

BEAUTY

SKIN SMART

Do you know your essential acids from your must-have moisturisers, your protein particles from your vital vitamins? Get top marks – and a gorgeous complexion – with our skincare crib sheet



Want to know the secret of really great skin? Surprisingly, it doesn't lie in high-priced products or wait-list wonders, but in knowing the ingredients that are proven to work and the simple steps that will make them effective for you and your skin.

"I am in constant awe of what well-formulated beauty products can do," says Paula Begoun, a US "cosmetics cop" who has spent 15 years producing no-holds-barred reviews of beauty products. "What I hate are the ludicrous claims, disproportionate prices and products that can hurt skin or mislead consumers into taking poor care of their skin."

Luckily, there are certain ingredients that really do get results, meaning the best way to boost your skincare savvy is to learn what to look out for. These ingredients are not restricted to the most expensive products – you will find them in items by big beauty brands and niche lines alike, in high-street bestsellers and high-end heroes. The reason they feature time and time again? They are tried, tested and trusted. "You must be realistic; there are no miracles," says Paula. "But aside from avoiding sun exposure, the primary way to achieve healthy, beautiful skin is with well-formulated skincare products."

And the best news is you don't need a doctorate in biochemistry to know which they are. Spotting the products that will help you make the most of your skin is easy: simply follow our five-step plan.

STEP 1: BOOST

Believe it or not, you can get a potent anti-ageing cream on prescription. In trials, Retin-A, a vitamin A ointment originally formulated to treat acne, was also found to lessen pigmentation and wrinkles. It does this by boosting collagen production and speeding up cell turnover; the downside is it causes redness and peeling. For the pros without the cons, the beauty business has developed alternatives that are less potent and so less irritating yet still effective. If you are serious about tackling ageing skin, you need to use a retinol product at night.



TRY

1. Environ ionzyme C-Quence 4, £96, tel: 020-8450 2020 for stockist information
2. SkinCeuticals Retinol 0.3, £38 (was £49), from effortlesskin.com
3. Medik8 Retinol 3 TR Advanced Night Serum, £31, from feelunique.com
4. La Roche-Posay Redermic R, £28, from Boots, a retinol anti-wrinkle treatment

STEP 2: HEAL

In your skin, there are substances known collectively as natural moisturising factor (NMF). These sit between the cells, helping to keep them healthy and hydrated, playing an important role in maintaining barrier function, which protects skin against damage from external influences such as sunlight and pollution. As we age, we produce less NMF, while stress, tiredness and being run down can also have an effect. However, skincare ingredients such as urea, ceramides, glycerin and hyaluronic acid can be used to mimic the way the skin works naturally, helping to heal the surface barrier function by binding water into cells so that they appear plump and function in a healthy way. This keeps irritants and redness, dehydration and dry skin at bay. Look for hydrating serums and day and night creams that enable you to hyper-hydrate without the need for heavy, occlusive oils and balms. And invest in eye patch masks and cloth face masks formulated to deliver a quick surge of moisture.



TRY

1. Institut Esthederm Repair System Eye Contour Lift Patches, £53 for ten, from feelunique.com
2. La Roche-Posay Iso Urea Smoothing Moisturizing Body Milk, £14, from Boots
3. Eau Thermale Avène Hydrance Optimale Hydrating Serum, £17, from Boots
4. Garnier HydraLock Hydrating Lotion, £5.49, from Boots

STEP 3: REPAIR

Lean protein is vital in the diet to help build muscle, but does our skin need it, too? The answer is yes. There are a group of protein particles called peptides that, when delivered into the very top layers, can “trick” your skin into boosting its production of firming collagen and elastin, encouraging your body to make new skin cells and repair damaged ones. Check ingredient lists for peptides, polypeptides and pentapeptides, as well as specific peptides such as Matrixyl and Argireline.



- TRY**
1. bareMinerals Multi-wrinkle Repair serum, £39; visit bareminerals.co.uk
 2. Sarah Chapman Skinesis Age-Repair Concentrate, £82, from SpaceNK
 3. Boots No7 Protect & Perfect Intense Advanced Serum, £24.95
 4. Dr Nick Lowe Super Charged SPF15 Day Cream, £19; visit drnicklowe.com



STEP 4: EXFOLIATE

Lactic acid, salicylic acid and glycolic acid are widely used by dermatologists to peel the skin, while in lower concentrations they feature in serums and creams. Designed for overnight use, these aim to remove dead skin cells, unblock pores, reduce pigmentation and speed up skin cell turnover. Also look out for impregnated face pads that you wipe over skin before you sleep, as well as deep-cleansing masks. These may tingle and aren't recommended for sensitive skin, but they do work and can be used to soften dry areas, lessen age spots and sun damage and plump out fine lines. Long term, they boost healthy collagen production.

- TRY**
1. Nip + Fab Glycolic Instant Fix Mask, £12.95, from Boots
 2. Paula's Choice Skin Perfecting 2% BHA Gel Exfoliant, £23.50; visit paulaschoice.co.uk
 3. Chanel Le Weekend de Chanel, £72, from Boots
 4. Origins Modern Friction Instant Brightening Pads, £31 for 40; visit origins.co.uk



STEP 5: PROTECT

Finally, no skincare routine is complete without a daily application of at least SPF15. Look for an oil-free, everyday formula with either a mineral sunblock such as titanium or zinc dioxide – which can be topped with mineral make-up – or a chemical sunscreen such as avobenzone or Mexoryl SX. Research has indicated that, used topically, antioxidants such as vitamins C and E, and green tea, as well as polyphenols from grape seeds, can bolster your SPF, so the best formulations contain a mix of both. Apply after your skincare but before your make-up.

- TRY**
1. Laura Mercier Flawless Skin Daily Face Shield SPF40, £28, from SpaceNK
 2. Clinique City Block Sheer SPF25, £18; visit clinique.co.uk
 3. bareMinerals Original SPF15 Foundation, £25; visit bareminerals.co.uk
 4. Estée Lauder DayWear Advanced Multi-Protection Anti-Oxidant Creme SPF15, £40; visit esteelauder.co.uk