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Headline: [WATCH] The science of 'black don't crack'

Blurb: Black skin shows signs of ageing at a later stage than white skin because it has more protection against damage from the harmful rays of the sun.

- **Collagen (the stuff that makes skin look young) is found in the second layer of all skin. In Black skin, however, collagen is arranged in tighter bundles than it is in lighter skin.**
- **That results in a skin surface more taut. The collagen in Black skin also stays intact for longer because it's got a protective layer of melanin (the substance that gives skin its colour).**
- **As a result, Black skin shows signs of ageing from sun damage such as wrinkles and fine lines at a later stage than white skin.**

Byline: Dija Ayodele

"Black don't crack" has a scientific explanation.

There are two reasons why Black skin looks young for longer.

1. Collagen – the protein that makes skin look plump

Collagen is found in the second layer of the skin.

In Black skin, collagen fibres are packed together into tighter and smaller bundles that stay intact for a longer time than in white skin.

Think of a trampoline. The more tightly wound the springs are, the more taut the mat is, and the less bouncy it becomes.

The collagen coils keep the skin looking propped up and youthful.

2. Melanin – the stuff that gives skin its colour

Black skin has far more melanin than white skin. Some studies suggest it's about double.

Melanin gives those with Black skin a natural skin protection equal to sunscreen of 13.4 SPF.

That's more than four times the amount of natural protection that white skin provides, which amounts to 3.3 SPF.

What does that mean?

It means that Black skin has an “overcoat” of protection that protects the collagen underneath from the harshest rays of the sun.

Over time, sun exposure from the harshest rays of sun causes damage that result in signs of ageing such as wrinkles and sagging.

But an abundance of collagen also has some drawbacks. It can increase the likelihood of scars forming on the skin.

These scars form when the skin makes too much collagen to heal an injury to the skin, such as a burn wound or a piercing and usually don’t disappear without treatment.

Treatments for these scars include

- Steroid injections or creams
- Surgery
- Silicone gel masks

The treatments all aim to reduce how much collagen the skin makes, but they remain basic and can have inconsistent results.

Surgery can sometimes result in the scar coming back worse than before.

This is why more research into treatments is crucial, writes “Dija Ayodele in her book *“Black Skin”*

This story was produced by the Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism. Sign up for the newsletter.