

**Women'sHealth**

# **The Skincare Ingredients To Avoid If You'll Be Swimming In A Pool —And What To Use Instead**

You can kiss dried-out skin goodbye.

By Korin Miller Published: Jul 14, 2025 5:17 PM EDT



getty images

- Exposure to chlorinated pool water can up your risk for experiencing dry skin, which can put you at risk for irritation and sensitivity.
- Combining the effects of chlorine with certain active skincare ingredients may only exacerbate the effects, dermatologists say.
- To minimize the effects of chlorinated pool water and these ingredients on your skin, dermatologists offer alternatives that are gentle and effective.

No one ever claimed that swimming in the pool was good for your skin, and it's no secret that taking regular dips can leave your outer layer feeling under-moisturized, to say the least. While a little dryness is to be expected, it's fair to wonder what's going on when your skin seems to be seriously parched.

Turns out, certain proven skincare ingredients you use could be making things worse.

These ingredients, many of which show up in skincare products being used by millions daily, can exacerbate chlorine's impact on your skin, says Gary Goldenberg, MD, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital. That can lead to more dryness and even put you at risk of photosensitivity, raising the odds you'll end up with irritation, sunburns, or skin rashes, he says.

**Meet the experts: Gary Goldenberg, MD, is an assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital.** Ife J. Rodney, MD, is a dermatologist and founding director of Eternal Dermatology + Aesthetics.

This doesn't mean you need to choose between the pool and great skin this summer—that'd be plain cruel. But this info is worth keeping in mind if your skin is feeling a little too parched after a dip.

Here's what dermatologists want you to know about potentially problematic skincare ingredients and the pool, plus what to consider swapping in instead.

### **How does pool water impact your skin?**

At baseline, pool water can be drying and irritating, Goldenberg says. "This is true of chlorinated and saltwater pools, which also contain chlorine," he explains. The chemical, used to keep the water you splash around in bacteria-free, is naturally irritating since it can disrupt the function of your skin barrier, which helps to keep allergens, chemicals, and microbes out, Goldenberg says. "Chlorine can also strip your skin of some of its natural oils, which can be further drying," says Ife J. Rodney, MD, founding director of Eternal Dermatology + Aesthetics. Basically, your skin's moisture is up against a lot when you go swimming.

What's more, common skincare ingredients can make matters worse. If you're planning to go for a dip or two this summer, you're unlikely to see any major effects, but if swimming is a regular thing for you, it's important to be aware of the potential impact.

### **Which skincare ingredients are a potential problem?**

**Goldenberg lists these common skincare ingredients as ones to watch:**

**Retinol:** This over-the-counter vitamin A derivative is often found in wrinkle creams and other anti-aging products as it's been shown to stimulate the production of skin firming collagen and elastin.

**Alpha-hydroxy acids (AHAs):** Exfoliating alpha hydroxy acids like glycolic and lactic acids help to loosen the sticky glue that keeps dead skin cells together, revealing a more glowing complexion.

**Beta-hydroxy acids (BHAs):** The most common BHA is salicylic acid, a common ingredient found in acne-fighting products due to its ability to clear pores of pimple-causing oil and clogs.

Benzoyl peroxide (BP): Another common blemish buster, BP has anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory effects.

“All of these ingredients can be irritating in their own right,” he says, “but when you combine them with chlorine, the drying effects can be compounded, causing more barrier disruption.” That's not the only risk though: Chlorinated H<sub>2</sub>O can also deactivate the effectiveness of these ingredients and degrade them, making your favorite lotions and potions ineffective and raising the risk of irritation, Goldenberg says.

That said, Rodney points out that these ingredients won't automatically cause a problem when swimming—it's just a risk you should be aware of. “The bottom line is that it's probably going to be fine to use these and swim, but there's definitely a risk of increased irritation,” she says.

### **What can you use instead?**

You have three options here: Wing it and see what happens, cut back on how much and how often you use these potentially irritating products, or try something else. If you want to play it safe and try different ingredients, Goldenberg suggests making these swaps, all of which tend to be gentler on your skin overall:

**Bakuchiol for retinol:** Research shows this plant-derived retinol alternative has many of the same effects, such as reducing the appearance of wrinkles and hyperpigmentation, but can be gentler on skin.

**Peptides for alpha-hydroxy acids:** Peptides are short chains of amino acids that are created in a lab and can be engineered to accomplish many things for skin, like enhancing glow and refining texture—but without the harsh exfoliating action of AHAs.

**Niacinamide for beta-hydroxy acids.** Like salicylic acid, niacinamide has been shown to help to manage acne (as well as melasma and psoriasis).

**Tea tree oil for benzoyl peroxide:** One study found that tea tree oil has strong anti-bacterial, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidant properties that may help in the treatment of breakouts, just like benzoyl peroxide.

## **4 Pool-Friendly Skincare Products**

### **Best Bakuchiol Product**

#### **Prejuvenation Firming Bakuchiol Serum**

##### **Dr. Jart+ Prejuvenation Firming Bakuchiol Serum**

\$70 at Women's Health Shop

This lightweight serum combines bakuchiol with collagen peptides to firm skin, reducing the appearance of fine lines and preventing new wrinkles from forming. Added for good measure: 5% glycerin to hydrating and make sure this is gentle on even the most sensitive skin.

### **Best Peptide Product**

#### **Elastic Skin Firming & Plumping Serum**

##### **iNBEAUTY Project Elastic Skin Firming & Plumping Serum**

\$46 at Women's Health Shop

\$52 at Amazon

Have you heard of those fancy snail mucin serums for glowing skin? This is kind of the same thing, except instead of using slug mucus (or harsh acids), it harnesses the power of copper peptides firm, tighten, and impart radiance.

### **Best Niacinamide Product**

#### **Mela B3 Serum**

##### **La Roche-Posay Mela B3 Serum**

\$45 at Amazon

\$45 at Walmart

\$45 at Target

La Roche-Posay's powerful product pairs 10% niacinamide (to help fade discoloration, MelasyI (a patented ingredient that further targets dark spots), and the brand's soothing thermal water, which reduces irritation and redness. Buh-bye blemishes.

### **Best Tea Tree Oil Product**

#### **Tea Tree Relief Serum**

##### **IUNIK Tea Tree Relief Serum**

Now 28% Off

\$25 \$18 at Amazon

A mild non-irritating solution for acne that combines tea tree oil with calming centella asiatic leaf water. It's also vegan, noncomedogenic, and feels completely weightless on skin.

### **How else can you take care of your skin after swimming?**

If you'd rather stick with your go-to skincare routine, dermatologists suggest taking these extra steps this summer:

Slather on moisturizer and sunscreen liberally during the day and especially after you swim.

**Load on the hydration. (Goldenberg even recommends that you "overhydrate" your skin.)**

Rinse your skin off after swimming, and apply a moisturizer afterward. Rodney suggests putting on a cream-based moisturizer first, followed by an oil-based moisturizer. When you can, take a full shower and moisturize again.

If you really want to do your skin a solid this summer, dermatologists say it's crucial to put on sunscreen and to keep using it. "Don't forget to reapply the right amount of sunscreen," Rodney says. "Don't be complacent and feel like your skin is good if you applied it once."

SOURCE: <https://www.womenshealthmag.com/beauty/a65402871/skincare-ingredients-to-avoid-pool/>