

SMOOTH OPERATOR

Face the facts, guys. Clean, clear skin is not just for women these days, says IMRAN JALAL

Ask a woman about her skin woes and, chances are, the list can go on forever.

Men, however, seem to have fewer complaints. Besides oilier skin, most do not fret about large pores, dark spots or uneven skin tone the way women do.

Men's skin also does not age as early as women's as the latter lose collagen – the protein compound essential for healthy skin – more rapidly. The thicker and oilier skin of men is also a boon.

Dr Wong Su-Ni, dermatologist from Dr SN Wong Skin, Hair, Nails & Laser Specialist Clinic at Mount Elizabeth Medical Centre, says: "Their thicker skin means more support for the dermis – the lower layer of the skin – as it acts like a scaffolding."

"Their oilier skin also keeps the face moisturised and less creased."

However, she notes that wrinkles can be caused by other factors such as facial expressions and sun damage.

Skin doctors report seeing more male patients in recent years.

Dr Lawrence Khoo, a dermatologist at Dermatology Associates in Paragon, has seen more men going to his clinic for concerns such as skin pigmentation and acne marks.

Three years ago, men made up 20 per cent of his patients. These days, up to 40 per cent of them are guys.

However, he notes that women tend to "seek treatment earlier and for milder problems" such as pimples and freckles.

He adds: "As women tend to use more skincare and cosmetic products on their faces, the chances of developing unwanted reactions to cosmetics are higher, just by the fact that there is more contact with these products."

That may soon change though. The guys are outpacing the gals in

buying grooming products, going by latest sales figures here.

In the 12 months till end-January, total sales of men's skincare products jumped 31.9 per cent, says a report by market research firm The Nielsen Company.

Women's skincare product sales paled in comparison, climbing a mere 9.4 per cent over the same period.

Given the jump in interest, it is no wonder at least six new names have entered the growing male grooming market since 2007, including adidas, Shokubutsu and L'Oreal.

Two brands came aboard last year: premium French label Vichy and Japan's Lucido.

At the end of this month, French luxury house Yves Saint Laurent will launch its male grooming line at its beauty counters here, including Tangs Orchard and Robinsons Raffles City.

While a man no longer relies on just soap and water, neither does he live by facial wash alone.

Jack Tan, product manager of L'Oreal Men Expert, says three in 10 customers here pick up a moisturiser as well.

In neighbouring countries however, cleansers make up about 90 per cent of sales.

Tan Seng Hwee, general manager of multi-label men's grooming store WhatHeWants in

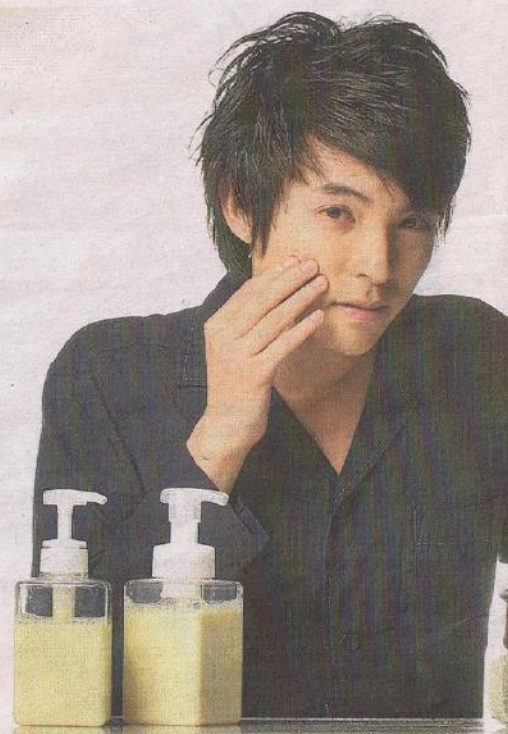
The Cathay, says that even as sales of fragrances have dipped in the credit crunch, sales of its skincare products are still growing at 10 to 20 per cent per month.

Looking healthy and well groomed "is even more important in the current economy if they are looking for a new job", he adds.

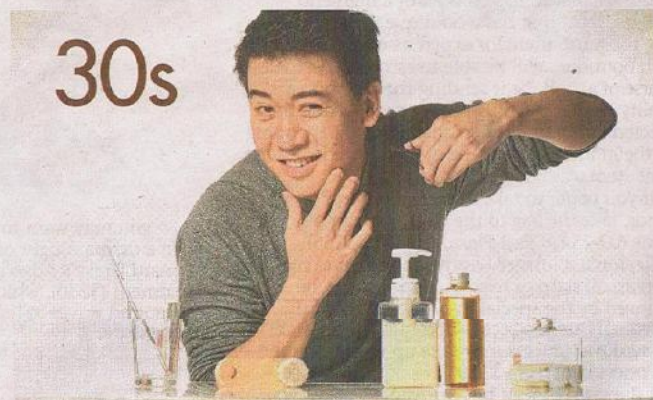
Urban faces off with four men – from a 21-year-old undergraduate to a 59-year-old grandfather – with great skin and pores over their secrets to looking good.

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Kenneth Lee, 30s, Singaporean actor based in New York City

Actors have quite a reputation for being a vain lot, but not this one.

In fact, Lee, who has been based in New York City for the past 15 years, was amused when he caught a late-night TV commercial for a skincare brand when he was back for a visit recently.

"Singaporeans are paying a lot more attention to looking good than I'm used to," says the Singaporean, who has had small roles in TV shows such as Law And Order: Criminal Intent as well as the 2008 film Deception, which starred Ewan McGregor and Hugh Jackman.

He also acts in theatre productions in the United States.

What products do you use on your face?

I use different things for different

climates. In New York where it's drier, I use Dr.Ci:Labo moisturiser every day and Anthony Logistics For Men Algae Facial Cleanser. Over here, I like Nugeno Men Deep Exfoliating Gel as well as its Radiant Youth Essence moisturiser. I started trying the L'Oreal Men Expert Deep Washing Foam recently when a friend gave me a tube.

What is your diet like?

I drink lots of water and have green tea every night in New York. I also eat foods that are high in antioxidants such as blueberries, which I have with yoghurt or cereal. I love roast meats but I'm trying to cut down on such greasy stuff.

What is your beauty secret?

I noticed that during my 3 1/2-month Basic Military Training stint, my skin got better. I guess when you are eating healthy food and have an exercise regimen, things work themselves out.