

EPISODE 1582

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FT: So Money episode 1582, breaking down the science and savings of skin care with Dr. Mimi.

***“MV:** Obviously, the skin of one with the skin of another is different. But its needs, its basic needs, its functions, the way it work on a daily basis, is always the same.”*

[INTRO]

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FT: Welcome to So Money, everybody. I'm Farnoosh Torabi. We've been doing a couple of episodes on wellness lately. If you listened to our episode with Liz Moody earlier this month, we talked to her about the science of wellness and some of the misinformation around wellness. Liz has an incredible podcast called The Liz Moody Podcast, and she has a new book out. You can check it all out on that episode, episode number 1577 from October 11th.

Today, we're focusing specifically on skin care. You've all seen these multi-step expensive skincare routines. If you've ever gone to get a facial, what do they tell you? “Come back in four weeks.” Or, “There are 17 products that I've left you at checkout. You should buy all of them.” You got to stop and wonder, how much of this is science and how much of this is sales-driven? Our guest today is a scientist, and she has all the facts and what we really need at the end of the day to protect our skin, which is the largest organ on our bodies.

Dr. Mireille Vega, also known as Dr. Mimi, is a respected chemist. She's a pioneering figure in skin microbiome studies, and she has always been on a mission to share the genuine truth about healthy skin and simplified routines. Her advice stems from 30 years of trials and discoveries, as well as her daughter's skin care struggles, where she realized that the traditional multi-step approach just didn't add up. She's actually developed her own revolutionary idea that bridges the gap between skin care and scientific understanding. It's the One Human Skin approach to skin health.

Can you imagine one solution for everybody's skin? It kind of goes contrary to the entire industry. They're probably hating this episode. If we can save money in the pursuit of saving our skin, well, sign me up. Here's Dr. Mimi.

[INTERVIEW]

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FT: Mireille Vega, Dr. Mimi, welcome to So Money. It's great to have you on the show.

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MB: Hi, Farnoosh. Thanks for having me. So happy to be here.

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FT: Yes, yes. All right. So, audience, we're doing a very special So Money today, where I really wanted to dive into the misinformation in the wellness industry, which we know is a billion-dollar industry. I think that from time to time, it's important to address this on the show, just as we are out there being the smartest consumers we can. I think if you are spending any time on social media, it's very easy to go down a rabbit hole and think that you need to buy all of the things to cater to this wellness lifestyle that a lot of times is just business.

Today, we're going to focus on skin care, which is why I wanted to bring Dr. Mimi onto the show. Dr. Mimi, you and I met – I guess it was this time last year. You attended a Pitch Please workshop. You are a respected chemist, pioneering figure in skin microbiome studies. I just thought let's go to the science. Let's go to someone who really knows skincare from your perspective, who can tell us the truth about what it takes to have healthy skin. Where are the investments we should be making?

I'll give you a quick anecdote, Dr. Mimi, and then we'll get into your advice. You will laugh at this. I met an entrepreneur in the beauty business many years ago who will remain nameless.

Lovely, lovely woman, great entrepreneur, great business. But she told me that when I pulled her aside and I asked her, “What's your skincare routine? What do you do at night,” because she had beautiful skin, she said, “My skin care routine is eight steps at night, and it starts with washing your face.” Then she puts on a mask. Then there's a serum. Then there's another thing and then another thing.

First of all, I was like, “I have two kids. There's no way.” She's like, “Oh, you can just put the mask on while you're making dinner.” I said, “Oh, okay.” Now, reflecting on this, I'm like, of course, she was incentivized to adopt an eight-step plan and promote an eight-step plan because she ran a business selling products that all supported these eight-step plans. Now, I'm not saying she was doing that intentionally, but it didn't harm her financially to promote this. So all this to say that I think that there's a lot of shoulds in the beauty business and like, “I need this, and I need that, and you're doing it wrong.”

I just wanted you to set the record straight. You've been very passionate about kind of setting the record straight and really digging into the science of skin care. Tell us, first of all, how you got interested in this.

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MB: I think I was born to do that in a sense that I grew up in the country surrounded by nature and really, really loved the chemistry of nature to start with. I was even part of environmental groups when I was young in the eighties. Yes, they existed back then, too, right? As a teenager, when I grew a bit, I had some skin issues that I tried to resolve by going to the drugstore and reading all these labels. I was part of the chemistry club, and I loved understanding how the world worked from a chemistry perspective and tried so many things.

I ended up having for multiple years face really red, irritated with all these products that dermatologists or just marketing were selling to me really. That's why I ended up a chemist really. I did go on a mission to resolve these complicated routines because I was offered solutions that were really complex. You talked about the eight steps routine. But sometimes, it's 10, 15. But it's not all in the morning or in the evening. You have like some products you'll use on rotation.

Now, it's very popular to do skin cycling or to exfoliate or all these things that for me at the core I didn't understand how it worked with the skin really. So this is why I went on a mission really to solve first my own issues and then like learning more and more on ingredients and how the skin really worked. But I did feel, especially at the grad level, I did a PhD in biotechnology because I really cared for natural ingredients. But at the time, really the market wasn't ready.

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FT: Just a reminder, like the skin is the largest organ. We often think of skin health as just like the face. We just think of making sure we remove the spots, and we have the best, cleanest skin. But there's far more to skin health than what is just on our face. So maybe talk a little bit about why investing in skin is so important as it pertains to our overall bodily health.

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MB: Yes. Very, very good question. The skin, as you mentioned, is the biggest organ. It's our first barrier of protection from the outside conditions. There is on top of the skin a layer of microbes. Most of us know, but still there's a lot of microbes living in and around our body. Most of them are located in the gut, but there are quite a few located on the skin. It's really an ecosystem, living organisms on our skin that build the protection that protects our skin which in turn protects us.

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FT: Very, very interesting. Just recently, you've backed it up now with the science, but I was on Instagram, and I was watching. I think it was Salma Hayek, famous actress, talk about her number one beauty tip that her grandmother passed down to her. It was don't wash your face, don't clean your face in the morning because overnight, your skin rejuvenates. Just like you explained, there's sort of like all these protective ingredients on the skin, especially when you wake up in the morning. Like we all the commercials say, "Immediately use your Neutrogena bar soap to wash your face or whatever." That actually may be more harmful to your skin. So let the microbes kind of do their thing on your face.

Let's talk more about the simplification. Now, you've described the science which sounds very complex, and maybe that's why there is this assumption that every skin type needs a different skin routine, and there needs to be multi-layers to the skin routine. But you've actually developed the One Human Skin approach to skin health, and I want you to talk a little bit about that. It's kind of contradicts a lot of, again, what we've been told is that every skin is different. So how do you streamline this into your One Human Skin?

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MB: It is really a streamline. You put the word on it. It was a process. For myself, it was a reprogramming. I've looked at the skin and ingredients for the skin for more than 30 years. I had done a deep dive on the microbiome, so I knew I had all the elements now to build something that made sense. But yet there was one thing that was for me still missing as how do I make this work together.

My daughter became a teenager, and she was faced with similar issues I had a faced. She went into the family cabinet where we and I stored all my product because I had multiple. I tried many, many things, right? She asked this simple question as to, "Okay, what do I do now," right? Then I started trying to come up with a system for her so that she would wash but not too much, and she would – like I could make something that made sense for her. This is when I had my second eureka moment, if we can call it like that, where I said, "Wait, wait, wait, wait. We have to focus on what is common to everyone, not on what is different from everyone."

This is when I mapped actually all the ingredients; the good, the bad, the wasteful. Those ingredients that are to avoid at all cost. We kind of know them; the phthalates, the parabens, the allergens, pretty straightforward. Then I mapped all these good ones that we really want to use. I looked also at those that have big, big claims, and they're supposed to be miraculous and to find the science behind it. Trying to make up these formulations, I really wanted one product that worked for all.

But it evidently was not possible, until I realize that there's really one, one element that changes from one person to another. Not even from one person to the other but within the same skin, the

same person from time to time. We lack sleep. We are stressed out. Sometimes, there's a period in the month. Or we've used specific products that affected our skin. Or we ate the wrong thing, right? Our skin reacts and changes and its needs change.

So how do we adapt our care to that? It's really, really complex with the way it's set right now because you have, okay, use these products. These are good for your skin, but your skin changes. So what about next week or in two months from now or when I'm really, really stressed or when I'm not or – so I realized that the main element was really the quantity of oils or fat lipids that the skin produced. That was the major factor. To simplify, the fats and the salts.

The fats, what they do, they create a layer, a protective layer, a physical layer on the skin. Typically, we need more of that during the winter. Typically, teenager will get more of this but sometimes too much, right? Then you have the other aspect, the salts that actually keep water in the skin. So the hydration, the real hydration with water is through these salts.

So what I did is actually create one formula that balances the salts and the lipids into two different products that you use at the same time. So you have these one and two, and then you put the two of them together. Then if you feel your skin stretched or dry, then you would add more of one. If you feel it's still oily, well, you would add more of two. Then this is how you balance your care because, honestly, everything else in your skin, from your skin to mine to anyone's, is just these two elements that vary.

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FT: So contrary to what you might be advised to purchase, like if you're going to – I remember going to the department store with my mom, and we go to the Clinique counter when I was a teen. They'd have you kind of figure out the oiliness, dryness of your skin. There was a little like thing that you had to play around with, and then they would give you – they would formulate, essentially. They' say, “Okay, you need this particular astringent, and then you need this moisturizer, and you need the –”

The challenge with that is that they were – am I right to assume that what's wrong with that approach is that they were assuming you have a certain skin type all year for the most part?

What I'm hearing from you is that your skin goes through all types of oily. It goes from oily to dry like depending on the month, your sleep, your stress levels, what you've eaten, all the things. So every day, you have to kind of measure for this.

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MB: Exactly, exactly. Honestly, we still have the same types of quiz, right? You go online, and then all these companies will ask you, "Okay. So answer these 10 questions, and we'll tell you what you need," right? Now, they say that AI can help in that. Like what this – the thing is I don't see how it can because at that point first, you're answering questions. Then like it will tell you for one specific instance.

Obviously, the skin of one with the skin of another is different. But its needs, its basic needs, its functions, the way work on a daily basis, is always the same. I agree. I don't think this quiz make sense and even when they're done face to face. Obviously, those that care for the skin have seen so many people that they can advise very well, right? They advise based on what they see when you go see them. The care that they will suggest will be great for the skin then, but then like we get a hormonal cycle in, and this all changed.

I'm not sure if you experienced this, but I used to experience monthly some breakouts, right? Even in my 30s and 40s, and you're like, "Oh, how is this really possible," right? Well, the skin is complex, and it does so many wonderful things for you to protect you when you give it what we actually strip from it on a daily basis.

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FT: Wow. So speaking of maybe the myths within the skincare industry, I remember, you're going to roll your eyes, but every time I go get a facial, they always – of course, like they're trained, right, the facialists? They tell you what's wrong with your skin, and you got to buy all the products. Or, "We'll put aside all these products for you when you check out. No pressure but we think you need this, this, and the other thing." They'll say, "How often do you get a facial?" "Truthfully, I might get a facial twice a year maybe." They go, "Oh, no. You need to come here every four weeks."

Can you imagine getting a full-on facial every four – I just feel like – that's to your point, like it's really overdoing it. Maybe they're right. I don't know. What's the right balance for these types of skin care procedures, whether it's the microdermabrasion, the facials, the this, the that? I feel like, again, there's an industry that would benefit from you having this be part of your monthly routine or even more frequent. So what's the right balance there?

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MB: Well, from my standpoint, I really, really changed my approach. I used to go quarterly because I thought it made sense because with seasons, we really feel the change of our skin. It's not so much that the needs change, but the external conditions change and, obviously, affects humidity and external factors. So I kind of related that to it.

I will be very transparent. Since I developed the two products that I use in one step, right, I have not gone not once. I was able to give back to my skin everything it needs to actually exfoliate itself naturally and gently. So, obviously, I miss the time I spend on that bed, where like someone was pampering me. This is like great for the mind. You can get other types of care. I do think even facial care, massages. But I don't think it's necessary.

In terms of the other interventions that you could get, some are beneficial for the skin short term. They will, for instance, decrease spots appearances or help in the plumpness. This doesn't last, unfortunately. But, again, like if you're used to these, you will see a benefit for the short term, and I don't think – other than your wallet, if it's not affecting it, and you like going through these procedures, well, I don't see why not, right? But personally, I no longer do it. I really wanted to simplify my life and give myself peace of mind.

The mapping of all these ingredients, those that you really need for your skin particularly will help me in making sure that I provided my skin everything it needed, and I know I don't need to add anything else. That's why I no longer do it. But if you feel that your skin needs it, and you're really convinced, well, it's really difficult. Honestly, even for myself, it took me a few years to deprogram myself because we've heard so many ways or claims that we began to believe them, right?

So when someone tells you, “Oh, well. You really don't need this,” well, you tend not to trust. Then you know what? It's really a process. So I would say like for all of these, like you go with those that really make sense for your skin, and you have to be very mindful, basically, of how your skin reacts to these.

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FT: What are some other ways? This will be our last question and then – before I also ask you about where to learn more about One Human Skin. But anything that people can do on a daily basis that are just easy things to do to help their skin's health that doesn't necessarily require buying products. But just I've heard you already talk about hydration is really important. But what else you think is helpful. As you say, the skin kind of works on its own, but it probably can benefit from some environmental benefits, too.

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MB: Absolutely. Well, first of all, you mentioned it. If we talk just purely skin, over washing is a big no no. That's the first thing. Obviously, we live in cities. We work out. We put on makeup. We have a thriving life, unfortunately, polluted environment. You'll need to cleanse at the end of the day, so you will do that with a gentle cleansing. You won't need to exfoliate. Exfoliation, especially physical exfoliation, will create micro wounds on your skin and can actually trigger breakouts and inflammation.

So like the first thing is really to wash with a gentle cleanser, neutral pH, and to reestablish the pH of your skin as quickly as possible. Most products now are formulated to be optimal to the skin's pH, which is slightly acidic. Then the reason why you would put different types of products right after is to actually restore what you lost during the day, during your activities, but also through that cleansing. Ingredients like hyaluronic acid or HA or ingredients ceramides, the lipids that will supplement the sebum that you may have lost or that you're not producing enough will be all important.

Actually, in our formulations, we put 35 ingredients. It's not that we don't like cosmetic ingredients. We do like them, but we put them in a balance so that they're actually beneficial to the skin. You don't need to think about, okay, what else is my skin needing at that point. So like this is the first like night routine that you could have. You can evening routine. You would go with a gentle cleanser and then reestablish the lost elements. In the morning, if you're used to it, well, then you could just rinse with water if you really feel that you need some type of rinse that will be sufficient. In general as well, there are different things. Obviously, we know that sleep, if we sleep enough, it's more beneficial getting enough sleep than any products you can use.

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FT: What you eat.

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MB: It is a reflection. Your skin is a reflection of what you eat.

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FT: What should I not be eating? What's the – is this like don't eat meat or don't eat French fries? What is the – what do you mean by things that we eat? Because there's also – like that's a whole other show.

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MB: Oh, yes. I mean, there are so many things. I mean, we haven't gone into even the business and the savings and like that you could get into. I like to simplify my life and to make sure that I do what is best for my overall health. But part of that aspect is to live in moderation really. So, obviously, we do things sometimes that are not as great for our health. But it's great for our mind, so we keep it.

But I'll give you examples of a vitamin that you want to make sure that you have on your plate, which is vitamin C. I mean, all of them, you want them. With a balanced diet of plant-based, with

vegetables and fruits, you'll get these vitamins. Obviously, you'll eat lean proteins as well. I'm not getting into the vegan or non aspect of it, right? We know the benefits, and this is more on the nutrition side. But you will have these vitamins.

But the vitamin C is a very good example of what we've heard, and everyone believes and many dermatologists as well, right, that the vitamin C is absolutely essential to your skin. It is but in your plate because what the vitamin C does, actually, is a cofactor to the production of collagen. Collagen cannot be put on your skin, feeling that you will supplement your skin with collagen. The only way to increase your collagen is really to produce it internally. To do that, you need to have the cofactors, and you need to have the amino acids, so the building block of the collagen protein, right?

You can eat collagen. It will be broken down and then rebuild. Or you could just eat proteins like vary types of proteins to get the building blocks. Make sure you have daily vitamin C so that you can have that cofactor to really produce the collagen that we so desperately want as we age.

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FT: Right. Dr. Mimi, tell us – this is a lot of science. I think that we did a good job of balancing the science with the practical use cases and the how-tos. We'd love to hear you tell us. One Human Skin, is that available on your website?

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MB: We are available online. We are starting out just e-commerce. The One Human Skin is more the approach. It's V*GAM Biome. That's the name of the line. On our site, we also have the list of these guides of ingredients that you want to make sure you have and those that you want to make sure to exclude from your products. The website is vgambiome.com or toloveyourskin.com.

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FT: Toloveyourskin.com. We'll put those links in our show notes. I'm excited to try it out. My skincare routine right now is basically washing my face at night, putting on some moisturizer, and then morning SPF, and I'm out the door. I don't know. I used to be – I think it's just for me also, my life stage. I just don't have time for multi-steps, so your approach is really hitting me where I need it. I think a lot of people can relate and will appreciate this.

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MB: Yes. We're really busy. That was the whole point, right? It was thought out before pandemic. So with the traveling as well, when you factor that in, you change environment very quickly. Then your skin is like, "What?" Well, now, like it's simplified. But more to that, under like the overall balance in your life, I think it's important, yes, to simplify everything basically.

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FT: Well, thank you, Dr. Mimi. I hope to have you back soon. Thank you.

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MB: Thank you for having me. That was great. Thanks very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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FT: Thanks so much to Dr. Mimi for joining us. If you'd like to more about her One Human Skin approach and her product, we have that link in our show notes. If you like this episode, please subscribe. Make sure you're leaving a review. Every Friday, I pick one reviewer to receive a free 15-minute money session with me. If you're enjoying *A Healthy State of Panic*, well, let me know about that, too. You can leave a review on Amazon, where all reviews are collected. Helps the algorithm, gets the title, leading the charts, and selling more books, which if I'm being completely honest, I want to sell some books. So please let others know. If you're enjoying the

book, leave a review on Amazon. I'll see you back here on Wednesday, and I hope your day is So Money.

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