We Asked 8 Derms What They Use To Fight Wrinkles—And They All Said The Same Thing

BRB, stocking up right away.

BY JESSIE VAN AMBURG January 22, 2018

When we recently asked a group of top dermatologists how they treat and prevent wrinkles on their own faces, we were floored to get the same answer from all eight of them: retinoids.

"Retinol is the single best-studied ingredient in fighting skin aging," says Joshua Zeichner, M.D., director of cosmetic and clinical research in dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital in NYC. Retinoids, the broad term for a derivative of vitamin A that includes OTC retinol and adapalene, stimulates collagen production and minimizes the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles, he says.

Zeichner is not alone in his praise of retinoids. "Retinoids are tried and true and one of the most effective ingredients to prevent and treat wrinkles," says Sejal Shah, M.D., a New York City cosmetic dermatologist. Francesca Fusco, M.D., says she has been using various forms of retinol for the past 15 years and considers it to be "the most powerful ingredient for rejuvenation."

And it's not just for anti-aging. Retinoid products like prescription Retin-A (also known as tretinoin) can also minimize pores and get rid of blackheads and whiteheads, says Kristina Goldenberg, M.D., an NYC medical and

cosmetic dermatologist. They can also help exfoliate dead skin cells and even pigmentation, says Robert Finney, M.D., a board-certified dermatologist in New York City.

The Type Of Retinol Most Derms Prefer

In fact, several of the dermatologists that we talked to specifically said that Retin-A was their retinoid of choice. "It is the best anti-aging product you can use over a lifetime," says Kavita Mariwalla, M.D., a dermatologist based in Long Island, New York. David Lortscher, M.D., a board-certified dermatologist and the CEO and founder of Curology, refers to Retin-A as the "gold standard," for fighting signs of aging. And NYC dermatologist Anna Karp, M.D., says she uses tretinoin at night because it's "stronger" than the OTC retinol alternatives.

Before You Try This At Home...

That said, Retin-A is pretty powerful. Retinoids, whether you're using an over-the-counter cream or a dermatologist-prescribed serum, can cause redness, dryness, and irritation in sensitive skin types. This may put people off, but most derms feel that the benefits outweigh downsides. "The stronger the concentration, the more effective it can be, but it will also cause more irritation," says Finney. He recommends following your retinoid product with a moisturizer, to reduce irritation.

It's also wise to ease into using a retinoid product—starting off by using it every few days, then using it more frequently (up to once a day) as your skin gets used to it. Although you probably will still have some irritation when first using it, that should go away within two weeks. And if you also love chemical exfoliants—like a face mask or peel that has alpha-hydroxy or beta-hydroxy acids—skip it on nights where you're using retinol to avoid overly irritating your skin.

Stumped on where to start? While lots of retinol-laced products can be pricey, there are plenty of affordable options out there:

Best For Drugstore Runs: RoC Retinol Correxion Sensitive Night Cream

This product has retinol levels just shy of what you can get from a prescription product. It also has a slow-release delivery system that will help more sensitive skin not get overwhelmed, especially if you're new to retinoids.

Buy it: $19, amazon.com

Best For Acne: Differin Gel

This was recently approved by the FDA to be sold OTC rather than by prescription (and at a much lower price).

Buy it: $12, amazon.com

Best For Multi-Tasking: L'Oreal Paris Revitalift Bright Reveal Overnight Moisturizer

This option also has glycolic acid, which helps brighten and restore skin, working in tandem with retinol.

Buy it: $20, ulta.com

In short: If you're not using a retinoid already, you should start ASAP. Anyone at any age can benefit from using a retinoid, and with so many derms backing it, you might as well give it a try, too.