

Melatonin Skin Care: Benefits, Risks and Dermatologist Advice

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It's no secret that countless folks use [melatonin](#) to doze off at night. In fact, a [2023 survey](#) conducted by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine found that more than six in 10 Americans have taken the hormone to help them sleep.

But now, that same sleep aid is seeping into the beauty world, cropping up in skincare products. That's right, folks, we're taking "beauty sleep" to a whole new level because melatonin can now be found in night creams, serums, sheet masks and body washes. "This ingredient is something that's getting some traction recently," says [Axel Delgado](#), MD, a New York City fellowship-trained board-certified dermatologist in Dorado, Puerto Rico. "It's pretty interesting."

There's tons of data elucidating how melatonin impacts our sleep-wake cycle and our ability to drift off to dreamland when swallowed as a gummy or pill supplement. So by comparison, the research investigating the cosmetic effects of topically applying melatonin to the skin is sparse.

Meet the experts: [Axel Delgado](#), MD, is a New York City fellowship-trained board-certified dermatologist in Dorado, Puerto Rico. [Gary Goldenberg](#), MD, is a cosmetic and medical dermatologist in New York City. [Dr. Francesca Ferri](#) is the science director at the skincare brand Irene Forte, a skincare brand that sells products containing plant-derived melatonin.

But what we do know from the limited research is that the ingredient can potentially help brighten and even out skin tone and reduce signs of aging, among other benefits. So if you're looking for a new ingredient to incorporate into your skincare routine, melatonin may be a good contender.

Before you splurge on a new melatonin skincare product, here's everything you need to know about the hormone, including what it is, how it may benefit your skin, and other ingredients that can provide similar perks.

What is Melatonin?

Melatonin is a hormone that's naturally produced in the body by the pineal gland located in the brain, Dr. Delgado says. Its primary function is to help regulate our circadian rhythm, our natural body clock that determines when we feel alert and sleepy. As it gets darker outside, we tend to produce more melatonin, and this signals to the body that it's time to rest.

But melatonin is also naturally produced by other parts of the body, namely the skin. There, its purpose is to [protect the skin](#) from environmental stress such as damage from the sun's ultraviolet rays. Similarly to humans, plants also produce a version of melatonin called phytomelatonin, and its purpose is to help plants grow, develop and withstand environmental stressors.

Melatonin used in skincare can be extracted from plants or made synthetically in a lab, then added to serums and creams where it's marketed for its potential skin-rejuvenating and restorative benefits.

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- [These Sleep Masks Will Change The Way You Sleep](#)



- [The Melatonin Side Effects You Should Know About](#)

What benefits can melatonin potentially provide the skin?

[Studies suggest](#) that melatonin has antioxidant properties, and that's where most of the molecule's benefits for the complexion lie. When you first hear the term "antioxidant," your brain might immediately jump to the most popular one in skincare, [vitamin C](#). But "we're having these new antioxidants, which melatonin is one of them, that are being proven to be increasingly powerful and efficacious on the skin," Dr. Delgado says.

As an antioxidant, melatonin is able to scavenge free radicals—unstable molecules in the environment that cause damage to the skin through a process called oxidative stress, Dr. Delgado says. This provides aesthetic benefits, of course, but can also potentially help reduce the risk of skin cancer, according to a [2025 review](#).

Here's a breakdown of everything melatonin may be able to do for your complexion:


Fight signs of aging

[Research](#) has long proven that oxidative stress—whether it comes from environmental pollution like [poor air quality](#), the sun's ultraviolet rays or even psychological stress—plays a major role in the skin aging process. I'm talkin' fine lines, wrinkles, dullness and saggy skin. And that's because free radical damage is linked to the breakdown of proteins that keep skin looking young, namely [collagen and elastin](#), as well as [hyaluronic acid](#), a molecule that keeps skin hydrated.

By protecting the skin from oxidative stress and damage from free radicals, topical melatonin may be able to help prevent the formation of fine lines and wrinkles, help skin stay more plump, and fend off skin laxity that increases with age, says [Gary Goldenberg](#), MD, a cosmetic and medical dermatologist in New York City. "Anytime you have a molecule that's protective and is an antioxidant, it helps to either improve or prevent those things from happening."

Alongside having antioxidant properties itself, melatonin may also stimulate the activity of antioxidant enzymes that occur in the body, which "enhances the skin's natural defense systems," adds [Dr. Francesca Ferri](#), the science director at the skincare brand Irene Forte, a brand that sells products containing plant-derived melatonin. This may further protect the skin from environmental damage and support "overall skin and cellular health," she says.

-  [Experts Love This Product For Fighting Wrinkles](#)

-  [7 Best Wrinkle Creams, Per Dermatologists](#)

-  [Dermatologists Love This Night Skincare Routine](#)

Fade dark spots

There are already a host of over-the-counter and prescription topicals to help fight dark spots, the gold standard being [hydroquinone](#). But for those struggling to manage stubborn hyperpigmentation, melatonin may be something to add to the arsenal.

Research suggests that melatonin may be able to stop skin cells from producing extra melanin (the pigment that creates dark spots) by slowing the activity of tyrosinase, a special enzyme that plays an important role in the skin's melanin production, according to a [2022 review](#) published in the *Journal of Pineal Research*.

Melatonin may also help fight dark spots by preventing pigment-producing skin cells from reproducing and thriving, according to the review. Meanwhile, a [2023 study](#) published in the journal *Experimental Dermatology* found that the hormone may also turn down the activity of certain genes involved in skin pigment production. The point is, “there are multiple mechanisms by which melatonin has been shown to help pigmentation,” Dr. Delgado says.

And what’s more, one small study involving human participants with [melasma](#) (a condition that causes dark spots on the face) found that using a 5% topical melatonin cream alongside consuming oral melatonin helped significantly with skin lightening, according to that 2022 review. All together, these findings may sound impressive. But keep in mind that a vast majority of the limited research conducted on melatonin and dark spots are experiments in controlled laboratory settings, not in real people. And what happens in test tubes and petri dishes may not translate to real, human skin.

So here’s the bottom line: Hyperpigmentation is a complicated skin concern that has multiple underlying causes, so it’s usually best to fight it using several active ingredients. We don’t fully understand how melatonin may be able to help, but if skin-brightening staples such as hydroquinone, vitamin C and retinoids aren’t doing the trick for you, for instance, it can’t hurt to consider giving a melatonin cream or serum a try. “I think it’s very safe,” Dr. Goldenberg says, “and I think it can help if it’s in an appropriate cocktail of other skin ingredients.”

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- [How To Use Azelaic Acid To Treat Dark Spots](#)

Calm inflammatory skin conditions

Alongside its antioxidant properties and potential ability to fight hyperpigmentation, research suggests that melatonin may also be able to calm inflammation, the body's natural response to injuries and infections, Dr. Delgado says. Inflammation is typically a good thing, because it allows the body to fend off germs or heal cuts, for instance. But in some people, inflammation can get out of control and become chronic. When this happens in the skin, it can lead to various inflammatory conditions such as atopic dermatitis (a type of [eczema](#)) as well as [psoriasis](#) and [rosacea](#).

By calming inflammation in the body, research suggests that melatonin may potentially be able to soothe inflammatory skin conditions, Dr. Delgado says. For instance, a [2022 study](#) done on mice with atopic dermatitis found that topical melatonin reduced redness, swelling and irritation. Another [2022 study](#), meanwhile, found that topical melatonin helped repair tissue damage, restore the [skin barrier](#), and lower inflammation in lab-engineered human skin cells with psoriasis.

There's a pretty big caveat to keep in mind, though: Most of the studies investigating this potential benefit involve oral melatonin supplements rather than topical formulations, Dr. Delgado says. And many of the studies on topical melatonin happen in a lab or involve animals rather than humans, which means their results should be taken with a grain of salt.

TL;DR? Melatonin should not replace prescription medications and mainstay treatments for inflammatory skin conditions, Dr. Ferri says, but it *can* potentially serve as a supportive or supplementary option.

If you're ready to hop on the melatonin bandwagon, here are some products to consider trying out:

Melatonin Skincare Products To Try

Best Antioxidant Serum



ISDIN Melatonik

[\\$175 at Amazon](#)

[\\$175 at Dermstore](#)[\\$175 at Isdin](#)

Credit: ISDIN

This melatonin serum is formulated with other efficacious ingredients such as bakuchiol and vitamin C. This cocktail of actives comes together to stimulate antioxidant defense, repair damaged skin, and fade fine lines and wrinkles.

Best For Signs Of Aging



IRENE FORTE Phytomelatonin Rejuvenating Serum

[\\$290 at Amazon](#)

[\\$290 at Nordstrom](#)[\\$290 at Bloomingdale's](#)

Credit: IRENE FORTE

This phytomelatonin serum was clinically tested to reverse several signs of aging, including wrinkles, saggy skin, age spots, large pores and more. It's also formulated to be compatible with all skin types, even those who are sensitive.

Best For Dry Skin



VICHY Minéral 89 Moisture Recovery Night Cream

Now 14% Off

~~\$36~~ [\\$31 at Amazon](#)

Credit: VICHY

The skin's natural ability to repair itself naturally goes into overdrive at night, the same time when melatonin receptors on the skin tend to be most active. This melatonin cream leverages natural biology to restore skin overnight, leaving you with a plump complexion.

Are there any risks of using it?

You can technically be allergic to anything. So any skincare ingredient (including melatonin) has the potential of causing irritation. Especially if you have sensitive skin, it's always a good idea to perform a patch test before using a new product. If your skin doesn't react poorly after performing a patch test, you're probably good to go! And if you're unsure, you can always visit a dermatologist and ask for their input on using melatonin for your specific skin concerns.

But generally speaking, experts agree that melatonin is well-tolerated, gentle on the skin and unlikely to cause irritation. "I think it plays well in the sandbox," Dr. Goldenberg adds, meaning it can also typically be used in combination with other common active ingredients. It "can be part of any skincare or anti-aging skincare regimen," he says.

What other ingredients can I try?

If your goal is to incorporate another, more evidence-based antioxidant into your skincare routine, there are alternatives, particularly [vitamin C](#). "It's been around for so long," Dr. Goldenberg says. This ingredient has decades of research demonstrating its ability to scavenge free radicals, brighten the skin, and stimulate collagen production for a more youthful glow. [Vitamin E](#) is well-studied, too, and is able to do provide much of the same benefits while also regulating the skin's oil production and strengthening the skin barrier.



- [How to Get Rid of Dark Spots On Your Face](#)



- [These Lifestyle Tweaks May Help You Live Longer](#)



- [Everything To Know About NAD+ For Skin](#)

For those whose primary concern is reducing signs of aging, your best bet is going to be using retinoids and sunscreen. Retinoids are a class of ingredients derived from vitamin A—and they help increase skin cell turnover, the process of replacing old skin cells with new ones. The most common over-the-counter retinoid is called [retinol](#), and it helps smooth out skin texture and can reduce the appearance of age spots. [Retinoids](#) also spur the production of collagen and elastin.

Dr. Delgado considers Vitamin C, retinoids and sunscreen "the holy trinity" of skincare, he says. So if you'd rather spend your money on ol' reliables, here are a some products with these ingredients to get you started:

Skincare Classics To Add To Your Regimen

Best Antioxidant Serum



SkinCeuticals C E Ferulic

[\\$182 at Dermstore](#)

[\\$185 at SkinCeuticals](#)

Credit: SkinCeuticals

This serum has garnered a cult following, and for good reason. It offers a lightweight texture that's appealing for most skin types and it contains 15% L-ascorbic acid, the most active form of vitamin C, as well as vitamin E.

Best Sunscreen



Eucerin Sensitive Mineral Zinc Oxide Protection Sunscreen

[\\$17 at Amazon](#)

[\\$17 at Walmart](#)

Credit: Eucerin

Mineral sunscreens are the way to go if you have a cranky outer layer of skin. This inexpensive option features zinc oxide as its main sun protective ingredient, and the formula is also free of common irritants, such as fragrance, oils, dyes, phthalates, PABA, and parabens.

Best Retinol Serum



CeraVe Resurfacing Retinol Serum

Now 15% Off

[\\$22 \\$19 at Amazon](#)

[\\$22 \\$19 at Walmart](#)[\\$22 \\$16 at Ulta Beauty](#)

Credit: CeraVe

In addition to retinol, which will help supercharge skin cell turnover and reduce signs of aging, this serum also contains niacinamide, another well-studied active known to calm redness and inflammation. It also contains licorice root extract to brighten the appearance of acne scars.

At the end of the day, there are only a few skincare ingredients that are actually [proven to work](#), and loads more that are [probably a scam](#). Due to the relatively limited research on melatonin, it's safe to say the jury's still out on just how effective it is. That said, it's very unlikely to cause harm—and the early data points to some genuinely promising benefits. So if you're curious about trying melatonin, there's little downside to experimenting.

But when it comes to skincare, the best regimen is the one you'll actually stick to, Dr. Goldenberg says. So even though the science behind melatonin isn't as robust as the classic ingredients mentioned above, the ingredient may still be worth a shot if it excites you. "What I tell my patients is, if they like the way something feels, they like the way that it makes their skin look, and if it's not harmful, I recommend they use it," Dr. Goldenberg says.



[Katie Mogg](#)

Katie Mogg is the beauty editorial assistant at Women's Health. Since starting college at Northeastern University in 2020, her bylines have appeared in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, NBC News and The Boston Globe. She strives to help readers lead happier and healthier lives through science-backed stories that explain how to care for hair,

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Reviewed by [Brian Underwood](#)

Beauty Director

Brian Underwood is beauty director at Women's Health, where he oversees content strategy for the brand across all platforms, including digital, print, and social. Underwood previously served as beauty and wellness director at Oprah Daily and O, The Oprah Magazine. During his tenure leading beauty content for the Oprah brand at Hearst, stories Underwood commissioned were awarded the Skin Cancer Foundation Media Award and a Fragrance Award for Editorial Excellence (his second). He was the launch Beauty Director of Dr. Oz THE GOOD LIFE, and has held additional editorial positions at Fitness, Organic Style, Good Housekeeping, Life & Style Weekly, and Woman's Day and has written for Self, Shape, Seventeen, Redbook, Cosmopolitan, and many more. Underwood previously served on the Skin Cancer Foundation's gala committee and as partnerships director of the Trans Beauty Clinic, a New York-based charitable organization that provided beauty services and workshops to the city's trans community.

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