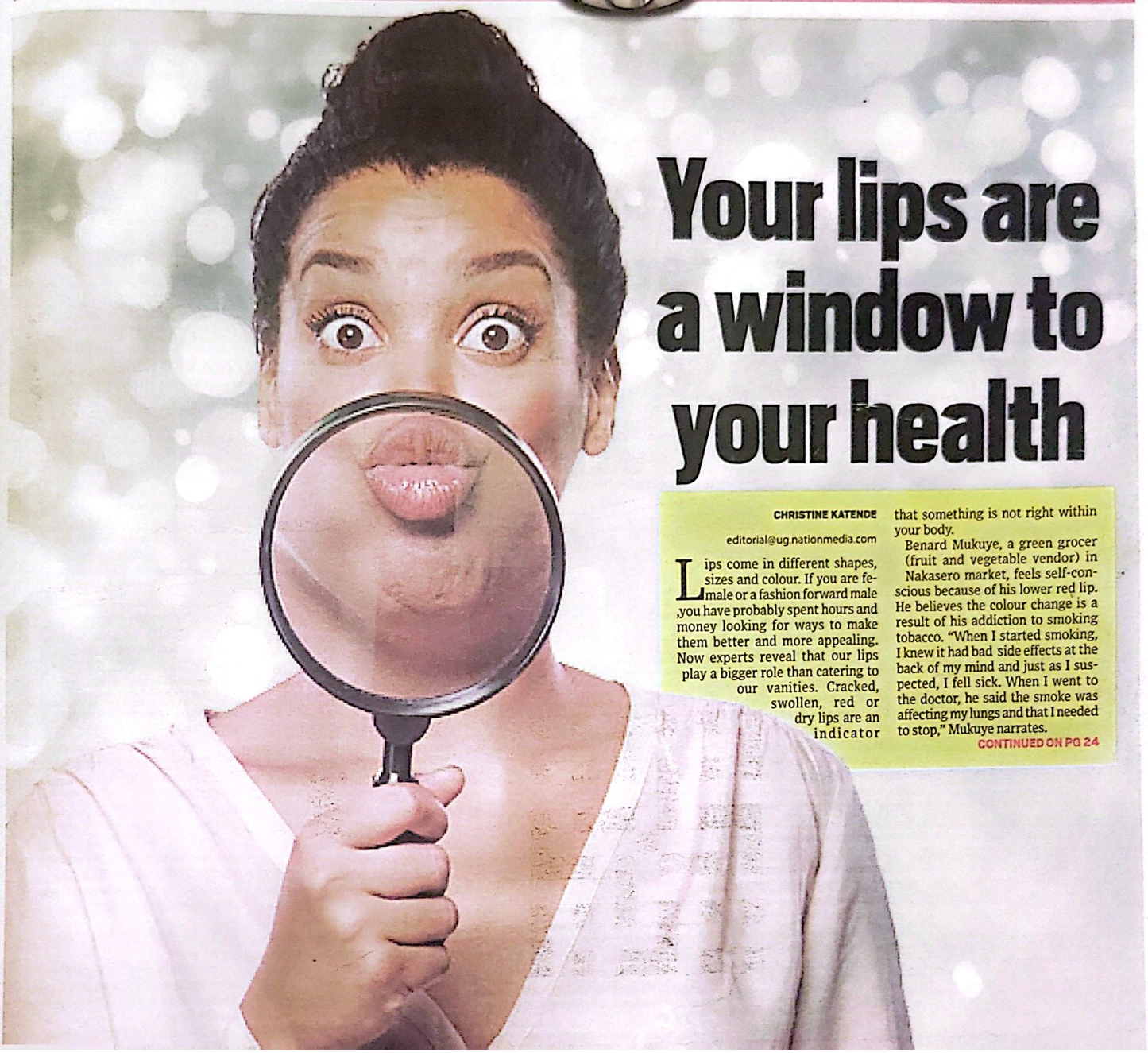
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Your lips are a window to your health

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Lips come in different shapes, sizes and colour. If you are female or a fashion forward male ,you have probably spent hours and money looking for ways to make them better and more appealing. Now experts reveal that our lips play a bigger role than catering to our vanities. Cracked, swollen, red or dry lips are an indicator that something is not right within your body.

Benard Mukuye, a green grocer (fruit and vegetable vendor) in Nakasero market, feels self-conscious because of his lower red lip. He believes the colour change is a result of his addiction to smoking tobacco. "When I started smoking, I knew it had bad side effects at the back of my mind and just as I suspected, I fell sick. When I went to the doctor, he said the smoke was affecting my lungs and that I needed to stop," Mukuye narrates.

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use lip balm to M... moisturised. I love lipstick, I use quality products particularly Mac, Clinique or Black Radiance products.
SHARON KAREU NWOBU, BUSINESS WOMAN

cannot dif... ones from fake ones
GEORGE KIZITO, PHOTOGRAPHER

SARAH KAB...

State of your lips is an indicator to general health



Do you like the texture, colour and shape of your lips? Are they darker, lighter than normal? These are some of the things to consider as they help prevent major health problem. .

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After a long struggle, Mukuye says he was able to break the addiction and stop smoking, however the damage to his lips had already been done and there was nothing much he could do to reverse it.

Cohen Maliro, a clinical officer at Doctor's Palace Medical Centre in Wakiso, explains that the lip's appearance speaks volumes about one's health. He reveals that red lips often signal a problem with blood. It can also be a reaction to drugs such as ARVs used to manage HIV/Aids and chemotherapy treatments. He further notes that high consumption of carbonated drinks such as spirits that have strong acids burn the lips, causing the colour to change.

Other reasons that might lead to the reddening of lips include chronic smoking and too much intake of Vitamin A. "When the person smokes, the nicotine comes at a very high temperature, thus leading the lips to turn red," Maliro explains.

Chapped lips can be caused by an allergic reaction. In this case, Maliro reveals that the lips tend to lightly swell, which causes the skin to crack and peel. The irritants range from certain foods to lipstick.

Dry lips; having dry lips in most cases signifies that the body is dehydrated, or the person has a frequent exposure to the sun. Maliro explains that when the person over expose themselves to the sun and without enough intake of fluids, the lips can easily dry up and sometimes get cracks. Another condition may be as a result of continuous breathing through the mouth. Here the dryness can later predispose the lips to turn red.

Dr Alex Kakoraki, a general practitioner at Murchison Bay Hospital in Luzira, says other health conditions that may lead to dryness of lips include diabetes mellitus. Depending on the type, high or low blood sugar, he notes that when sugar is on the higher side, patients tend to breath faster leading to loss of fluids from the body hence getting dehydrated. This manifests as dry lips.



Dr Kakoraki cites oral candidiasis which leads to oral thrush (wounds in the mouth) as one of the causes of cracked lips. However, cracked lips may also indicate that one has herpes or there is a shortage of iron in the body.

Watch out for pale lips as they signify that your current heart and lung conditions are affecting the amount of oxygen being carried in the blood. With this type of condition, Dr Kakoraki explains that when the level of oxygen drops significantly, the lips take on a bluish tone, instead of a healthy deep pink colour.

Swollen lips can be a strong indicator of poor health or food sensitivity according to Maliro. He reveals that sometimes lips swell as a result of Crohn's disease, which causes swelling in the bowel and this may affect any part of the gastrointestinal tract from mouth to anus.

Maliro reveals that peeling lips may be a sign of anaemia (low blood count) or a certain vitamin deficiency or an allergy from toothpaste or cream used.

In most cases when you are depressed, you present with burning lips. "Whenever a person gets depressed, there is a huge amount of sensory equipment in the brain that becomes overly sensitive thus causing psychological imbalance," explains Maliro. Lips burning may also be as a result of an allergy from a certain drug such as septrin.

Scaly lips are more common in people who excessively lick or chew their lips, according to Maliro. He further expounds that as a person continuously lick or chew the lips, there are few natural oils that are depleted away in the process. This leaves the area around the mouth dry and vulnerable to infections. In this case, he advises to apply medicated lip balm or to try and give up the habit.



SEEK MEDICAL HELP

Dr Kakoraki recommends that people should seek medical advice in case they are not comfortable with how their lips look and feel. Proper care of lips includes taking enough fluids, eating a balanced diet and using safe lip products," he notes.

Maliro however discourages self-medication in case of any condition. "Seek medical help instead of just buying medicine from the drug shop, because you might end up with wrong drugs that make the problem worse," he notes.

CANCER OF THE LIPS

Dr Kakoraki says sores on the mouth that do not heal and persistent mouth pain might be an indication of cancer of the lips. Other symptoms include hypopigmentation caused by the several wounds one has on the lips.

Cold sores on the lips are an indication of poor feeding or a sign that your immune system is weak. "When there is an interference of micro nutrients in the body, it means that the person is not having a balanced diet. And in this case, one's lips will become ulcerated or white, where they present as if the person has applied ash on their lips," Dr Kakoraki adds. They can also be a reactivation of the herpes virus. This is passed from person to person by saliva either directly or by drinking from the same glass or cup.

How to take proper care of your lips

Drink enough water to keep your body hydrated. You need about eight glasses of water every day for proper nourishment.

Eat a balanced diet. Eat plenty of green vegetables and fruits that are high in Vitamin E and Vitamin B such as avocados, papaws, and tomatoes. They also help your skin glow.

Moisturize often with safe products. Always have a lip balm in your handbag. Be sure to apply balm, or petroleum jelly every four hours to keeps your lips moisturized. This will also help to prevent darkening.

Avoid biting or licking your lips. Biting your lips constantly will leave them chapped and dark. While licking them with saliva causes drying. By avoiding this habit will really help you.

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