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The Do's and Don'ts of At-Home Chemical Peels, According to Dermatologists

BY KRISTINA RODULFO

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Like Seamless and Amazon Prime, beauty brands are making it so you never have to leave your house again. See: at-home peels, which promise spa facial-like results, no appointment required.

"At-home peels come in a variety of forms that range from the agents used to the application methods," says **Ava Shamban**, celebrity cosmetic dermatologist and founder of Skin Five. "Their benefits range from a useful gentle exfoliation to treating acne to improving texture tone and pigmentary abnormalities."

Because there are countless peels on the markets with different hero ingredients—like glycolic acid, lactic acid, alpha hydroxy acid (AHA), and citric acid, to name a few—we turned to both Shamban and fellow Beverly Hills-based aesthetic and surgical dermatologist Naisson O. Wesley, an Arbonne Scientific Advisory Board Member, to break down exactly what you need to know before trying a peel yourself.

**DO:** Read the ingredients.

"If reading the label is important for every day skin care, it is extremely important when choosing a peel," Shamban says, "If you choose incorrectly you may not turn into a reptile, but your skin could certainly peel like a snake shedding its skin."

"I would look closely at the type of acids. Citric acids typically fall in the same category of AHAs," Wesley says, "Not only do they speed skin cell turnover to help with dark marks and pores, but they can also encourage acne pimples go away faster."

Shamban is also a fan of AHAs, which she says "can be extremely useful for treating conditions from acne to pigmentation abnormalities." Enzyme peels (made with fruit ingredients like papaya or pineapple) offer a more gentle alternative.

**DON'T:** Get too caught up in percentages.

You might see a glycolic acid-based product claiming a percentage of acid in the formula. "The pH of the solution matters more than the percentage of acid, as acids can be buffered by other ingredients," Wesley explains, "Two to 10 percent is sufficient for most over-the-counter options." Shamban claims the percentage of glycolic acid should be higher for more mature and sun damaged skin. Aging skin can be treated with up to 20 percent. However, she adds, "With repeated peels, results will be seen almost regardless of the concentration."

**DO:** Test first.

"If your skin is sensitive, be sure to test the peel behind the ear or right in front of the ear before applying," Shamban suggests.

**DON'T:** Go overboard with skin prep.

Using a peel doesn't require prep, really—"just a gentle cleansing or a prep pad of the solution that comes with the peel," Wesley suggests. Make sure your skin is makeup-free and clean of grease—no need for heavy exfoliation or toning. If you're feeling ambitious, you could even use a facial steamer beforehand to let ingredients penetrate even deeper.

**DON'T:** Do anything that might irritate skin further.

"Scrubs, lasers, and waxing should be avoided for 24 to 48 hours. Avoid sun exposure before and after. I would also avoid other AHAs, and exfoliants for at least 48 to 72 hours before," Wesley says. On top of that, try to skip makeup for a day after the peel "to avoid clogging pores."

**DO:** Stop using retinoids beforehand.

Both Shamban and Wesley suggest dodging any retinol-based products for three to four days to decrease sensitivity of the skin.

**DON'T:** Use physical exfoliators immediately after a peel.

Take a break from the Clarisonic. "You are doing a chemical exfoliation, so be careful with any device that will do a physical exfoliation as you will be rubbing off the top layers of your skin," Shamban says.

DON'T: Peel too frequently.

"Light peels can be done as often as once a week or once a month for a stronger peel," Wesley suggests. More can start leaving your skin raw.

DO: Use gentle skincare products after a peel.

Seek products that add moisture and nourishment back into the treated skin. Shamban suggests following with a "general non-comedogenic moisturizer" while Wesley stands by a "soothing botanically-based formula."

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