

You Might Be Using Your Skin-Care Products In The Wrong Order

And that could change everything.

BY KORIN MILLER May 18, 2017



No doubt you try to take good care of your skin—you wash it twice a day and apply moisturizer when you can. And, while keeping your skin clean and moisturized seems pretty simple, things can get complicated when it comes to all of the other products you can put on your face. Between sunscreen, serums, face oils, and moisturizers, how are you supposed to know what you're supposed to apply when? And does it even matter?

"Generally speaking when it comes to face care, I recommend prevention of damage in the morning and repair in the evening," says Joshua Zeichner, M.D., a New York City-based board-certified dermatologist. **Gary Goldenberg, M.D.**, medical director of the Dermatology Faculty Practice at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, agrees. He always recommends that patients use sunscreen in the a.m. "That's the most important ingredient of skin care in the morning," he says.

Zeichner recommends layering an antioxidant cream or moisturizer under your sunscreen in the morning. "Antioxidants are like fire extinguishers that put out inflammation from free radicals that develop despite your best efforts in protecting yourself from the sun," he explains. "Sunscreen prevents UV light from reaching the skin leading to free radical damage." Then you can apply makeup, if you're planning on wearing it.

But some dermatologists recommend putting on sunscreen first. Zeichner says that's just a difference of opinion—since there isn't data to say what the right order is, there's no definitive answer. "The most important message is to use sunscreen in general," he says. (*For great sun protection, we love this coconut-based sun stick from the Women's Health Boutique!*)

As for serums and face oils, Goldenberg says it's a good idea to save those for your nighttime routine. "Serums, especially those with retinol or high vitamin concentration, can be irritating and make you sun sensitive," he says. Meaning, you could counteract the sunscreen you applied if you slather on a serum in the a.m. Goldenberg says oils, on the other hand, are usually just too greasy for people to use in the morning.

Once you get to the end of the day, wash your face and then apply a serum. "Usually serums contain additives, such as retinol, and should go on as a base layer," Goldenberg says. After that, you can apply a face oil or moisturizer—most people don't need both.

Of course, you may have different products in rotation. If you're not sure what should go on when, Zeichner recommends following this rule of thumb: Apply the lightest product first followed by heavier or thicker products. That way, you won't interfere with absorption of one product applied over another.