

# 5 Steps You Can Take to Keep Your Skin Looking Great

By Kateri DeLaney, R.N.

“Wow, your skin looks great!” That’s something that women love to hear no matter what their age is. And the reality is, you can have healthy, supple, glowing skin at any age by following a basic five-step program. So, before you spend hundreds of dollars on sophisticated looking over-the-counter department store or late night TV skin care products, get started with this skin care program.

In addition, you may want to get visit a medical skin care professional, such as a dermatologist or a medical aesthetician. Only a medical professional should prescribe medical grade products, often called cosmeceuticals.

**1. Cleanse.** The first step to a great skin care regimen is choosing the proper cleanser. The predominant ingredient in practically all cleansers is one which breaks up oil and debris on the skin. Called a surfactant, it can leave your skin clean and fresh or taut and dry.

To prevent dryness, avoid cleansers whose primary ingredient is sodium laureth sulfate. One good product that doesn’t list that ingredient among the first three-four ingredients is Cetaphil® Daily Facial Cleanser. In addition to surfactant, cleansers can contain a number of other ingredients that are designed to manage various and sundry cosmetic concerns. Talk with your skin care professional to determine which cleanser is best for your skin type. And remember, skin requirements are dynamic. What you need now may change over time.

**2. Tone.** The second step is equally important, but is most often skipped – toning. A toner is important because it adjusts the pH of the skin after washing. Many cleansers can cause the pH of the skin to increase for up to two hours. The problem is that many skin care products are designed to work at a selected pH level; they are not as effective at a higher pH .

**3. Repair.** Yes you can turn back the hands of time by repairing past damage. The most common product for repairing skin is Tretinoic Acid, commonly known as Retin A. When Retin A first came on the market, it was over-used and people commonly used too high of a strength. The result was actually “burning” the skin, which resulted in redness and blisters. Tretinoic Acid is a drug not a cream, and should be prescribed by a skin care professional so that you get the proper dose and instructions for your skin type.

Frequently a low concentration such as .025% is initially prescribed, and you may gradually build up to a higher concentration. Additionally, although most people can initially tolerate nightly use on their neck and chest, they frequently must build up to nightly use on their face. Be sure you keep it away from your eyes and eyelids.

**4. Moisturize.** It’s commonly accepted that moisturizers are an important part of a basic skin care routine. Dehydrated skin has less capacity to repair and regenerate itself, and is also more prone to skin infections and irritants because it has many tiny cracks that allow the offenders to sneak in.

Although moisturizing won't lift your eyelids or reverse wrinkles (except maybe recent fine lines), it will help slow down any further damage, and allow other treatments to work better. In fact, if your skin is excessively dry, most skin care treatments have far less chance to produce desired results. And don't forget to use an eye cream that is specially formulated for the delicate skin around your eyes.

**5. Protect.** This is a crucial step because it can prevent damage from occurring. Most of us generally know about sunscreen, and are familiar with the abbreviation "SPF", which stands for "Sun Protection Factor." SPF is a necessary ingredient in any sunscreen product, but did you know it only protects against only one segment of ultraviolet radiation, UVB?

UVB rays are the ultra violet rays that are responsible for browning and burning our skin. As we age, UVB rays also cause the unsightly spots on sun-exposed areas that are commonly known as "liver spots." Many of us feel protected when we apply a product with a high SPF number. SPF 15 filters out approximately 94% of UVB rays, but UVB rays only make up about five percent of the ultraviolet radiation that reaches the earth!

UVA rays make up more than 90 percent of the ultraviolet radiation we're exposed to, and they are the real culprit in the aging process. However, the SPF in sunscreens does not protect us from the UVA rays! Worse than the cosmetic havoc of sun exposure, however, is the skin cancers it causes. Skin cancers are on the rise in the United States, and the best way to manage them is through prevention and early detection.

When selecting a sun screen, look for UVA protection. The Skin Cancer Foundation logo on over-the-counter products is a great indicator that you are making the right choice. If you purchase your sunscreen at a physician's office, ask your provider if it provides UVA protection. One UVA protection product, Anthelios SX, is available in a few outlets and select medical offices.

Finally, if you're really serious about your skin, ask your skin care medical professional about correction products, such as Hydroquinone, and antioxidants. Hydroquinone is used to lighten areas of darkened skin such as freckles and **age spots**.

A high-quality antioxidant performs two important functions; it keeps new damage to a minimum, and actually repairing damage that's already there by rebuilding lost collagen, thus giving the skin a youthful, firm appearance.

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