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Clothing with a focus on wellness is new smart trend

Post-Covid, items can be infused with ingredients to heal and act as ‘medicine’ for the skin, too

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“Smart” clothing emerged as a trend several years ago as many manufacturers started to focus on creating textiles that make our lives easier.

This led to the introduction of fabrics that tackle body issues such as sweating – see dry fit and antimicrobial textiles – or incorporate intelligent technology that does everything from regulating body temperature to collecting data using vital signs.

This trend has now taken a new turn as wellness and self-care have come into the spotlight following the pandemic.

More brands are experimenting with what industry insiders are calling “well fashion”, specifically clothes that function like wearable skincare, with the added benefit of improving skin problems or promoting better health.

– the greatest power source around – to elevate our clothing,” co-founder Gates Hinds says.

“It fuels our cells and mitochondria [the powerhouse of a cell], which in turn can create more collagen, reduce inflammation and aid muscle recovery.”

Other brands are infusing their materials or clothes with skin-enhancing, tried-and-tested ingredients that have been around for decades.

Loungewear brand Buki uses fabrics infused with marine collagen, which the company says holds moisture to the skin, making it feel softer and hydrated.

Knitwear specialist PH5 makes cotton pyjamas infused with hyaluronic acid molecules that it claims increase comfort and provide the same properties as face masks and other skincare products by releasing the acid molecules to the skin upon contact.

“People look at fabrics for their aesthetic appeal, but when you realise that certain fabrics touch our skin 24 hours a day, you start to question whether it’s good for us or if it’s doing it more harm than good,” says Kenneth Lau, a textile manufacturer and founder of Hong Kong-based Comfiknit.

“We worry about what we eat and drink, and the products we apply on our skin, but what about the clothes we wear?” he says

Comfiknit – the name both of Lau’s brand and its fabric – recently launched a functional T-shirt for sufferers of a chronic skin condition known as atopic dermatitis.

The fabric uses technology to remove sweat and maintain optimal moisture levels to allow for a balanced PH level so the skin stays healthy and strong. Its properties have been verified by research institutes, including the graduate school of biomedical sciences at Nagasaki University in Japan.

“We don’t incorporate anything into the fabric,” Lau says. “We use the natural properties of the fabric to ensure it functions like drugs or medicine. Our three-layer knit works in a specific order and sequence, creating the right environment for the skin to be at its best. The function is permanent and properties everlasting.”

Comfiknit is not alone in offering clothing designed to boost wellness. American activewear brand Under Armour launched a line called UA Rush that boasts infrared technology which promises to boost the wearer’s energy level, strength and endurance while lowering muscle fatigue.

US start-up Lumiton offers apparel that turns sunlight into red and near-infrared light, with many benefits for the body. The clothing offers protection from the effects of ultraviolet light and cools the skin, the company says.

“Red-light therapy is nothing new and has been used in the medical space for years. What’s great is we are able to use sunlight

Indian brand Monsoon Blooms embraces traditional Indian medicine, or Ayurveda, by dyeing its fabrics with various blends of herbs so that the clothes act as “medicine” for the skin.

► **We worry about what we eat and drink ... but what about the clothes we wear?**

KENNETH LAU, FOUNDER OF COMFIKNIT

These include neem, which has anti-inflammatory, antiseptic and antihistamine properties, and fenugreek, which is packed with vitamins A and C, iron, copper, calcium, zinc and folic acid.

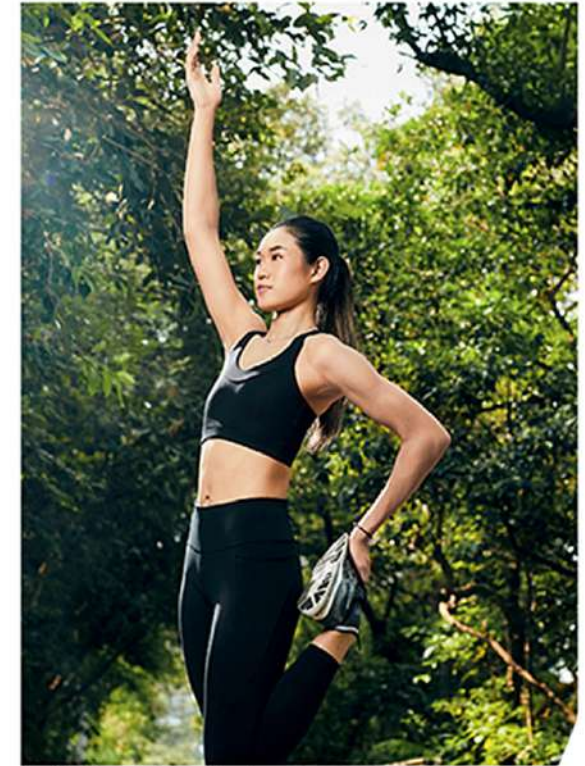
While the premise of therapeutic textiles is appealing on many levels, whether it will be embraced by the masses – or even by fashion designers – is open to question.

For one thing, many of these brands offer only a small range of clothing, with much of their attention focused on loungewear and/or activewear rather than everyday fashion.

Scaling up production in response to demand is another potential challenge, although the bigger test will be whether customers will buy this type of clothing in significant numbers.

However, Hinds says: “Fashion infused with ingredients to heal is more niche but has the potential to have a decent market size.

“What’s interesting is if this technology could become a gold standard that other brands can utilise, just like how Polartec became a way to make fleece or Gore-Tex is used by many companies. By offering added wellness benefits, we are elevating clothing from a baseline level, which makes it all the more desirable.”



Comfiknit sports bra and leggings. Photo: Handout