

How to Care for Your Skin at Every Age, Every Day

Browsing the skincare aisle can be frustrating. There's a cream for everything from fighting acne and soothing scaly skin to preventing wrinkles and fading sunspots.

Which skincare products live up to their claims, and which ones aren't worth your time and money?

What about dermatologists? Can they help restore your skin without needles and scalpels? Research says yes, there is some truth to the promise of certain serums.

Start with the right cleanser.

"You want to avoid facial cleansers with harsh ingredients, as these can aggravate your skin," says Jonette Keri, M.D. Ph.D. , a dermatologist with the University of Miami Health System. A facewash labeled "gentle" or "mild" can be used in the morning and at night for every skin type, age, and climate.

"A cleanser with salicylic acid can be great for relieving acne (teenage years and into adulthood) and even for mild rosacea (seen in older patients). But, I don't recommend gritty scrubs," that can injure or inflame sensitive skin tissues, Dr. Keri says. "If you want to exfoliate the superficial skin cells, use a baby washcloth, and do it gently and only for 10 to 20 seconds a couple of times each week."

Keep your skin hydrated.

Washing your face or taking a long shower can dry out your skin. "It's counterintuitive, I know," Dr. Keri says. "With too much exposure to water, the skin

gets dehydrated. Think of how your hands look after being in bath water for too long.”

If you have oily or acne-prone skin, you may think that drying it out will help clear up pimples. But, overly dry skin can stimulate oil production and trigger breakouts. The goal is to help your skin maintain its natural moisture barrier that protects against irritants.

“Start by patting dry your face, not rubbing it aggressively,” Dr. Keri says. “While the skin is still a little damp, apply a gentle moisturizer. Pick one that’s fragrance-free. ‘Fragrance-free’ is better than ‘unscented’ because unscented products can have chemicals to neutralize odors, and you may be sensitive to those chemicals.”

If you live in a humid climate or have acne-prone skin, try oil-free moisturizers. If your skin feels dry or rough during the winter months, try a moisturizer that has moisturizing hyaluronic acid, calming colloidal oatmeal, ceramides (which support skin’s protective barrier), or even basic petrolatum.

Which skin creams, lotions, and serums actually work?

The most common topical treatment to reduce the signs of aging is a group of ingredients derived from vitamin A, called **retinols/retinoids**. They can encourage cell renewal and the production of collagen, which gives skin its firmness. Retinoid products are available over the counter and in prescription strength. The downside? These products might dry and irritate your skin. If this happens, use them less often and apply a moisturizer beforehand.

For exfoliation, Dr. Keri recommends mild chemical exfoliation products with glycolic acid. **Alpha hydroxy acids** (AHAs) like glycolic acid and citric acid can help remove the top layers of dead skin cells and increase the thickness of deeper layers

of skin, promoting brighter, firmer skin with less noticeable fine lines.

Beta hydroxy acids (BHAs), like salicylic acid, can help fade dark spots and diminish fine lines. When highly concentrated, these ingredients can dry and irritate the skin, but the results are typically better with more potent products.

Polyhydroxy acids (PHAs) can also be useful, with less irritation.

Antioxidants are another group of beneficial ingredients found in anti-aging serums. Antioxidants include **ascorbic acid**, a topical form of vitamin C that brightens skin, increases collagen production, and reduces the damage of free radicals (like UV light and air pollution). **CoQ10** is a trusted antioxidant added to fine line-fighting products to improve skin's texture.

"If you want to splurge on an in-office dermatological treatment, **chemical peels** give the most bang for your buck over time," Dr. Keri says. "**Botox**® (*botulinum toxin*) also gives quick results for deeper wrinkles, but is temporary (lasts a few months per treatment)."

Some noninvasive treatments that used to be offered exclusively by dermatologists and spa aestheticians, like **derma roller cosmetic needling** and **LED treatments**, are now available with less intensive, consumer-friendly devices you can use at home. These tools can target dark spots and wrinkles but may be less effective than treatments provided by doctors and aestheticians.

Don't underestimate the power of sunscreen.



If you apply only one product to your face every day, it should be sunscreen. It's your most valuable anti-aging skincare product. The sun's damaging rays can reach you almost anywhere - even while you're driving or sitting near a window at work.

To effectively prevent wrinkles and age spots — not to mention deadly skin cancer — sunscreen must offer broad-spectrum (UVA and UVB protection) with an SPF of at least 30. This protection needs to be reapplied every two hours, liberally and evenly, with particular attention to your face, lips, and décolletage. That's why your daily facial moisturizer with a minimal SPF isn't enough to protect your skin all day.

Of course, you can adopt other good habits to help maintain your skin's elasticity, thickness, tone, and smoothness as you age. These include not smoking, eating a vitamin-rich diet, exercising regularly, getting enough sleep, consuming less alcohol, and reducing your stress — all of which have significant anti-aging benefits beyond those for your skin.

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