



Taking the Mystery out of

Skin-Care

Products

There are a myriad of skin-care products on the market — online, at the grocery store, at the mall, everywhere! I am asked at least once per week about a product line that is new to me. In the case of these new lines, I ask myself several questions. What is the active ingredient? Will its molecular size penetrate the stratum corneum (uppermost layer of the skin)? Will it stay active, at the correct pH balance, so that it is effective? I also take into consideration other factors, such as safety, allergenicity and potential irritation. Most importantly, I ask: Will this person consistently follow their skin-care regimen? Of course, the best regimens are tailored to specific skin types and show results fairly quickly in order to inspire continued use.

Let's break down the components of a regimen.

Cleansers

Cleansing the skin every night is a must. Going to bed with makeup and grime on causes puffiness of the eyes and congested pores — just what we are trying to avoid. For dry, sensitive skin, we recommend milky lotion cleansers. For acne-prone or oily skin, we recommend glycolic or benzoyl peroxide cleansers, such as Jan Marini or Neutrogena Acne Free. For skin types with excessive redness or rosacea, we recommend a line of cleanser and toner that has an herbal, soothing anti-inflammatory quality.

Sunscreens

There are many formulations of sunscreen on the market. We recommend micro-nized-zinc- or titanium-dioxide-based products for broad spectrum SPF 30 or higher coverage. Some formulations are more cosmetically elegant and less likely to cause congested pores. Physical blocker type sunscreens are also less likely to cause burning or stinging of the eyes upon perspiration. One common complaint about sunscreen is the white, shiny appearance that it can cast on the skin. For this reason, we carry lightly tinted sunscreens that allow great coverage without as much shine and glow. Please apply and re-apply every two hours when outdoors.

Retinoids

Almost every dermatologist you meet is personally using a nightly retinoid. Retinoids — Retin A, Adapalene, Tazorac®

— are vitamin A derivatives that find a nuclear receptor in skin cells and regulate cell division. They do cause a bit of redness and sun sensitivity in the first six weeks of use, but after that, it is smooth sailing as long as sunscreen is consistently applied. Retinoids are powerful anti-aging, anti-pigment and anti-acne agents. True retinoids (which Retinol is not) require a prescription from your doctor and should only be used at night.

Glycolics

Glycolic-acid-based products are effective in micro-exfoliating the skin, thus allowing a fresh, dewy glow. Plus, they have the added benefit of dropping the skin's pH, thus making bacteria uncomfortable. The original use of glycolics dates back to the days of Cleopatra, who took soured goat's milk baths to smooth and exfoliate her skin. That was lactic acid at work, a slightly less-savory cousin of glycolic acid. In our office, we recommend glycolic cleansers, serums or toners and even sunscreen depending on skin type and where it fits in to the remainder of the regimen.

Moisturizers

Moisturizers vary immensely in consistency. For dry, winter-chapped or post-menopausal skin, we recommend very emollient creams to hydrate and "plump" the skin cells. Rosacea-prone skin varies since it is sometimes oily and sometimes dry. Normally, we would go to an herb-based formulation to soothe redness. For acne-prone skin, we recommend a light, oil-free moisturizer, occasionally containing glycolic acid.

Eye Cream

Eye creams with caffeine and antioxidants work best for daytime in order to reduce puffiness. At bedtime, the best eye creams are balmy and soothing in order to hydrate and smooth out the "crepey" look. Vitamin C-based eye creams are popular, but if there is irritation, sensitivity or allergy, they can lead to more visible wrinkling.

Firming Creams

Firming creams are the icing on the cake. They are very popular these days. Some definitely work better than others, but few, if any, give long-term results. The firming creams and serums work much like albumin in egg whites. When they dry, they contract, leaving the skin tighter

and smoother looking. This is a temporary effect, but very valuable to many, even just as a primer before applying makeup.

One thing must be said: Skin-care products work only when applied to the skin. They cannot reach you from the jar on your shelf. Many people purchase products — anywhere from simple to ambitious regimens — and don't actually apply them. This is like buying a 12-pack of Pilates classes and only attending one. The results will be equivocal.

Skin-care products can be a challenge to decipher. A few rules, however, consistently followed, allow for nice results. Washing the face at night is a must, and daily sunscreen is an *absolute* must. (In recent news, both Hugh Jackman and Troy Aikman have been treated for skin cancer). From there, the number of additional products will depend on your skin goals and condition and your personal fastidiousness. Choosing great products with the help of a trusted professional, followed by consistent use, will result in visible improvements. ■

The statements in this article are for general informational purposes only and do not substitute for individual medical advice.

Dr. Guanche is not a consultant for, nor receives consulting fees or compensation from, any of the product or device companies mentioned in this article.

