

ELLE®

The Season's Ultimate
SPECIAL BEAUTY ISSUE
Makeup,
Hair,
Skin Care

the secret ingredient

The ultra-moisturizing cream that dermatologists and plastic surgeons are prescribing for postoperative skin recovery might surprise some patients. "Crisco's not just for frying chicken—it's also for healing extremely vulnerable, delicate skin," enthuses Thomas Romo, III, MD, director of facial plastic and reconstructive surgery at Manhattan's Lenox Hill Hospital, who advises patients undergoing laser resurfacing to try the famously greasy household cooking aid as a face moisturizer. (It should be noted that Crisco doesn't recommend the product for anything other than baking.)

Once skin has been resurfaced (a controlled removal of the superficial layers of skin with the help of a superpulsed CO₂ laser, aimed at diminishing fine lines, wrinkles, acne scarring, and slight discoloration), both its thickness and its ability to fight infection are reduced. In order to heal, skin needs a steady, intense supply of moisture. The substance applied to resurfaced skin (called an occlusive ointment) must be inert—nontoxic

and nonreactive—yet must support and protect the skin. "All occlusive things are the same," says **Gerald Imber, MD**, a New York plastic surgeon and author of *The Youth Corridor* (Morrow). "Whether you use bacitracin, Vaseline, or Crisco, you're sealing off the raw skin from the air and allowing it to remain moist. I find that the simplest things do the job."

While the image on the classic blue label of piping-hot cookies may not be as faith-inspiring as a clinical tube bought at the pharmacy or a jar of pricey European cream, Crisco works. Dr. Romo believes in it so strongly that he has gone as far as packaging it in discreet little jars with his practice's private label for the timid and nonbelieving. "If people feel that something in a small black container with my label on it is better, we'll give it to them," he says. "With cosmetic surgery, you want little risk and lots of benefits. Crisco satisfies both."

A vegetable-based semisolid compound, Crisco was used for removing makeup in the '30s and '40s, as well as for treating dermabrasion and chemical peels (the predecessors to the CO₂ laser)—and has been on the market for more than eighty years. "You can't say that for newer products," says Dr. Romo. While some patients have developed dermatological reactions to products like bacitracin and Bactroban, neither **Dr. Imber** nor Dr. Romo recalls a negative reaction to Crisco. At around only \$1.50 per sixteen-ounce canister, and easily found in the baking aisle of any supermarket, the beauty secret of the past may also be the miracle cream of the future.—SARAH BROWN



Dark,
Brooding,
Smart as
a Whip...
**Gabriel
Byrne**

diary of an eye job

Louisa Kamps talks to a thirty-year-old woman opting to get rid of her excess baggage

