

Aquaphor or Vaseline? Experts Explain Which Is Best for Your Skin

Walk into literally *any* drug store or major retailer, and it's extremely likely you'll find Aquaphor or Vaseline on its shelves.

These ointments are both skincare veterans, says [Alicia Zalka](#), MD, a board-certified dermatologist and an [associate clinical professor of dermatology](#) at the Yale School of Medicine, because they can help address a wide range of skin concerns. Think: [chapped lips](#), cracked elbows and [dry skin](#), as well as minor cuts, scrapes, [chafing](#) and other wounds. The list goes on!

"Remember the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* and they use Windex for everything? Well Aquaphor is like that for dermatologists. It's our Windex," Dr. Zalka says. Vaseline has a similarly impressive reputation among experts, she adds, which can make it difficult for some consumers to decide which product may be best for them.

Meet the experts: [Alicia Zalka](#), MD, is a board-certified dermatologist and an [associate clinical professor](#) of dermatology at the Yale School of Medicine. [Gary Goldenberg](#), MD, is an assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. Belinda Tan, MD, is a physician-scientist and co-founder and CEO of [People Science](#). Dr. Samuel Hetz, BSc, is the medical director of [Concept Medical](#) in Ottawa, Canada.

The good news is that both ointments can effectively moisturize and protect the skin. And the products are compatible with all skin types since they rarely cause allergic reactions or negative side effects. But what exactly is the difference between the two products?

Here's what dermatologists say you need to understand before buying a jar of ointment for yourself—from the ingredients that Vaseline and Aquaphor each include, to the benefits they provide, and any potential risks of using these products on your skin.

What is Vaseline?

The name "Vaseline" is often used generically to refer to any petroleum jelly product, no matter the actual brand—similar to how people use the term Band-Aid for all bandages or Kleenex for all tissues.

But Vaseline is the O.G.: It's been manufactured since the 19th century and has been around for more than 150 years, says Belinda Tan, MD, a physician-scientist and co-founder and CEO of [People Science](#).

The ingredients label on Vaseline is also strikingly simple. It's made entirely of white petrolatum A.K.A. petroleum jelly, adds Dr. Zalka, which is a highly-refined and purified mixture of hydrocarbons derived from petroleum, she explains. (Yep, the same crude oil that's used to fuel your car!)

"Vaseline has this patented process where they distill it and they refine it like three times," Dr. Zalka says. "If you buy a bag of salad and it says 'triple washed,' well, Vaseline does triple refining and purification" with petroleum, she adds. "Instead of it being amber gasoline, they produce it and refine it into this white petrolatum" that can be used on the skin.

Here's how it works: The outermost layer of skin, called the skin barrier, can be thought of as like a brick and mortar wall. The bricks are skin cells called keratinocytes, and the mortar is made of various fats that hold them together, Dr. Zalka adds. That skin barrier can weaken and lead to dryness and irritation as a result of a range of factors. Some include skin conditions like eczema, exposure to extreme temperatures, as well as pollution in the environment, just to name a few.

But the petroleum jelly in Vaseline is considered an occlusive substance, which means it's "sort of like a tarp" that prevent moisture loss from the skin, Dr. Zalka says. So when you rub Vaseline onto yourself, you're

helping ensure the "bricks" of your skin barrier stay together and retain the water it needs to stay healthy. "So it's almost like an invisible Band-Aid," Dr. Zalka says. Occlusives help "reestablish the skin barrier," she adds. Vaseline can also be considered an [emollient](#), Dr. Goldenberg says, since it can help soften, soothe and moisturize the skin.

What is Aquaphor?

Aquaphor is another household brand name that refers to an ointment that's been around for about a century. Like Vaseline, petrolatum is the sole active ingredient, which means it also acts as an occlusive substance that repairs the skin barrier and locks in moisture. The TL;DR? The science and benefits of Aquaphor are pretty much the same as Vaseline.

But Aquaphor differs in that its formula contains [more than just one ingredient](#). In addition to containing 41 percent petrolatum, Aquaphor contains other inactive but nevertheless beneficial ingredients: a mineral oil called paraffinum liquidum, a wax called ceresin, and soothing ingredients like bisabolol, glycerin, lanolin and panthenol, says Dr. Samuel Hetz, BSc, medical director of [Concept Medical](#). A couple of those ingredients are considered humectants, Dr. Zalka adds, which means they draw moisture into the skin.

The extra ingredients in Aquaphor can help give the ointment an extra moisturizing boost, Dr. Zalka says, as well as impact how the product feels on the skin.

What are the benefits of using these ointments?

Both products are versatile, fragrance-free moisturizers that can help relieve dryness and create softer, smoother skin without causing irritation, Dr. Goldenberg says. And these ointments can also come to rescue to help heal injuries, according to the [American Academy of Dermatology](#). Because the petrolatum in these ointments keep the skin moist, they help prevent wounds from drying out and forming a scab—which generally delays how long wounds take to heal.

Plus, these ointments are generally considered better than lotions and creams for wound healing since they contain less (or no) preservatives, Dr. Zalka adds. "People like lotion better. People like cream better because it's not as mushy," she says. "But take it from a dermatologist, ointments just feel better when you have a cut or when you have a scrape," because they're less likely to sting.

But there are specific upsides that pertain to each ointment. Here's a more detailed breakdown:

Vaseline

- **Versatility:** Vaseline is nothing if not versatile: Its own website [cites 101 use](#) for its product, ranging from relieving sore skin after a waxing or threading hair, to removing makeup and healing tattoos.
- **Texture:** Because Vaseline is made of pure, white petrolatum, the texture of the product can feel a bit greasy, says Dr. Goldenberg. "It takes a long time to get absorbed. It can stain clothes and bedsheets," he says. However, that greasiness can also be a positive thing because it means the product can more easily spread across wider areas of skin such as the thighs, chest or arms compared to thicker formulas, Dr. Zalka adds. "It goes on a bit more smoothly."
- **Price:** Since Vaseline is made with just one ingredient, it tends to be a bit more affordable than Aquaphor as well. And who doesn't like saving a little money?

Vaseline Products For Dry Skin



Vaseline 100% Pure Petroleum Jelly, Original

[\\$16 at Amazon](#)

Credit: Vaseline

This is the O.G. petroleum jelly product. Give it a go if you're struggling with large patches of dry skin.



Vaseline Extremely Dry Skin Rescue

[\\$22 at Amazon](#)

Credit: Vaseline

If the texture of Vaseline ointment gives you the willies, the brand formulates lotions, too.



Vaseline Lip Therapy Advanced Healing

[\\$10 at Amazon](#)

Credit: Vaseline

If you don't want to splurge on an entire tub of Vaseline white petrolatum, you can opt for this lip therapy protectant. It comes in small packaging and can be easily applied to chapped lips or nostrils.

Aquaphor

- **Versatility:** Aquaphor can be used to treat many of the same skin issues as Vaseline, making it a good choice for folks struggling with a range of concerns.
- **Texture:** This ointment generally feels thicker, waxier, and less greasy compared to Vaseline, Dr. Zalka adds. As such, Aquaphor is generally more comfortable to apply to the skin—especially on sensitive areas of the face such as chapped lips or nostrils, as well as smaller areas of skin like the cuticles.
- **Ingredients:** Since Aquaphor contains more ingredients, the ointment acts as an occlusive substance, emollient, and humectant all at once. If you're looking to moisturize your skin, it literally doesn't get better than that!

Aquaphor Products For Irritated Skin



Aquaphor Healing ointment Advanced Therapy

Now 25% Off

~~\$20~~ [\\$15 at Amazon](#)

~~\$51~~ [\\$18 at Walmart](#) [\\$18 at Target](#)

Credit: Aquaphor

Pros

-

This dermatologist-recommended ointment is formulated for dry, cracked, and irritated skin. It's a tried-and-true solution skin doctors

have relied on for about 100 years.



Aquaphor Lip Repair Immediate Relief

[\\$5 at Amazon](#)

[\\$10 at Walmart](#)[\\$5 at Target](#)

Credit: Aquaphor

Like Vaseline, Aquaphor sells similar products formulated and packaged to help heal dry, chapped lips in particular.



Aquaphor Baby Diaper Rash Cream

Now 21% Off

[\\$22 \\$18 at Amazon](#)

[\\$8 \\$7 at Walmart](#)[\\$8 at Target](#)

Credit: Aquaphor

Alongside chronic skin conditions and dry skin, some Aquaphor products are formulated specifically to help address diaper rash.

Are there any risks of using Vaseline or Aquaphor?

Aquaphor and Vaseline are mainstream products that have been used for decades, so side effects are super rare. "I can't say I've ever, in 30 years of practice, seen anyone get allergic to them," Dr. Zalka says. But it is important to keep in mind that it's possible to be allergic to anything on the planet, she adds. So it's always worth doing a patch test on a small bit of skin to make sure you can tolerate the products if you're using them for the first time.

If you do experience an adverse reaction to either ointment, it'll probably consist of relatively mild symptoms like minor itching, irritation, burning or redness, Dr. Hetz said. And if you like to take part in skincare trends such as "[slugging](#)," which consists of applying layers of Vaseline or other skincare products to the face, keep in mind that you may risk breaking out, he adds. [Both brands](#) claim their products are safe to use on the face without causing acne. But to be on the safe side Dr. Zalka recommends only applying the ointments to the lips, nostrils, around the eyes, or the body.

"It's really buyer beware," Dr. Zalka says. "If you want to put it on your skin, it could make acne worse, especially if you're very oily."

It's also important to note that Aquaphor contains an ingredient called lanolin, which is extracted from a sheep's wool. Lanolin can cause an allergic reaction in some folks, Dr. Goldenberg said. In fact, the American Contact Dermatitis Society named lanolin the "[Contact Allergen of the Year](#)" in 2023, he added. So if you've got particularly sensitive skin or know you have a lanolin allergy, you might want to avoid Aquaphor.

So which ointment should I choose?

At the end of the day, don't stress. Both products work well to treat common skin issues like minor cuts, scrapes, and dry skin. And in both cases, side effects are uncommon. So neither choice is a bad one. "It really comes down to cost and preference for a particular feel or consistency," says Dr. Tan.

If you know greasy ointments make you squeamish, you might prefer how Aquaphor feels. And if you're hoping to lather ointment onto large areas of your body, Vaseline might make that process a little easier.

But for those who still feel stuck between the two, note that Dr. Zalka personally prefers one product over the other depending on the skin concern she's trying to treat. So it might be worth it to keep both in your medicine cabinet. For instance, Vaseline comes in handy to treat wounds since it's so unlikely to cause a negative reaction due to its short ingredient list, she says. And when managing a condition like eczema or psoriasis, Dr. Zalka tends to prefer Aquaphor since it includes extra ingredients that boost hydration.

And don't fret if your dermatologist's office seems to stock samples of one ointment and not the other, Dr. Zalka says, it doesn't necessarily indicate preference.

"Skincare brands provide samples at no cost to dermatology clinics and these samples then get distributed to patients," Dr. Tan says. "Just because your dermatologist is providing a sample, it doesn't necessarily mean they endorse that product over other brands."