



TIME ZONES

Great skin isn't just about which ingredients you apply—it's about when you apply them. Here, the best A.M. and P.M. routines, deconstructed. By Megan O'Neill

☉ RISE AND SHINE

Morning skin care's mission: protection. Broad-spectrum SPF inhibits UV damage, but "an antioxidant along with sunscreen is the best defense," says New York derm Whitney Bowe, MD, who recommends vitamins C and E to scavenge free radicals and reduce inflammation. Another A.M. hero, salicylic acid, does more than fight acne. New York derm Patricia Wexler, MD, applies a salicylic acid lotion after cleansing (before moisturizer and sunscreen), as its exfoliating properties smooth pores and give skin a glow. **L.A. derm Annie Chiu, MD, says sal acid "quiets the sebaceous glands,"** which, triggered by circadian rhythms, are most prolific during the day. Calming ingredients such as aloe and chamomile are also best used in the morning, before skin becomes irritated by pollution and sun exposure. **"You want to prevent the issue,"** Chiu says. **"Not chase it."**

☾ NIGHT WATCH

During sleep, cells are in repair mode, and "temperature and blood flow rise, which increases absorption of active ingredients," Chiu says. Cue retinoids: Because these derm-loved vitamin A derivatives can lose their efficacy in daylight, they do their best cell-renewing and collagen-replenishing work at night. Studies show that applying a pea-size amount of a prescription retinoid to the face, avoiding the delicate eye area, can still diminish crow's feet. "Through diffusion or another process—it's probably not a single pathway—a retinoid can travel to adjacent areas," Chiu says.

Nighttime is also the right time for antiaging powerhouses such as growth factors. These proteins "signal cells to behave like young, healthy cells to improve tone and elasticity," says New York dermatologist Joshua Zeichner, MD.

DANGEROUS LIAISONS

Some ingredients just don't play nice together. Here, five skin-care combos to avoid.

EXFOLIATING ACIDS

+ GROWTH FACTORS OR VITAMIN C

Alpha hydroxy acid, beta hydroxy acid, and retinoids can overpower many actives—especially difficult-to-stabilize vitamin C and easily-broken-down growth factors—putting them out of commission. "As a general rule, don't use acids with products that come in dark or opaque bottles," Zeichner says, packaging that indicates that "their ingredients are sensitive to light, temperature, or pH." For acid fans who want the benefits of those other key actives, he suggests spacing out products morning and night.

BENZOYL PEROXIDE

+ ANTIOXIDANTS

When good old-fashioned benzoyl peroxide—an oxidant that creates phenyl-free radicals that kill acne bacteria—is mixed with an antioxidant, both lose their effectiveness. One exception: A new UCLA study shows that resveratrol and benzoyl peroxide, when combined, can have a potent effect on acne. Because benzoyl peroxide's release of bacteria-killing free radicals is only partially hampered by resveratrol, its antibacterial effect remains, and resveratrol's anti-inflammatory, skin-protecting benefits stay active.

ANTIMICROBIALS + PROBIOTICS

Probiotics are microbes that reduce inflammation and balance the good and bad bacteria that live on skin. So, for obvious reasons, Zeichner cautions against using them with antimicrobials, such as sulfur, tea tree oil, and benzoyl peroxide.

ALPHA HYDROXY ACIDS + H₂O

When acid and water mix, the reaction "changes the structure of the acid, making it inactive," Zeichner says. At home, he suggests leaving a glycolic cleanser on for at least a minute before rinsing to allow time for effective chemical exfoliation to occur.