

them, then ease the cuticle back using a wooden orange stick, and rub in the cuticle oil every night.

If you can't stand getting your fingers oily, try Margaret Dabbs Nourishing Nail and Cuticle Serum (£10, margaretdabbs.co.uk) or a cuticle pen such as Rituals Cuticle Treatment Pen (£7.50, rituals.com) and John Lewis.

Diet is everything

EATING well gives nails and skin a boost. Make sure your diet includes plenty of protein in the form of fish, eggs, lean meat and cheese. Packing in colourful vegetables will strengthen skin, too, and the antioxidants they contain improve its ability to stand up to sunshine and pollution.

Research by Dr Mark Birch-Machin, professor of molecular dermatology at Newcastle University, has found that a diet rich in tomatoes increases the skin's ability to protect itself, thanks to the antioxidant lycopene that they contain (it's the pigment which gives tomatoes their colour).

Other beneficial antioxidants include carotene, found in carrots, and anthocyanins, which give blueberries their colour.

Pop a pill

IF YOUR diet isn't providing the right nutrients, you can take supplements to strengthen nails and thicken skin. Studies have indicated that Imedeen Time Perfection tablets (£35, imedeen.co.uk) improve the density of ageing skin by 122 per cent, while Evelle (£35.95 from multivits.co.uk) claims to have a unique formula to support skin, nails and hair.

Don't get in a lather

IF YOUR job involves lots of hand-washing, it's even more important to use a protective cream. Paediatric nurse Antonia Steven has created a remarkably good cream called 'Yes Nurse' (£5.49, yesnurse.co.uk).

Another cracker of a thick, protective cream is Farmers' Hand Cream (£12.95, welshlavender.co.uk), while Lanolips Rose Balm Intense for Very Dry Hands and Nails (£8.99, victoriahealth.com) is based on medical-grade lanolin.

Hand in glove

USING hand-treatment products overnight in conjunction with cotton gloves is a short cut to better-looking hands — the build-up of heat helps lotions to penetrate.

Facialist Sarah Chapman has created the gorgeous new Overnight Hand & Nail Treatment (£35 including gloves, spacenk.com), while Bliss Glamour Gloves (£36.50, blissworld.co.uk) have a self-activating, moisturising gel lining impregnated with vitamin E, olive and grapeseed oils. Wear them for 20 minutes at a time to soften, hydrate and smooth.

There is even a 'face-mask' for hands, the Sanctuary Anti-Ageing Intensive Hand Mask (£5.10 at Boots). Massage it in last thing at night, then pull on the gloves that come with it to help the product soften your skin overnight.

SMUDGE-FREE MASCARA

Loose Powder (Marks & Spencer; £12).

For mascara that lasts from day to night, try Estee Lauder Long Wear Zero-Smudge Lengthening mascara (boots.com, £20).

Swimmers should try Rimmel London Waterproof (superdrug.com, £5.29) or Clinique High Impact Waterproof mascara (johnlewis.com, £16).