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How To Try A 'Secretome' Skincare Serum Made From Your Own Stem Cells

A firsthand account of regenerative aesthetics' latest development, as Acorn Biolabs banks stem cells from the hair follicle and creates personalized anti-aging "secretome" serums for patients.

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The author of the article

First member of the U.S. media to try my personalized secretome serum, made by Acorn using stem cell-conditioned media from my banked stem cells.

What makes Acorn's Stem Cell Derived Treatments the best?

Bypasses concerns around "immune rejection, inflammation, or incompatibility.

Desirability as a source due to its accessibility, regenerative potential and abundance.

Similar to the beauty industry's existing serums made from stem cell-conditioned media, secretomes contain banked stem cells' natural secretions of growth factors, cytokines, exosomes and more.

The difference is that Acorn's secretome uses the patient's own autologous stem cells and is purported to be more effective than popular patient-derived biologics like PRP or PRF. Preliminary clinical data is promising, showing a batch of the secretome's regenerative concentrations to be several folds higher than in the same patient's sample of PRP.

Why can't I just use stem cells from plants, animals or plant donors?

While the use of autologous stem cells sounds great in theory, there are several hurdles to overcome in practice. High cost, FDA-regulations around banking and the sheer invasiveness of liposuction make ASCs' and their aesthetic applications inaccessible to most. So while the ideal scenario uses a patient's own stem cells, practicality has called for donor sources. Hence the countless serums from donor-derived stem cell-conditioned media; namely, a human donor's "allogenic" stem cells, or an animal or plant donor's "xenogeneic" stem. From there, there is debate around the ethics, safety and efficacy of various plant, animal and human stem cell sources, from donor age, to medical screening, respective bioavailability, shelf stability and marketing claims.

How much research is there behind stem cells?

"The presence of mesenchymal and epithelial stem cells in hair follicles was first established in peer-reviewed literature over 20 years ago."

How does the lab access our stem cells and make them into a serum?

Culturing stem cells essentially means setting them up in a dish, "feeding" them and ensuring they do not differentiate into an unintended cell type. It's kind of like taking care of a plant, but instead of growing fruit or flowers, they release a medley of regenerative ingredients that can be collected and used in skincare formulas.

Stem cells are sometimes cultured with bovine fetal serum—but this is an example of the type of donor biologic material that Dr. Taylor explicitly avoids at Acorn. The media your stem cells are grown in at Acorn contains only "a proprietary balance of sugars, salts, antioxidants, and simple proteins [manufactured in] sterile, cGMP conditions rated for cell therapies.

What is in your secretome serum?

Dr. Taylor identifies "a range of bio-identical growth factors (i.e., VEGF, FGF, EGF, IGF), cytokines and chemokines, exosomes and structural proteins from the extracellular matrix such as hyaluronic acid, collagen and elastin."

Better than PRP

Growth factor VEGF was found at a 20x higher concentration in the secretome, Epidermal Growth Factor (EGF) was present at 10x the concentration, with FGF and IGF also present at 15x and 8x higher concentrations respectively.

Regenerative Aesthetics And The Future Of Medicine

Undifferentiated stem cells are the foundation for every cell, tissue or organ in the body—and Acorn has already demonstrated that follicle-harvested stem cells can be turned into “fat, bone, cartilage, pancreas, neuronal and even NK cells on demand,” Dr. Taylor says.

I also personally prefer human versus animal donors, with the ability to harness my own stem cells the most appealing of all. Beyond that, my hope is that banking my stem cells with Acorn will prove itself valuable in ways that go far beyond beauty; in the best case scenario, a futuristic form of health insurance.

Authors’ Personal Experience

Harvesting is Practically Painless

Having your hair plucked is not particularly pleasant, but it was certainly not painful or invasive. Throughout the process I drank coffee and chatted with members of the team.

Harvesting Process

The follicle was trimmed off of each strand of hair and stored in a vial, then placed on ice and couriered to the lab. I received e-mail updates every step of the way, including how many of the follicles had been viable. At the lab, my stem cells were extracted and cryogenically preserved for banking and culturing, as described above.

Use RF Microneedling or Heat Inducing Treatments?

Short answer, best not to as to “ protect the viability of the proteins in my secretome by avoiding excess heat exposure. Dr. Taylor assured me this was an over-abundance of caution, but does recommend avoiding heat after application in order to "preserve protein structure and maximize bioactivity."

Do it again?

Would I do this again? Yes, and I plan to complete a series of three sessions. Anecdotally speaking, I have tried the gamut of aesthetic add-ons, from PRP to PRF to PDRN, and I would opt for my secretome in lieu of almost any other non-invasive boosters I have tried.

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