



THE FEARLESS OLIVE

BY REEMA ISLAM

Spice up your life!

"No man should die if he can afford cinnamon"... said someone in the 14th century! London dockyard workers were paid in cloves while the Roman soldiers were paid in salt, coining the term "a man worth his salt".

Spices were one of the major reasons trade around the world flourished, the reason America was discovered and one of the best kept secrets was the

identity of the countries produc-

ing these golden

flavours. So the

next time you

flavour your

meal, think

about how lucky

we are to be in an

age where wars

are not declared in

the name of a spice!

An ordinary meal

in the home of some-

one from the Indus

Valley Civilisation

would contain salt,

asafoetida (Hing), green

chillies or perhaps some

pepper with an assort-

ment of vegetables and a

staple grain. While the later

day people like the Mauryan

dynasty had at least five

different salts to choose from

(Kautilya, the famous strategist

advised on cultivation of sea

salts, spring salts, black salt, rock

salt and some other types) the

Buddhists kept it simple and had

access to salt, maybe some pepper,

mustard seeds and amlaki, while

they avoided five major kinds of

foods like garlic and onion.

The Buddha once consoled a

woman grieving her lost child by ask-

ing her to bring mustard seeds from a

house which had lost no relatives. When

the woman could find no such house, she

realised that she was not alone in her grief.

The fragrance of black pepper travelled

from Cochin, Kerala to the far off shores of

Greece from as long back as the 4th century

BCE. It was called Black Gold and its trade

attracted the Romans and later the Portuguese and other

nations so when Vasco De Gama finally arrived in India, he

was sorely disappointed to see that he was not the only contender for Indian spices! It is only when he tried taking back pepper plants, his shocked hosts in the Kerala region warned him "you can grow this in your country, but how will you give it our rain?"

The pre and post monsoon rains of the verdant land, which is affectionately called

God's own country, is what lends the

Kerala pepper its extra punch. The

Portuguese sadly produced a much

watered down version. However, the

Dutch had found an easier way to

navigate to India from Cape Town in

South Africa and this led to the

British finally arriving on our shores,

to compete with the trade of this

exotic food additive.

In fact, British cuisine was

infinitely more flavoursome than

its bland versions today,

because once spices started

becoming cheaper and more

freely accessible, British arist-

ocrats purposely went for

blandness to set themselves

apart from the common

man.

The Mughals however

arrived from Samarkand

and Emperor Babur

lamented the lack of

fragrance in the Indian

dishes so by the time

of Akbar's reign, rose

water was sprinkled

on vegetables so

they could grow

sweet-smelling,

lending food

more aroma. The

Mughals also

included the

custom of

consuming

dessert after a

meal topped off with a

paan and thus savoury food might

not necessarily be spicy, but simply non-sweet.

So whether it is the medicinal properties of turmeric

or the ludicrous value nutmeg had in the 1400s, spices

have always and still continue to spice up our lives and

excite our senses.



Use of spices

Saffron dyes were found in artwork on cave walls from 50,000 years ago while the Phoenicians are said to have traded in it with the Asians. Saffron has long been the stuff of culinary fantasies and known to contain properties that heal many an ailment from alopecia to Alzheimer's, while being an aphrodisiac and a popular dye.

Kashmir produces a large quantity of it while about 8 percent of the world's saffron comes from Iran, but it is this dried stamen of the Crocus flower that is used far and wide. The Swedish make a bun using it while the Spanish indulge in Paella laced with saffron. The Iranians naturally use it in multiple ways and liquid saffron is used in teas, in pulaos, in the stew dish Khoresh and in desserts.

Fennel seeds or saunf was one of the key 9 spices of Anglo Saxons while Roman soldiers chewed on it for strength.

Fennel seeds have long been used in cuisine where they are an essential member of the paanch foron used to temper

dishes like daal, vegetables and even in sweet buns. Used as a mouth freshener, saunf is extensively consumed in the Indian sub-continent as part of the moshla everyone loves to have after a meal, especially sugar coated saunf or ones mixed with sugar crystals.

Tutankhamen's tomb contained the nigella seeds as well as a Hittite flask found in Turkey in 2nd Millenium BCE (before current era). The famed Kalonji was also a favourite of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) who has advised consuming a bit of it with honey to strengthen the immune system. Also an essential part of paanch foron, this black seed gives off a strong, onion like pungency which is ideal for vegetables like stewed pumpkins, the famous Indian dum aaloo or a Moorish touch in the form of a Moroccan chicken tagine, where saunf is called sanouj.

Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed

Food Styling: Star Lifestyle

I have poke marks and ice pick holes on my face. I have tried microdermabrasion several times which did not help. Can you suggest me something which will reduce these scars?

Fahim (21Y), Mirpur

Dear Fahim,

Microdermabrasion is a very basic treatment for recent acne scar not for old scars like ice pick or box scars. Usually ice pick and poke holes are very stubborn type of scars which shows marked improvement when we combine PRP (Platelet rich plasma) with Fractional CO2 resurfacing.

SmartXIDE VOLT

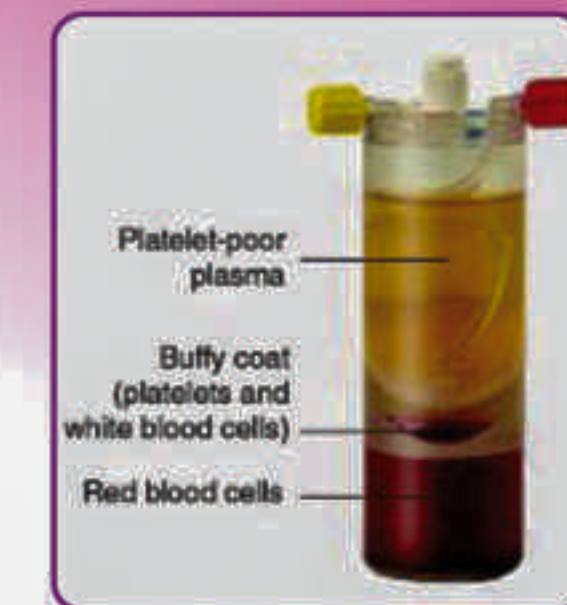


PRP contains (and releases through degranulation) several different growth factors and other cytokines that stimulate healing and filling of the scars and the soft tissue.

Fractional CO2 laser removes a microscopic thin layer of skin and replaces it with healthier one. This unique device tightens the skin and stimulate collagen growth as well.

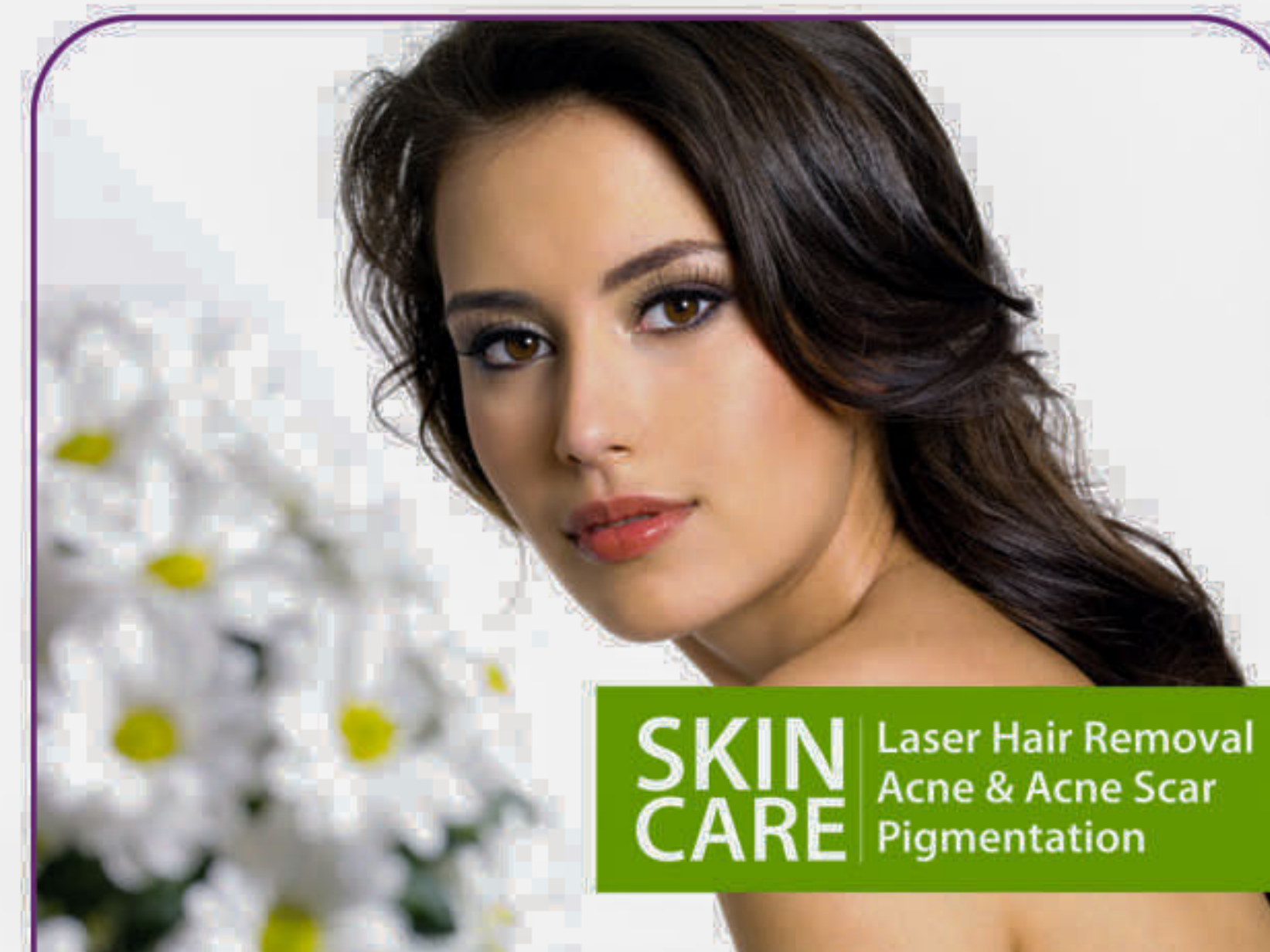


BEFORE AFTER



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