

Health

3 Skincare Products You Should Never Use With Retinoids

Combine skin products with care! Plus, how to apply retinoids so you avoid dry, damaged skin.

MADELEINE BURRY | May 14, 2018

Retinoids are well known for being the ultimate does-it-all skin solution. This vitamin-A derived product—commonly used in its over-the-counter form, retinol—treats acne, fights signs of aging like fine lines and wrinkles, unclogs pores, and evens out skin. How does this magic work? "Retinol stimulates a quicker renewal of skin cells," explains New York City-based dermatologist Debra Jaliman, MD, assistant professor of dermatology at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and author of *Skin Rules* (\$9; amazon.com). "When someone uses retinol, the outer layer of the skin is sloughed off and the newer skin underneath is revealed."

What could be more appealing than fresh, unblemished, youthful-looking skin? But this revitalization doesn't come without risks. "Retinoids can be irritating and drying to the skin, especially when you first start using them," says Shari Lipner, MD, PhD, a dermatologist at New York-Presbyterian and Weill Cornell Medicine. And that's on their own—combine retinoids with other strong ingredients found in cleansers, creams, and serums, and the results can be uncomfortable—and unsightly, too.

Find out which ingredients don't mix well with retinoids, and discover tips that'll help your skin flourish while you use this miracle-worker.

1. Exfoliators

Retinoids get the job done by exfoliating your skin, and this is one case where more isn't better: When you add another powerful exfoliant on top of your retinoid—like alpha-hydroxy acid (AHA)—it can leave your skin raw, says **Ava Shamban**, MD, a Beverly Hills dermatologist and founder of SKIN FIVE. AHA is not the only problematic exfoliating acid:

Beta-hydroxy acid (BHA), also known as salicylic acid, is also a poor mix with retinoids, says Dr. Jaliman. Along with going after whiteheads and blackheads, the salicylic acid exfoliates the skin.

You can still use these products—just stagger your application. "Products with acids can be used during the daytime and retinoids at night," says Dr. Jaliman. Or, use an antioxidant as a serum, recommends Dr. Shamban. "It will both penetrate better and reduce the chance of irritation."

2. Astringents, toners, and other drying agents

Retinoids tend to dry out your skin—so the last thing you want to do is deprive it of moisture further. "It is best to avoid other drying agents when using retinoids such as toners, astringents, and medicated cleansers. These products cause further irritation," says Dr. Lipner. Consider, instead, piling on rich, creamy moisturizers.

3. Benzoyl peroxide

As you can see, mixing ingredients that do the same thing as retinoids—drying your skin or sloughing it off—can cause problems. With benzoyl peroxide, the reverse problem occurs. This powerful pimple-treatment can cause your retinoid to oxidize, says Dr. Shamban. Why's that bad? Put simply, when your retinoid is oxidized, it's less effective.

Tips for applying retinoids so you get the good results (without dry, irritated skin)

Start small, go slow: A little goes a long way, says Dr. Lipner. A pea-sized amount of the product can treat your entire face, she adds. And ease into the medication. "I tell my patients to start slowly, using the medication Monday, Wednesday, and Friday until their skin acclimates to the medication," she says. Once your skin is accustomed, you can increase usage to nightly.

Use sunscreen: "Using retinol can make your skin more sun sensitive," says Dr. Shamban, who recommends not spending a lot of time in the sun. Whether or not you use a retinoid, make it a daily habit to use a broad-spectrum sunscreen that's SPF 30 or above. (Try one of these dermatologist-recommended options.)

Apply retinoids in the evening: That's mostly to avoid the sun sensitivity side effect. "Retinoids are best applied at nighttime, since sunlight can inactivate [them], making [them] ineffective," says Dr. Lipner.

Don't use before wax and laser procedures: Planning to wax or get laser hair removal on your eyebrows or upper lip? Both procedures target the top layer of skin cells, which is super fragile because retinoids encourage cell turnover. The result could be burns and irritation. The fix is simple: just take a break from products prior to the treatment. "Your dermatologist may advise you to stop using your retinoid before waxing or laser procedures," says Dr. Lipner.

Stop using during pregnancy: If you're planning to get pregnant—or are already expecting—do not use retinoids, says Dr. Lipner, since they are not safe to use during pregnancy.

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