to try EGCG in a cream a few years ago and found that it helped protect against damage from UV rays.

"It's thought that probably what happens is that the green tea polyphenols act as antioxidants and in so doing work to prevent cancer," which can result from that damage, said Dr. Elmets, the chairman of the Department of Dermatology.

"This really is gratifying because this may be a way of preventing skin cancers from developing to begin with."

The antioxidant effect also could be promoting cell growth, he said. But while there are now many products that claim to contain green tea chemicals, Dr. Elmets said the potency is questionable. Green tea chemicals tend to break down over time, he said.

"Most of the ones that are out are not really particularly active at this point," he said.

That was one of the obstacles Dr. Hsu said they had to overcome in creating the skin cream, but he thinks they have succeeded by combining them with fat molecules.

"They're more stable," he said.

The fat-soluble chemicals also should get into the skin better because of the fat cells in the surface of the skin.

Skin "can only be penetrated by those substances that can be dissolved in fat," he said. "It's going to get into your skin cells. You know when you put it on your skin."

And while he is still testing it, he is standing behind the Denise Austin Skin Fit for Life line.

"I'm impressed by this, by the effectiveness, myself," he said.

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