Lipstick has always been an essential cosmetic product because full and well-defined lips evoke a sense of youth, health, and attractiveness.

'A foolish man tells a woman to stop talking, but a wise man tells her that her mouth is extremely beautiful when her lips are closed' - Anonymous. Lips are often viewed as a symbol of sensuality and sexuality. This has many origins; above all, the lips are a very sensitive erogenous and tactile organ.

It is interesting to know that small amounts of visual information, such as the appearance of the lips has a major effect on how the aesthetic impressions of an individual and on the overall attractiveness of the face. When lips are full and well defined, they evoke a sense of youth, health, and attractiveness. Since ancient times, women have been highlighting their lips, and lipstick is a major component of the cosmetics industry.

However, wearing lipstick in 1770 was not without its hurdles - in 1770 a British law was proposed to the parliament that a marriage should be unnuled if the woman wore cosmetics before her wedding day.

Lipsticks were used by prostitutes and actors, using home-made cosmetics, including lipsticks. Throughout the 19th century, respectable women wearing cosmetics were frowned upon. Fortunately, the situation changed when Guerlain began to manufacture lipstick by the end of the 19th century, and by 1921, Londoners could legally wear lip colour.

When my daughter was about 6 years old, I fetched her from school one afternoon, and when she saw me, she asked: 'Mom, are you tired, angry, or are you just not wearing lipstick on today?' Even at that young age she knew what a difference lipstick could make to her mom's overall appearance! No wonder Liz Taylor advised 'Pour yourself a drink, put on some lipstick and pull yourself together!'

Human lips are unique: The skin in this area has fewer melanocytes, is much thinner than the rest of facial skin and the pink colour is caused by blood showing through. They lack hair follicles (unlike other mammals), are without sebaceous or sweat glands, and can therefore dry out very easily. They also have poor skin barrier function and have low water-retaining capacity, hence they need much more protection against the environment such as the wind and sun, which can cause the lips to become dry and chapped.

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Like the rest of our bodies, our lips also age - intrinsically (natural process relating to chronological age) and environmentally (mostly caused by the sun). Both types of ageing cause structural changes to the lips and perioral skin due to a reduction in collagen and elastin, together with a loss in hydration.

An optimal lip product should include agents that both condition the lip skin to improve texture and reduce surface lines as well as increase lip fullness and definition and enhance the natural lip colour. When the depth and number of wrinkles around the vermillion border (the normally sharp demarcation between the red-coloured lip and the adjacent normal skin) are reduced, the overall make-up appearance of lipstick improves significantly.

More recently, several aesthetic agents claiming to plump the lips (enhancing blood flow to the surface), and actives (oil- and water-soluble) have been incorporated into lipsticks, enabling manufacturers to make treatment claims.

The one specific lipstick product that has been around for the last 80 years, and has remained one of the most popular fashion items in the Western world, is lipgloss. Other than lipstick, which changes lip colour for fashion purposes, or lip balm, which often has medicinal properties such as soothing and healing, lipgloss can be transparent or slightly opaque, and is in general more affordable than lipstick. Its main purpose is to give lips a glossy surface. The first lipgloss was produced by Max Factor in 1930 to fulfil the needs of black and white (monotone) film actresses. Because of the general female population wanting to imitate these film stars, the first commercial lip gloss called "X-rated" was launched in 1932, but since then, it has been made in many variations i.e. metallic, glassy, pearly, and with claims such as sun protection).

In 1970, Bonne Bell launched the first flavoured lip gloss called Lip Smackers, Flavoured lipgloss is still a hit among teenage girls today. Lipglosses are packaged in many forms such as small cylindrical bottles with applicator wands, soft squeezable plastic tubes and even in jars as solid glossing agents.

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