

## Wrinkles in Wrinkle Cream Reports

So I'm sitting here, staring at a couple of close up pictures of some person's eye area. I see crows' feet in both. Are there fewer feet in the bottom picture? Maybe. If I look with a magnifying glass, the wrinkle lines do seem to be softer. Why am I doing this? I'm trying to see if the headlines in British newspapers that have been touting the benefits of an anti-wrinkle cream are justified. "Boots anti-wrinkle cream actually works, say researchers," reports the Guardian. Other papers also have been singing the praises of the curiously named "No. 7 Protect and Perfect Intense Beauty Serum." Why? Because this cream has ventured where no other cream has. Into a respected University laboratory, to undergo a controlled, randomized double-blind trial clinical trial. Cosmetic counters are filled with anti-aging creams of all sorts that vie for the attention of baby boomers trying desperately to hang on to their fading beauty. They promise miracles but usually deliver disappointment. Well, last year the excellent British television program Horizon ran its own less than scientific tests on a number of creams and concluded that No 7 Protect and Perfect by Boots, a huge British company, actually might have a wrinkle reducing effect. As you can imagine this caused a run on the product, with Americans quickly jumping on the bandwagon and importing it. Boots of course was delighted and decided that here was a cash cow to be milked. Imagine if a proper clinical trial could corroborate the Horizon experience. The company, whose own research had led to the development of the cream, and was in fact confident that there was an anti-wrinkle effect, enticed researchers at the University of Manchester to carry out a proper scientific study, as one would do for a drug.

Now the results of that study have been published in the British Journal of Dermatology, triggering a plethora of media reports about the first ever reliable clinical trial of any anti-wrinkle cream. Not only was it the first reliable trial, but it showed that the cream was indeed effective at smoothing away wrinkles. Researchers had enlisted forty-nine women and eleven men aged between forty-five and eighty with typical signs of sun-damaged skin. The participants were randomly assigned to use either the Boots product or a placebo moisturizing cream for six months. Neither the subjects nor the researchers knew who was using what. The results? After six months, forty-three percent of the subjects using the Boots cream showed some improvement while only twenty-two percent of those in the placebo group did. When the appropriate statistics are applied, one can conclude that this cream will reduce wrinkles in one of five people who use it. A significant but not a stunning statistic. Just what the active ingredient is, is hard to say because the cream is a complex mixture. It's a water in silicone emulsion containing extracts from plants such as Panax ginseng, Morus alba, Lupinus alba as well as Medicago sativa. There are also oligopeptides and vitamin A derivatives such as retinyl palmitate. This latter is a candidate for activity because in higher concentrations it is used as a prescription product to treat acne and wrinkles. OK, so the University of Manchester study showed that No. 7 works. But whether it works in a way that makes a practical difference is another question. Yes when I stare hard at the published pictures, which I think we can assume represent the best case scenario, I can see a small improvement in the fine lines. Would this be noticed when a subject walked into a room? No way! And remember that even this effect is to be expected in only one of five people. Doesn't seem like a great investment to me.

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