

PROFILE

Rewarding Experience
Celebrity and author Dr. Nicholas V. Perricone
finds his work incredibly fulfilling



If you've been watching television lately, browsing through bookstores or thumbing through national magazines, chances are you've come across the name Nicholas V. Perricone, M.D. One minute he's chatting with Diane Sawyer or Barbara Walters about the benefits of eating salmon, the next he's hitting the public television airwaves to raise millions for educational TV in programs based on his two number one New York Times best selling books *The Wrinkle Cure* and *The Perricone Prescription*

As his celebrity grows, so does his ability to improve life for millions of Americans, right where it shows-on their skin. For Dr. Perricone, who is in his mid-50's, this kind of impact has only been possible because the first life he improved was his own. "Everyone has a mission in life," he says. "And if you want to be able to carry yours out, you need a good mind and body-so, I had to be sure I had that myself before I could help anyone else."

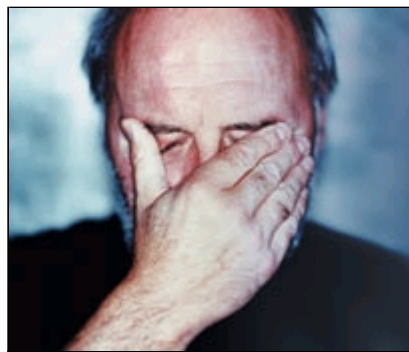
Back in 1971, when Perricone was a 23-year-old English-literature graduate, with a stint in the Army to his credit, he found himself physically and mentally exhausted. In an effort to find out what was wrong, he underwent a complete physical exam. The doctor proclaimed him to be in perfect health despite his debilitating symptoms. Frustrated by the lack of answers, Perricone experienced first-hand, the limits of traditional medicine. This began his life-long investigation into the powerful healing benefits of nutrition. With no guidance from his own physician, he determined to figure out what was wrong and fix it himself. An avid reader, he turned his attention to books on nutrition, beginning with the works of Adele Davis, an early advocate of healthy diet. He immediately followed her recommendations to eat more protein and take nutritional supplements.

About the same time, he also accepted his first job-as program coordinator in the Connecticut office of the Muscular Dystrophy Association, a national organization that helps children with muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular diseases. "There had recently been a breakthrough in using vitamin E to help kids with muscular dystrophy," he remembers, adding that he soon added this powerful antioxidant to his daily regimen. "I just fell into using it and it changed my life."

An exercise component soon followed and within a few months, Dr. Perricone was feeling "terrific." In fact, he was so energized that he quickly-and intensively-rekindled an interest in medical school, which had lain dormant through his military service. He began taking night classes in organic chemistry and physics to fulfill his core science requirements, while working full time during the day and applying to medical schools on his lunch breaks. "The course work was interesting," he says now. "But even at that point I knew all about nutrition and wondered about its effect on the disease process and why that was never mentioned." That oversight became his obsession.

Accepted at Michigan State medical school, Dr. Perricone soon had a chance to begin challenging traditional teachings in the classroom. He observed under the microscope that every illness, from heart disease to cancer, showed signs of inflammation. "I asked my professor why that was and he said that the body was mounting an immune response, but I didn't buy it," he says. "What does inflammation have to do with cancer? And why is it present in disease and in aging skin?"

By dictating his course notes into a cassette tape that he played back around the clock, Dr. Perricone accelerated his course work, graduating in under three years, as opposed to the traditional four-year program. From Michigan he moved on to the Yale Pediatrics program, where he crossed paths with Dr. Sidney Hurwitz, an old friend who was one of the first pediatric dermatologists in the country. Dr. Hurwitz raved about dermatology, describing it as the best area in medicine from which to explore a wide range of interests. Dr. Perricone liked the idea and began a three-year residency in dermatology at the Ford Medical Center in Detroit. Once enrolled he immediately focused his attention on his earlier questions about the relationship between inflammation, disease and aging.

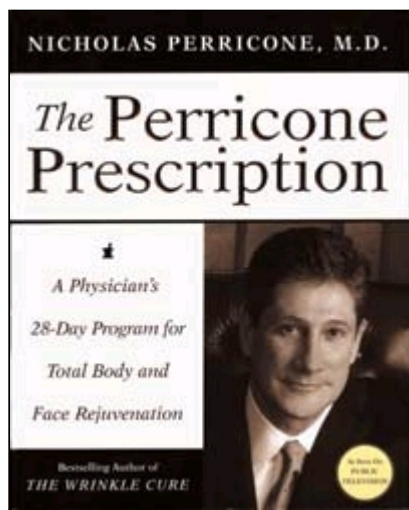


Because of his extensive knowledge of nutrition, he began mixing up vitamin C concoctions to test on his own sunburned skin. Using ascorbyl palmitate, a synthetic ester of vitamin C that is fat soluble (as opposed to the water-soluble ascorbic acid), he found that it penetrated the skin quickly and had a high level of healing properties that quickly made his sunburn disappear.

Dr. Perricone soon expanded his focus to alpha lipoic acid, an especially powerful antioxidant that reaches into all portions of the cell to provide protection from free radicals-the culprits that create and perpetuate inflammation. "Alpha lipoic acid boosts energy production in your cells, just as it helps the mitochondria change food to energy. As you know the higher the energy level in the cell, the more youthful you remain. The importance of alpha lipoic acid-the metabolic antioxidant-is hard to overstate."

It can also safeguard other antioxidants in the skin, such as vitamins E and C, for extra protection. Dr. Perricone found that regular topical use of alpha lipoic acid diminishes the appearance of fine lines, wrinkles and scars.

His experience in confirming these results was especially rewarding. A group of plastic surgeons in Texas performed a double-blind placebo controlled study on the effect of topical lipoic acid on scarring in young children after cleft lip palate surgery. At the end of 18 months, the children who used lipoic acid showed much less scarring and deformity than those receiving the placebo. "It was really gratifying to see the research benefit young children," he explains.



Much of this research was used to substantiate the theories he espouses in *The Wrinkle Cure*, which was in the top five of the New York Times bestseller list for 19 weeks-four of those at Number 1. *The Perricone Prescription* which came out in August 2002, spent 18 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list and four weeks in the Number 1 position. The book advocates a three-pronged approach to skin aging: diet, supplements and cosmeceuticals.

Not surprisingly Dr. Perricone follows his own advice, beginning with diet, where the principal tenet is that sugar is the enemy. "Sugar causes inflammation, inflammation causes aging," he notes. "Fifty percent of skin aging is a result of sugar. It's as bad for your skin as sun exposure. If just a drop of sugar is added to a cell culture of fibroblasts, within a minute or two we can measure a sharp rise of inflammatory chemicals in the cells.

He also shuns the type of carbohydrates, such as pasta, breads and potatoes, that rapidly raise blood sugar levels, resulting in inflammation on a cellular level that leads to wrinkles and other disease processes. Instead, he advocates salmon and green salads with olive oil for omega-3s and anti-inflammatory chemicals. Berries are also good because they are rich in

antioxidants.

One of Dr. Perricone's key concerns in maintaining an anti-aging lifestyle is the control of stress. "Of all the destructive, proinflammatory and proaging forces I have observed as a physician, nothing compares to stress. Stress causes various hormonal changes in your body that rapidly alter cellular function in your vital organs." According to Dr. Perricone, the real danger of stress is that it increases the levels of cortisol in the body. In excessive amounts, the hormone cortisol can cause brain cells to die, increase blood sugar levels and negatively impact on the immune system.

He's also dedicated to exercise-but not to excess. "I take one or two days a week off," he says, "because overexercising can put you in a proinflammatory state." Dr. Perricone's workouts typically consist of a three-mile run on his home treadmill, followed by a 45-minute weight-training session every other day.

When it comes to supplements, Dr. Perricone sees himself as his own "guinea pig," because of his constant tinkering to arrive at the perfect mix. He starts each day with glutamine powder dissolved in water taken on an empty stomach for healthy maintenance of his GI track. After that comes taurine, L-carnitine, acetyl-L-carnitine, pantothenic acid and B6. He also uses N-acetyl cysteine and alpha lipoic acid to raise levels of glutathione in his cells and takes B complex and grape seed extract, DMAE and MSM, because of their powerful anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. "A diet high in DMAE will enable you to think more clearly,

improve your memory and increase your problem-solving ability." Phosphatidylserine is on the list for cognitive enhancement, and chromium nicotinate regulates his blood sugar levels. A few times a day, he'll take zinc, extra folic acid, selenium and CoQ10, as well as stocking up on extra minerals like calcium and magnesium. Of the success of the overall regimen, he says: "Very rarely do I get sick."

Staying healthy, of course, means he can continue to carry his message to an ever-expanding audience. "After I went to medical school, I was able to apply my basic health principals to my patients and change their lives," he says. "The books and my two television specials airing nationally on the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) has helped reach even more people, allowing them to maintain their health goals. I have about 50 more research projects that I'm working on, which will help even more people. It's incredibly fulfilling." Dr. Perricone is a long-time member of the Life Extension Foundation.

-Twig Mowat

[Back to the Magazine Forum](#)

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