

# The acid test

Acids are essential for younger looking skin – here's everything you need to know about the best time-fighting formulas

**Y**our skin may tingle at the mere mention of acid, but these not-so-secret skincare staples can resurface, refine and plump up your complexion. They also help to reverse sun damage, rev up collagen production and minimise scarring. "Acidic products offer an advantage over other skincare agents in certain situations, as they are 'active'; they can effect vigorous physical and chemical changes in the skin," says dermatologist Dr Adam Sheridan. Here, experts break down the elite formulas so you can put your best face forward.

THE ACID:

**Glycolic**

THE CONCERN:

**FLAKY SKIN AND PIGMENTATION**



"Glycolic acid is the proven performer in the acid stable," says Dr Sheridan. As the smallest molecule of all the acids, it can penetrate the deepest to combat sun damage, pigmentation, acne, blackheads, dilated pores and superficial scars. Derived from sugar cane, it loosens the connection between the top-most skin cells to allow exfoliation of dead skin. "It also causes collagen regeneration, and thickening of the epidermis and the dermis," adds dermatologist Dr Li-Chuen Wong. Gentle AHA cleansers, toners and moisturisers can be used daily, but be wary of overdoing it as overuse can cause redness and irritation.

**BEST BUYS** Mario Badescu Glycolic Acid Toner, \$26; Ole Henriksen Invigorating Night Treatment, \$64. ►



THE ACID:  
**Salicylic**  
THE CONCERN:  
**ACNE AND CONGESTION**

A beta hydroxy acid, salicylic is the only compound capable of penetrating deep into pores to clear excess sebum and debris. "This special point of difference allows it to work well on greasy skin and within overactive sebaceous glands in acne," says Dr Sheridan.

A derivative of aspirin, it boasts anti-inflammatory properties, unblocks follicles and also benefits pigmentation and rosacea. Use it sparingly, however, as there can be a risk of chemical burn if applied in too high a concentration or left on for too long, says Dr Sheridan.

**BEST BUYS**  
**Rationale Catalyst Skin Refining Serum**, \$148; **Paula's Choice Resist BHA 9**, \$54.

THE ACID:  
**Lactic**  
THE CONCERN:  
**SENSITIVE SKIN, DISCOLOURATION, UNEVEN TEXTURE**

Made famous by Cleopatra and her milk baths, this popular alpha hydroxy acid has been branded a gentler version of glycolic. "It's similar in action, and has the same potential benefits and cautions as glycolic acid. It's favoured by dermatologists when a moisturising and skin-plumping effect is desirable – especially in cases of sensitive skin," explains Dr Sheridan. As it's a larger molecule, it doesn't penetrate as fast into the skin's surface and causes less inflammation, says Dr Wong.

**BEST BUYS**  
**Dr LeWinn's Reversaderm Micro-Cellular Age Correcting Peel**, \$49.95; **Philosophy Miracle Worker Miraculous Anti-Aging Lactic Acid Cleanser & Mask**, \$45.



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THE ACID:  
**Retinoic**  
THE CONCERN:  
**WRINKLES AND SAGGING**

"The undisputed king of active skin products, retinoic acid is a derivative of vitamin A," says Dr Sheridan. Considered the gold standard of anti-agers, it can help with anything from smoothing fine lines and increasing collagen production to diminishing dark spots and preventing abnormal or malignant skin cells from developing.

While it does have a reputation for causing flakiness and irritation, new over-the-counter formulas are combining this powerful molecule with skin soothers, such as antioxidants, to minimise inflammation. One caveat: it can increase the risk of photosensitivity, so apply a broad-spectrum SPF of no less than 30 before heading outdoors.

**BEST BUYS**  
**L'Oréal Paris Revitalift Magic Blur Instant Skin Smoother**, \$34.95; **Dr Dennis Gross Ferulic + Retinol Wrinkle Recovery Overnight Serum**, \$132.



THE ACID:  
**L-ascorbic**  
THE CONCERN:  
**SUN DAMAGE**

The active form of vitamin C, L-ascorbic acid is a potent antioxidant that protects cells from UV damage and oxidative stress. "It's also involved in collagen production – it not only prevents skin ageing but contributes to its reversal," says Dr Sheridan. And here's good news for those with pigmentation: it slows the production of melanin (the pigment found in skin) to even tone and promote a clearer complexion.

"Start off by using a product containing 10 per cent vitamin C a few times a week, building up to nightly use," advises Dr Wong. "Then you can increase the concentration to 15 per cent, and finally to 20 per cent."

**BEST BUYS**  
**SkinCeuticals Serum 20 AOX+**, \$149; **Algenist Genius Ultimate Anti-Aging Vitamin C Serum**, \$152.



THE ACID:  
**Mandelic**  
THE CONCERN:  
**PIGMENTATION AND ROSACEA**

It's known as the 'up and coming' acid, thanks to a growing awareness of its potential, says Dr Sheridan. "Mandelic acid is regarded as one of the 'gentle' acids, yet it still penetrates deeply within pores and the surrounding skin to effectively clear skin debris, blackheads, acne and pigmentation," he says.

Derived from bitter almonds, it offers a particular advantage when treating skin disorders such as melasma (patchy discolouration) especially in darker skin types. As it's less likely to cause irritation and post-inflammatory pigmentation, Dr Wong recommends using it two to four times a week.

**BEST BUYS**  
**Éminence Organic Skin Care Calm Skin Chamomile Exfoliating Peel**, \$124; **Indermica Mandelic Scrub**, \$53.

