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Strip down

Reduce fine lines and reveal more radiant skin with a peel treatment

Dull-looking skin can be a drag. The same goes for uneven pigmentation, acne scars and fine lines. If you're craving a radiant, air-brushed complexion, then chemical peels might be the solution for you.

"Peels are generally great for refreshing the skin, evening out skin tone and treating acne, blackheads and excessive pigmentation," says Dr. Peter Vignjevic, a dermatologist in Hamilton, Ont. Some peels may also reduce the appearance of fine wrinkles and treat superficial sun damage. Because skin regenerates about every four weeks, dead cells move toward the surface, contributing to dull-looking skin, clogged pores and uneven texture, according to Vignjevic.

"I compare using peels to [doing] sit-ups – the more you do, the better results you get," he says. Mild peels can be used every two weeks while more aggressive ones should be used once a month.

How they work

Most peels are applied like a mask to the face and left on for about 15 minutes, during which time the alpha hydroxy and salicylic acids contained in the solution exfoliate the top layer of the skin, causing it to peel off, and leaving a clearer, smoother and more radiant complexion. Results vary depending on your skin condition, the strength of the peel and the frequency with which you get a peel.

Professional peels

There are various types and strengths of peels used by dermatologists. According to Vignjevic, milder ones are enlisted for superficial troubles, such as removing blackheads, while stronger ones penetrate deeper and, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, are often used to combat light wrinkles. A dermatologist will recommend the appropriate one for you after assessing your skin.

If you opt for the mildest chemical peel, you can go back to work immediately afterward. "Although you get a lot of exfoliation, like visibly peeling skin, you can still go to work – it's just harder to apply makeup," says Vignjevic. But if you opt for a stronger peel containing a higher percentage of acid, in order to combat sun damage or deep acne scars, expect more unsightly short-term side-effects such as swelling, blistering and scabbing, which can last for up to two weeks. After all, you are essentially burning off the uppermost layers of the skin to reveal smoother skin underneath. If the thought of a professional peel makes you weak in the knees, you're probably better suited for at-home treatments.

DIY peels

You may want to consider the at-home alternative if dermatologist visits aren't in your budget. Typically, DIY peels are less expensive than pro-

fessional ones and are much less potent, making them totally safe to use. There's no chance of burning yourself. However, at-home peels are also less effective, largely because they contain a lower amount of exfoliating acids. "The strength of the peel you use at home may contain between four and eight per cent of both acids, whereas professional peels contain between 20 and 70 per cent," explains Vignjevic. Still, at-home peels are not futile; they can help your skin look brighter and clearer.

When shopping for kits, choose one that contains salicylic acid, lactic acid or glycolic acid – the most effective exfoliators. Once you apply the peel, you may feel some tingling or stinging, but you shouldn't experience pain. "If you get extreme redness, or feel pain, wash it off immediately," says Vignjevic.

Precautions

Although peels can be used by most people beginning in their 20s, Vignjevic says they're not for absolutely everyone. If you have highly sensitive skin, are prone to rosacea, have severe eczema, or are allergic to aspirin (it contains salicylic acid, which is also contained in peels), stay away from peels. Also, it's crucial that you don't get a peel if you have a cold sore. "Peels create little abrasions all over the skin, and the cold sore can spread to any area with abrasions and cause scarring," he says. "That's probably the biggest complication that can occur with a peel."



Bliss Sleeping Peel Serum, \$78, Sephora, Holt Renfrew, www.blissworld.com



Juice Beauty Full-Strength Green Apple Peel, \$44, Sephora, www.juicebeauty.com

Skyn Iceland Nordic Skin Peel with Biospheric Complex, \$49.50, Holt Renfrew and Sephora, www.skyniceland.com



Biotherm Anti-Line Peel for dry skin, \$56, The Bay, Shoppers Drug Mart, Sephora, www.biotherm.ca



La Prairie Cellular 3-minute Peel, \$245, Holt Renfrew, www.laprairie.com



Citra-Peel High Intensity Resurfacing Peel, \$36.50, Shoppers Drug Mart, www.goodskinderm-care.com



Darphin Mild Aroma Peeling, \$74, Holt Renfrew, www.darphin.com