

Women'sHealth

This Is The Single Most Important Skincare Step When It Comes To Fighting Wrinkles, Says A New Study

It's the easiest thing ever, but most people skip it altogether.

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New research published in the Journal of The American Academy of Dermatology surveyed sixty-two dermatologists to find their top product recommendations for several common skin concerns.

96.8% of respondents ranked mineral sunscreen as the number one product to use to prevent fine lines and wrinkles while 95.2% rated it as the top option for combating facial redness.

The study author says that mineral sunscreen may be best as it's the gentlest form of SPF on the market and is well-tolerated by most skin types.

Yes, there's no shortage of pricey serums and creams out there that promise to help fend off fine lines and wrinkles, but new research suggests that your best protection against these common signs of skin aging is a step most people skip: Using sunscreen—specifically, mineral sunscreen.

And this wonder product didn't just come out on top for fine lines and wrinkle prevention: Researchers also found that this form of sun protection should be your go-to for combating skin redness, too. Unfortunately, a 2023 survey reports that only 13.5 percent of Americans cop to wearing SPF daily, with 11 percent admitting they never wear it at all. That means a good number of people are missing out on this key to healthy, youthful-looking skin.

Meet the experts: Gary Goldenberg, MD, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital; Ife J. Rodney, MD, founding director of Eternal Dermatology + Aesthetics; Murad Alam, MD, study co-author and vice-chair of dermatology at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine

So, why is mineral sunscreen, in particular, so helpful for wrinkle prevention? Here's what the study found, plus what dermatologists want you to keep in mind.

What did the study find?

The paper, published in the Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology, recruited 62 dermatologists at 43 academic centers across the country. Each doctor was asked to weigh in on the importance of 83 different products and skincare ingredients in treating a range of skin health issues.

The results were surprising: A whopping 96.8 percent of dermatologists recommended mineral sunscreen as the top product to help prevent fine lines and wrinkles, ranking it as equally important as retinoids, one of the most common class of ingredients used in over-the-counter anti-aging skincare products. Those were followed by vitamin C and chemical sunscreen.

Mineral sunscreen was also the top product recommended by dermatologists to combat redness—95.2 percent say it's the most helpful.

How does sunscreen protect against wrinkles?

On a basic level, sunscreen prevents wrinkles by blocking ultraviolet (UV) rays, which can degrade skin-plumping collagen and elastin over time, explains Gary Goldenberg, MD, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital.

Collagen, a protein that is an essential building block of skin, hair, and nails gives your complexion its firm texture while elastin, another protein, makes it more springy, says Ife J. Rodney, MD, founding director of Eternal Dermatology + Aesthetics. "When both of those are broken down, you get fine lines, wrinkles, and creases in your skin," she says. "That's why sunscreen can be so helpful—it blocks those rays."

Why mineral sunscreen specifically?

Sunscreen can generally be broken into two camps: Mineral sunscreens, which reflect UV rays, and chemical sunscreens, which absorb UV rays before they can damage the skin. "Mineral sunscreen filters, such as zinc oxide and titanium dioxide are important ingredients in blocking UV penetration into the skin," Goldenberg says. "These sit on the skin's surface, reflecting UV rays, reducing penetration and irritation."

Chemical sunscreens also protect the skin from UV rays, but they don't always reflect as many types of damaging UV rays as mineral options, Rodney says. Because chemical sunscreens absorb rays, she says they can also warm the skin. That can lead to skin discoloration like melasma and hyperpigmentation, Rodney says. "Mineral sunscreen may be best because it is gentler on sensitive or acne-prone skin and doesn't irritate the skin, or cause as many allergies or clogged pores," says Murad Alam, MD, study co-author and vice-chair of dermatology at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine. These sunscreens are also more photo-stable, meaning they don't break down and stop being effective in the sun as easily as chemical sunscreens, Alam says.

4 Mineral Sunscreens Loved By Women's Health Editors And Dermatologists

Best For Oily/Acne-Prone Skin

Unseen Sunscreen SPF 30

Supergoop! Unseen Sunscreen SPF 30

\$38 at Nordstrom

\$38 at Amazon

\$40 at Revolve

If you have an oily complexion, the last thing you want to do is add a shine-inducing SPF to the mix. But you're not out of options: This formula has a fluffy, weightless texture that won't clog pores. Plus, it works great as a primer under makeup, so if you're a concealer girl, you'll love it.

Best For Dry Skin

Hydrating Mineral Sunscreen Face Lotion SPF 50

CeraVe Hydrating Mineral Sunscreen Face Lotion SPF 50

\$14 at Amazon

\$20 \$14 at Walmart

\$14 at Target

On the dry side (skin-wise, that is)? Here's the SPF for you: It's formulated with ceramides—the building blocks of a healthy skin barrier—to keep moisture in, plus hyaluronic acid, to attract more water into the deeper layers of your skin.

Best For Dark Skin

Eryfotona Actinica SPF 50+

ISDIN Eryfotona Actinica SPF 50+

\$78 at Amazon

\$78 at Walmart

\$73 at isdin.com

It's a sad-but-true fact: Many mineral sunscreens leave behind a white or gray tint on darker skin tones. But not all! Those with a deeper complexion will want to look for a tinted mineral SPF, like this one, which our beauty editor raves about.

Best For Sensitive Skin

Daily SPF

Cocokind Daily SPF

\$31 at Walmart

\$25 at Soko Glam

\$25 at Target

This zinc oxide-based SPF is recommended by the National Eczema Association, so you can be sure that it's non-irritating and suitable for the crankiest of complexions. Also of note: It contains phytoplankton and microalgae to provide even more of an antioxidant boost.

They're not perfect, though. "Mineral sunscreens can leave a whitish cast on your skin—especially in those with darker complexions—and sometimes feel a little heavier than chemical ones," Alam says. "But new tinted varieties and lighter varieties are being developed."

Reapplication is crucial.

For some people, just slapping on sunscreen daily is a step up from what they're currently doing. "Most people do not use sunscreen often enough," Alam says. "Many only use it on sunny days, or at the beach or pool, or during the summer. Since skin cancer and aging are caused by cumulative sun exposure, every little bit of sun can make them worse."

But dermatologists stress that, in an ideal situation, you'll continue applying it throughout the day—ideally every two hours. "Most people don't reapply the sunscreen throughout the day as needed," Rodney says. "You need to do that." Goldenberg agrees. "Reapplication is important, especially if one is going to be exposed to direct sunlight," he says. Using the right amount is also key—two fingers-length for both the face and neck is sufficient.

Ultimately, there's more to preventing fine lines and wrinkles than applying mineral sunscreen—those pricey serums and lotions help, too. But dermatologists agree that slathering sunscreen on daily and reapplying throughout the day will go a long way toward setting your skin up for long-term success.