

whole living



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body+soul

The 5 Essential Skin Care Products

Skin care gets a little more complicated every year. New products tout "never-before-seen" benefits, while the ingredient du jour earns top billing as the next "beauty breakthrough." But instead of piling on the "miracle" skin creams and praying for results, why not keep to the essentials? After all, what's new isn't necessarily more effective. Sometimes tried-and-true trumps trendy. With help from the experts, we came up with the five indispensable items:

1. Start with a gentle exfoliant, rather than a harsh soap, to cleanse

Why you need it: It As skin regenerates, dead cells compromise luster and clog pores. Derived from plant and milk sugars, alpha-hydroxy acids (AHAs) slough skin without harsh scrubbing. Of the AHAs used in skin

-care products, "citric, lactic, and malic acids are the most gentle," says Torok. "Their larger molecules allow them to penetrate the dermis slowly, causing less irritation." Small-molecule glycolic acid seeps in faster with more dramatic results, but can irritate sensitive skin.

Try: Juice Beauty Green Apple Cleansing Gel, juicebeauty.com; Be Fine Cooling Peel Off Mask, befine.com



2. Apply an anti-inflammatory serum to nourish skin deep down

Why you need it: Stress and fatigue can lead to puffy skin and a blotchy complexion. Calm redness and blemishes with serums and gels that contain extracts of anti-inflammatory herbs like chamomile, calendula, and lavender. Skin needs proximity to these thin concentrates -- and their nutrients -- so apply them before moisturizing to reap the most benefits. Seek out serums with a wealth of organic botanicals, not just a dusting. (Ingredients appear in descending order based on amount present.)

Try: Avalon Organics Lavender Revitalizing Eye Gel, avalonorganics.com; Luzern Laboratories Serum Control Absolut, luzernlabs.com



3. Hydrate with moisturizer

Why you need it: Our daily habits (long days, sleep debts, frequent washing) deplete sebum, skin's natural moisture lock. That protective layer of oil holds in moisture and prevents irritation, says Fine. Without it, skin becomes vulnerable to damage.

For dry skin, plant lipids such as jojoba and sunflower oil replenish lost moisture and provide long-lasting hydration. Oily types need water- or gel-based moisturizers containing noncomedogenic ingredients, like aloe, that won't lead to breakouts.

Try: Grassroots Soak It In Super Rich Moisture Cream, grassrootslife.com; Zia Skin Basics Herbal Moisture Gel, zianatural.com



4. Protect with sunblock

Why you need it: Nobody wants the side effects of too much sun -- wrinkles, moles, age spots, not to mention skin cancer. Protecting skin against UVA and UVB rays is the foundation of great skin care, says Torok. She suggests a sunscreen of SPF 30 or higher that contains Mexoryl SX or stabilized avobenzone because they defend against both wrinkle-accelerating UVA rays and sunburn-causing UVBs. Fine prefers mineral sunblocks with titanium dioxide or zinc oxide, which deflect the sun's rays.

Try: Desert Essence Organics Age Reversal Mineral Sunscreen SPF 30, desertessence.com; Dr. Hauschka SPF 30 Sunscreen Cream for Children and Sensitive Skin, drhauschka.com



5. Before bed, use a cream rich in antioxidants, such as green tea, soy, or grapeseed extract

Why you need it: While the body sleeps, the skin restores itself, says Fine. Thicker than moisturizer, a night cream rich in antioxidants will help skin defend against smoke, sun, smog, and age. These stressors cause skin to produce free radicals (oxidants) that attack collagen, its main connective tissue, she explains. And when collagen breaks down, wrinkles and sagging result. Antioxidants such as jojoba leaf and vitamins A, C, and E battle those free radicals before they can do damage.

Try: Origins High Potency Night-A-Mins Mineral-Enriched Moisture Cream, origins.com; Boscia Antioxidant Recovery Treatment C, boscia.net



Experts: Naturopathic skin specialist Anne Marie Fine, M.D., who runs a clinic in Scottsdale, Arizona; Helen Torok, M.D., lead dermatologist at Trillium Creek, an integrative medicine center in Medina, Ohio.

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