

nutrition

Apply it, then eat it



Some foods can benefit the skin

whether they are applied externally or ingested, says

AMANDA URSELL

Cleopatra may have bathed in asses' milk, but the actress Angelina Jolie has gone one better — by reportedly rubbing caviar into her skin. The £200-a-time treatment, during which extract from the eggs of Baeril sturgeon is smothered all over the body, is thought to be especially moisturising (the fishy smell is removed first) because of phospholipids — fats that hydrate the skin. This is a new development in a growing trend for foods that we can apply before we eat.

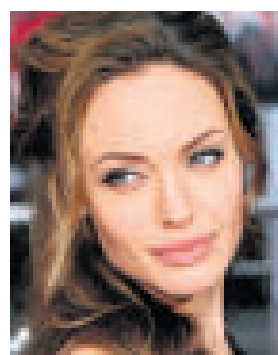
The merits of caviar have already been lauded by another actress, Catherine Zeta-Jones, who puts caviar in her hair. While most of us make do with Pantene, apparently Zeta-Jones, like various other well-heeled Knightsbridge ladies, visits Hari's, on the Brompton Road, for its exclusive Caviar treatment. This £100 treatment involves having Iranian beluga fish eggs rubbed into your scalp and hair, to allow their essential fats to nourish the hair follicles. "It is the most nourishing, and most popular treatment, costs £100 and lasts for four weeks," says Hari, who discovered the treatment.

Anyone rich enough to put caviar on her hair can probably afford to eat it, too, and doing so would give more potential beauty-boosting benefits, since its Omega-3 oils help to keep cells in the skin well hydrated and smooth.

Fortunately, not all foods that beautify both by digestion and external application come with such a high price tag. If you prefer your beauty treatments natural and cheap, opt instead for berries. Kirsty McLeod is a leading facialist who spent years in New York working with cosmetic dermatologists at companies such as Aveda. On returning to the UK, she set up her London salon, where she offers a berry oat mask. Natural fruit acids in the berries will, she says, help to exfoliate your skin and directly provide antioxidants such as vitamin C to help to reduce sun damage. You can make it at home by blending a cup of mixed berries (blueberries, raspberries and strawberries) with a cup of rolled oats, a tablespoon of runny honey and six whole almonds until it forms a thick paste. Apply it to freshly washed skin, leave for 15 minutes, then wash off for rejuvenated, fresh-looking skin.



Clockwise from top: Angelina Jolie uses caviar in her hair; berries will leave the skin rejuvenated; spinach boosts antioxidants; and an avocado mask is a good source of Vitamin E



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SCOPE BEAUTY

bling an orange peel. It may not be as bonkers as it sounds, according to the cellulite expert Dr Elizabeth Dancy. When applied directly to the skin in gel or cream form (it is found in some anticellulite products), caffeine is rapidly absorbed in the tissue just under the skin and stimulates "beta receptors" on the surface of fat cells, encouraging them to release fat into the bloodstream; this in turn may improve the appearance of dimply-looking skin.

Caffeine is also known to raise our metabolic rate, and so the calories we burn when we drink it may help cellulite from the inside-out. But moderation is the key: as Dancy points out in her book *The Cellulite Solution* (Cornet Books, £6.99), drinking too much caffeine narrows small blood vessels, which restricts the flow of blood and nutrients to cellulite and makes it worse. A maximum of two to three drinks containing caffeine a day will give you the calorie-burning benefits without causing damage to the blood flow.

What you drink can also help your beauty regimen in more ways than one, and beer is an unlikely but important contender. According to scientists at Tufts University in Boston in the US, beer is bursting with silicic acid, a relative of silicon that is hugely important for making and maintaining the spongy cells in our skin, helping it to feel and look

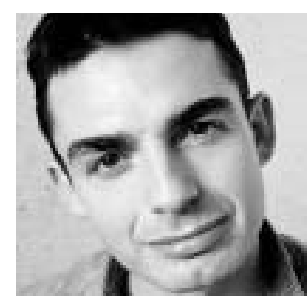
Enjoy the avocado's creamy flesh, then use the inside of the peel as a moisturiser

plump and youthful. Extra intakes of this trace mineral may also benefit our nails and hair according to the doyen of silicon research, the former Harvard University Professor Eugene G. Rochow. He found that when fed to short-haired guinea pigs, preparations containing silicon turned them into hirsute little rodents with hair 13cm long, while creams rich in silicon brought about dramatic regrowth of hair in young people who had lost theirs through chronic illness.

Perhaps this is why we often hear that rinsing our hair in beer makes it feel lustrous. If a half of bitter is not your favourite beverage and you don't fancy walking around with a whiff of the brewery about your crowning glory, then it is good to know that drinking an old-fashioned cup of tea is also good for this trace mineral, as is Fiji mineral water. No research has been done into the benefits of rinsing our hair in tea, but if silicic-rich liquid works internally, there's nothing to prevent it having the same effect externally. No doubt Hollywood A-listers will be showering in Earl Grey soon. You heard it here first.

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Tim Teeman



Cheap, lousy backtracking at the BBC

Traditionally, it's Slade from whom it's impossible to escape at Christmas. *That* song shadows us for weeks, recedes, then returns the next year to haunt us: a seasonal lyrical bogeyman. This Christmas another song has superseded it: the Pogues and Kirsty MacColl's *Fairytale of New York*.

On December 18, Radio 1 announced that it was dubbing out the word "faggot" from MacColl's line "you scumbag, you maggot, you cheap lousy faggot" because it was "offensive". Almost immediately, everyone, many gays included, said that the decision was ridiculous, why was it suddenly deemed bad, political correctness gone mad, blah blah. Radio 1 reversed the ban, and the song reached No 4 in the charts.

Of the furore, the Pogues singer Shane MacGowan, who turned 50 on Christmas Day, said/slurred: "That's just typical of the way this country is going down. I mean, it's practically a police state."

The present consensus is with MacGowan — that there is nothing wrong with using the word "faggot" in this context. Lighten up, you Milly Tants. My unfashionable counter-view is that there is something very wrong in using it, that Radio 1 was right in its original decision and should have shown more balls and stuck by it. "Faggot" is a term of anti-gay abuse; in this song it is most definitely an insult.

The subtext of the Pogues controversy is that it's not so bad because it's not sung by a bad-boy rapper but by that nice lady who died in that boat accident. And, oooh, that Shane MacGowan is just a dissolute fart so, rather like the sozzled uncle in the corner of the room on Christmas Day, just let him get on and ramble to himself. Indulge him, funny old thing. Hang on, you'll say, she's not actually calling him a "faggot", ie, gay. She's just chucking an insult. But the insult is an anti-gay one: "faggot" is intended to diminish him as a man, her errant lover.

Weird, but I can't imagine the BBC giving the same latitude to the word "nigger", expressed in the same way, or "Paki". It seems that offending gays matters less, and homophobia is more acceptable than racism. Indeed, The Pogues controversy comes at the end of a year when the corpo-

ration has shown it has a remarkably elastic way of navigating what constitutes offence to homosexuals. Along with the broadcasting authority Ofcom, it has sanctioned the use of "gay", by the likes of Chris Moyles and Jeremy Clarkson, to mean "rubbish".

On *Top Gear* "the lads" feel that they can sneer — ever so ironically, of course — at "poof" this and "poof" that. A friend watching the sitcom *The Green Grass* the other week said that a gay character had been belittled and eventually punched, and that there was something in this depiction (not nakedly homophobic but just scornful, dismissive, gays as the mincing targets of

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jokes) that had made my far-from-PC friend put his disgust in writing to the BBC.

To say that you're offended these days is to risk being accused of being humourless; of not getting the joke. It's the same risk you run as a woman who is offended by the endless parade of breasts in magazines such as *Nuts*. The new casual homophobia is couched as a perfectly acceptable, knowing joke, and coincides with a general feeling that gays have had quite enough equality: equal age of consent; civil partnership ceremonies (but not marriage). That we are getting a little too big for our boots.

There are lots of gays on TV in their shiny suits. But almost nowhere on TV or in popular culture can mainstream audiences

watch gays living, loving, having sex and not just playing the court jester. Yes, some gays may use "poof" and "faggot" among themselves, but that is no justification for everyone else to have a go — and, if it is, can we be as free and easy with "nigger" and "Paki" to show that we have a level playing field? Equal opportunities offence-giving.

I wonder whether some gays rush to defuse these little brouhahas by saying that they are not offended because we are entertainers and pacifiers, used to deflecting homophobia around us with wit or just turning the other cheek. Our instinct is to josh, parry, swerve, not confront bigotry. We don't want to be bashed. We don't want to be out of the gang. Of course we know how to "take a joke". We had enough practice in school and on the playing field. We excuse homophobia because we don't want to fight, cause trouble, be different.

We want a place at the table and, if we have to suffer the occasional sting or belittling remark, then so be it. But equality isn't about just what is enshrined in statute. It's about being treated with — and, most importantly, expecting — respect and consideration. You can't put that kind of thing into law, but organisations such as the BBC arguably have a responsibility to foster and encourage it.

In the end, I couldn't escape *Fairytale of New York*. E4 played it with the offending word intact. George Michael took it on the chin when playing MacGowan's part in a *Catherine Tate Christmas Special* on BBC One. The fact that the song reached No 4 is depressing: it was almost as if those people rushing out to buy it were not merely assailed by a sudden nostalgia but actually waiting for — indeed, actively investing in — that "faggot" line with some relish. Homophobia sells.

Only on TMF, a cable/satellite music channel, did a little bit of gay respect shine: they didn't trumpet it, and maybe it was a one-off, but there I saw the *Fairytale* video played with "faggot" dubbed out. The song didn't suffer as a result: simply, some consideration was extended to a minority group who have been abused, without thought, for too long. Perhaps, in the coming year, the BBC might show some steel and extend gays the same courtesies.

Desperate reading

Long nights, and deep glasses of red wine, have not meant unbroken hours of TV viewing. (This is odd. I love TV and will happily graze like a Friesian across channels.) This Christmas, I have also retreated into books. The Mitford sisters' letters, edited by Charlotte Mosley, are fascinating (even for the nicknames they gave each other: Hen, Bobo, Honks). Alan Bennett's *The Uncommon Reader* made me fall in love with the Queen. And the *EastEnders* Christmas Day apocalypse was totally eclipsed by Rachel Cusk's *Arlington Park*, the story of a group of silently suffering housewives in an upmarket suburb. I imagine Cusk's novel doing the rounds of women's reading groups, its tightly wound story of marital disenchantment and frustration encouraging revolution; a book where nothing much, yet everything, happens. As with Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*, you hold your breath reading it. Married women readers, buy this book and identify long-nursed grievances against your partners. Husbands, buy this book, be very afraid and prepare to mend your ways.

Comedy of manors

Much nervousness preceded the return of *To The Manor Born*. The BBC wouldn't send out tapes prior to broadcast to this reviewer — was it going to be a stinker? The first few minutes were not promising. There were clunky "relevant" jokes about multinationals cheating farmers and some racist rubbish about Polish labourers. Then the old magic suddenly returned. De Vere was the same cad; Audrey, ramrod straight and doorbell-ringingly domineering, was treating Marjorie as her slave and getting arrested for taking an E (in fact, a paracetamol) after going to a nightclub. It was quite daft and, in its resolute playing to Middle England, seemed in sitcom terms utterly arcane. I loved almost every minute. Can it come back for good? tim.teeman@thetimes.co.uk

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