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Best Face Forward

Wrinkles and lines and spots, oh my! Strategies to help your skin age as gracefully as possible, from OTC products to in-office procedures (and some stuff in between).

By Dori Price

Complexion concern: Fine lines and wrinkles

At Home A key ingredient for treating wrinkles is retinol or a prescription retinoid (like Refissa), says Ranella Hirsch, MD, a dermatologist in Boston. The vitamin A derivative speeds up cell turnover, leading to newer, plumper skin cells. Hirsch advises patience: Retinols and retinoids are super potent and they sometimes make skin look worse (irritated and red) before it starts to look better. Don’t quit at first peel—begin slowly, with a pea-sized amount twice a week, then increase the frequency as your skin adjusts. Give it 12 weeks in order to see a difference. If you just can’t deal with the irritation from using a retinoid, you could try a higher-tech (but pricier) approach: a professional-strength LED light source, which uses light energy to treat fine lines and wrinkles. One to check out is LightStim for Wrinkles (lightstim.com, $249). Use the device five days a week, for three minutes per area, and you should see an improvement in your skin in about eight weeks or sooner. If crow’s-feet are your main struggle, try Dr. Dennis Gross Skincare DRx SpectraLite EyeCare Pro (sephora.com, $159), a hands-free mask (you can multitask while you wear it!) designed specifically for wrinkles around the eyes.

At the Derm The most common quick fix is Botox, the go-to muscle freezer for forehead wrinkles, crow’s-feet and the space between your brows. The average cost is $500 per area (depending on where you live), and the effects last about three to four months.

Products to try:

Complexion concern: Dryness

At Home Choose products with humectants like glycerin, sorbitol and hyaluronic acid, which help skin retain moisture. For super-dry skin, Hirsch recommends a two-step treatment: a hydrating serum followed by a rich cream. Steer clear of foaming cleansers, as they can be drying—seek out cream-based ones instead. A weekly intense moisture mask will also give your skin a boost of hydration while pampering your skin. Look for products with ceramides and vitamin B5, two heavy-hitting hydrators, in addition to the humectants above.

At the Derm The HydraFacial is a three-step, 30-minute treatment that cleans, extracts and hydrates. Deanne Mraz Robinson, MD, FAAD, president of Modern Dermatology in Westport, CT, is a huge fan. This is not your typical facial with manual extractions and masks, explains Robinson. It’s an effective quick fix for dehydrated skin. In the final step of this facial, your skin becomes infused with ultra-hydrating serums. HydraFacials start at $150. If you’re interested in trying this face-changer, locate the nearest spa or salon at hydrafacial.com/find-a-provider.

Products to try:
PCA Skin Hyaluronic Acid Boosting Serum, pcaskin.com, $115. CBD For Life Pure CBD Face Cream, cdbforlife.us, $35. Glossier Moisturizing Moon Mask, glossier.com, $22.

WATER WORKS Hydrate from the inside out—aim for eight glasses of H2O daily.
Complexion concern: Sagging

**At Home** While sagging is hard to treat with topical products, hyaluronic acid can have a plumping effect when used consistently, says Hirsch. Resveratrol is another recommended ingredient—in addition to protecting skin from free-radical damage, it helps thicken epidermal cells and firm skin from within. Peptides can be beneficial too, as they build collagen and elastin fibers to plump and increase elasticity in skin. If you want to go beyond skin care but aren’t ready for injections, both derms recommend the NuFace Trinity Facial Toning Device (myNuface.com, $325) for at-home firming. The device firms, lifts and tones by using microcurrent heat to trigger the creation of new collagen. Think of it as a mini electric jolt that causes the skin to have a little contraction, similar to working your muscles at the gym. It is time-consuming—you’ll have to use it for five minutes a day, five times a week for at least a couple of months—but it will noticeably lift and tighten your skin.

**At the Derm** Injectable fillers (usually hyaluronic acid) do exactly what their name suggests: fill in sunken or sagging areas to contour and re-volume skin, says Robinson. Common treatment spots are the cheekbone area (we tend to lose volume in the mid-face), jawline and nasolabial folds, which run from each side of the nose to the corners of the mouth. Restylane Lyft and Juvaderm Voluma are two widely available options; they range from $750 to $1,500 per treatment, and the effects can last six months to two years. Pricey but a good choice if you want a longer-term solution (and less daily work!).

Complexion concern: Dark spots

**At Home** Vitamin C is the tried-and-true brightening ingredient, says Robinson. It lightens pigmentation over time and—bonus!—as an antioxidant, it fights free-radical damage. Kojic acid and licorice extract are two other lightening all-stars. Be on the lookout for these in a daily serum or moisturizer. Take your at-home routine to the next level with a DIY peel containing glycolic or lactic acid or both. Peels help remove pigmentation on the top level of skin to reveal a more even skin tone, says Robinson. Think of it like vitamin C on steroids for those times when you want instant, strong results. She also suggests using a sonic cleansing tool, like the Clarisonic Mia Smart (clarisonic.com, $199) or Foreo Luna 2 (foreo.com, $199), to really clean out pores and allow products to penetrate deeper. This is especially relevant for brightening products, but other treatments also perform better when they go deeper into your skin.

**At the Derm** Lasers are the best way to eliminate pigmentation, says Robinson. She recommends Clear & Brilliant, VBeam and the Picosure laser—any of the three should be used for a series of three or four monthly treatments and generally range from $200 to $300 (Clear & Brilliant), $300 to $400 (VBeam) and $400 to $800 (Picosure) per treatment. Ask your doctor which laser is best for you. For a more cost-effective option, Hirsch recommends in-office chemical peels (starting at $250 per treatment), which are stronger than at-home versions and can be done monthly if needed. They won’t penetrate as deeply as lasers, but they will address surface-level discoloration.