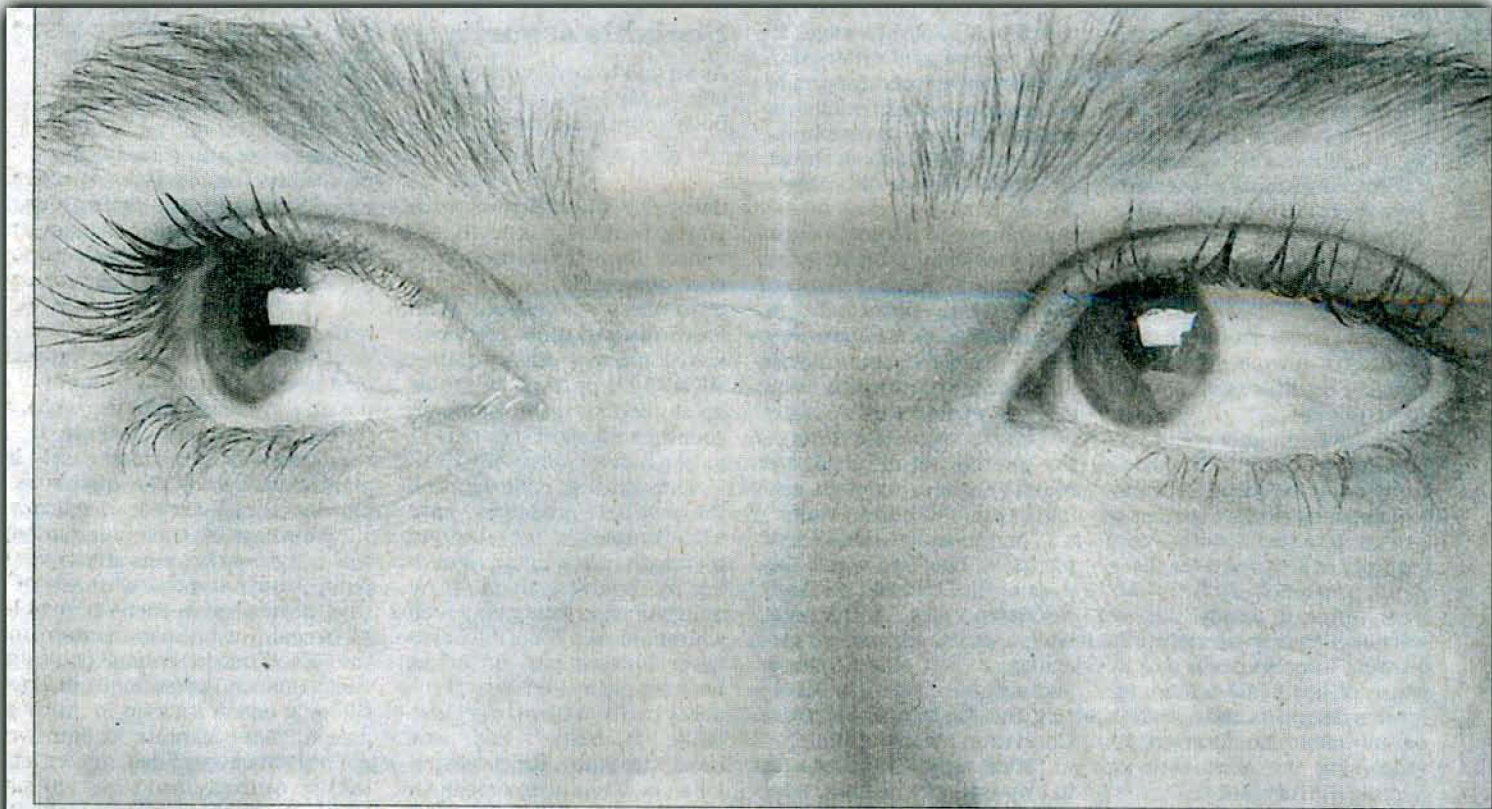


HEALTH

MONDAY, JANUARY 26, 2009 :: LATIMES.COM/HEALTH

Los Angeles Times

MEDICINE



A TEMPORARY BOOST: Many eyelash products can create the illusion of fuller, thicker lashes, a dermatology professor says.

THE HEALTHY SKEPTIC

Dream of fatter lashes

LashFood's makers say it's a natural option to a prescription drug. But ingredients differ, and experts aren't sure.

CHRIS WOOLSTON

Every once in a while, hard science has a cosmetic payoff. We use botulinum toxins to erase wrinkles, and lasers to remove unwanted hair. Now a company called Jane Beauty is promising to apply scientific principles for another purely cosmetic purpose: longer, thicker eyelashes.

The company's product, called **LashFood**, looks like regular eyeliner, but it contains some ingredients that you might expect to find in a nutritional supplement, including the vitamin biotin, the amino acid arginine, extract of irises (the flowers, not the eye parts) and a blend of 15 herbs. Biotin and arginine are widely marketed as vital nutrients for hair growth.

"We've been researching this product for three years," says Clare Kwon, a general manager with Jane Beauty. Though the iris extract and herbs help nourish the eyelashes, she says, "the main ingredients that really work are biotin and arginine."

Users are instructed to apply LashFood to their eyelashes twice each day. The website says users

can expect results within two to four weeks. Shopping online, you can buy a 10-milliliter bottle (0.3 fluid ounces) for about \$130. "It's a high-end, luxury cosmetic," Kwon says. The bottle will last five months if used twice each day, according to the LashFood website. LashFood is also sold at some spas and salons.

The claims

According to Kwon, LashFood is a natural alternative to Latisse (generic name bimatoprost), a prescription glaucoma medication that was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in December to stimulate eyelash growth. In clinical trials, Latisse was shown to make eyelashes longer, thicker and darker after four months of treatment. Latisse costs about \$120 a month, not including the doctor's visit to get the prescription. There's some risk that the drops can irritate eyes and darken the iris.

Kwon says LashFood is as effective as Latisse but doesn't have any side effects.

The LashFood website claims that the product was "uniquely formulated by cosmetic scientists" and that it "uses natural ingredients that provides [sic] you with stunning results: thicker, darker, stronger, longer, more beautiful lashes."

The bottom line

Like many other eyelash products, LashFood can probably create the illusion of fuller, thicker lashes,



Jane Beauty

COSMETIC: LashFood has biotin and arginine, touted as nutrients for hair growth.

says Dr. Zoe Draelos, clinical associate professor of dermatology at Wake Forest University School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, N.C., and the editor in chief of the Journal of Cosmetic Dermatology. The product probably clings to the lashes to give them more length and depth, at least until it's washed off, she says.

But Draelos highly doubts that LashFood makes eyelashes bigger. Despite their popularity in hair-loss remedies, biotin and arginine have never been shown to encourage growth of hair, eyelashes included, she says. "Hair growth cannot be stimulated by any type of supplement."

Dr. Leslie Baumann, director of the Cosmetic Medicine and Research Institute at the University of Miami in Florida, says it's theoretically possible that a natural product could make eyelashes longer and thicker. But to pull off the trick, she says, the products would have to naturally contain the same sort of hormone-like compound found in Latisse. A few such products are in the research stage, she says.

In 2007, federal agents seized nearly 13,000 tubes of Jan Marini Age Intervention Eyelash Conditioner — another "natural" eyelash product — because it was found to contain an unlisted prescription drug, namely bimatoprost (Latisse). Age Intervention Eyelash Conditioner is now sold with a different formulation.

Kwon says that LashFood works in a completely different way from Latisse and doesn't contain anything resembling its active compound. She couldn't point to any research showing that biotin, arginine or the herbs in LashFood encourage hair growth, but she did say that the company performed some informal, unpublished before-and-after tests on employees.

"We know for a fact that this product works well," Kwon says. "All of our clients who use it love it."

Is there a consumer product you'd like the Healthy Skeptic to examine? E-mail the details to health@latimes.com. You can read more Healthy Skeptic columns at latimes.com/skeptic.