

7-Night Skincare Cycle

Kelley's Notes & How to Use

Notes

- This has been crafted after years of experimentation and hyperfocused ADD-driven research. Science summary at the bottom if you care.
- Mornings are simple and identical every day.
- Nights run on a 7-night rotation: retinol, regeneratives, exfoliation, barrier repair, retinol again, then two nights of hydration and rest. Then you start over.
- Three rules before you start:
 - Retinol goes on DRY skin for max efficacy. Wait 15 minutes before moisturizer. If you are building retinol tolerance (meaning you don't want max efficacy quite yet) its ok to add moisturizer to buffer the retinol as your skin adjusts
 - If your skin feels sensitive, add another barrier night. The cycle bends.
 - Sunscreen every single day or none of the rest of this counts.

How this works

- Mornings are simple and identical every day. Nights run on a 7-night rotation: retinol, regeneratives, exfoliation, barrier repair, retinol again, then two nights of hydration and rest. Then you start over.
- The nighttime routine is where the effort goes. We get eight hours of repair time while we sleep and I want to use it well.
- Three rules before you start:
 - Retinol goes on DRY skin. Wait 15 minutes before moisturizer. This one matters.
 - If your skin feels sensitive, add another barrier night. The cycle bends.
 - Sunscreen every single day or none of the rest of this counts.

The 7 Nights at a Glance

Night	Focus	The move
1	Retinoid	Cleanse, retinol on dry skin, wait 15 min, occlusive moisturizer
2	Regeneratives	Cleanse, growth factors or exosomes, peptides, moisturizer

Night	Focus	The move
3	Exfoliate	Cleanse, gentle chemical exfoliant, peptides, moisturizer
4	Barrier repair	Cleanse, peptides, barrier serum, lipid barrier cream
5	Retinoid	Same as Night 1
6	Hydrate	Cleanse, hydrating serums, facial oil, barrier cream
7	Hydrate/ repair	Same as Night 6. Let the skin repair before you start again.

Beauty Tools

- A microcurrent device does work. It's temporary, but sometimes temporary is good enough. I use [FACE GYM Pure Lift Face](#) 3-4 times a week.
- A really good LED mask will change your skin. I can guarantee this. 6-7 days a week for 10 minutes, there is a noticeable change in evenness, smoothness, glowiness, radiance, and fine lines. [CURRENTBODY Skin LED Light Therapy Mask](#) is the one to get, I promise. I really did my homework on this one. Use this on clean skin ! Before skincare routine, and definitely not while wearing makeup.
- Sheet mask or game changer for an instant glow up. [These](#) are the best

Daytime Routine

I keep my morning routine simple and consistent. Every single day, I do the following:

- Spritz Hydrating toner (optional, any watery essence- i love [this one](#))
- Vitamin C serum: [MEDIK8 C-Tetra Luxe Serum](#)
- Peptides (if I'm feeling fancy): [MEDIK8 Liquid Peptides](#)
- Moisturizer: [CeraVe Daily Moisturizing Lotion](#) or [Skin Food](#) (she's thiccc I love this for dry skin season) and now obsessed with this [Sweet Chemistry serum](#) for light hydration
- Sunscreen SPF 30+: [My favorite sunscreen](#) I buy 5 at a time. It's the most lightweight, hydrating, can't even notice you have it on

Nighttime 7-Night Cycle

Night 1: Retinoid Night

(The MOST important to prime for days 2-7)

The Routine:

- Cleanser
- Retinol that you can tolerate on DRY SKIN
- Wait 15 minutes (THIS IS IMPORTANT)
- Occlusive moisturizer

Product Recommendations

Cleanser: I only use one. I've used it forever and ever. [DHC Deep Cleansing Oil](#). Double cleanse.

Retinol: I like [MEDIK8 Crystal Retinal 10](#) because you can start at a lower strength and work up to the highest. If you're really experienced, ask your doctor for a prescription of higher strength tretinoin. My sensitive skin can barely tolerate tret, so I stick with the highest strength Medik8.

*note- If you're having a hard time tolerating your retinol, don't suffer through it. You can put a thin layer of moisturizer first to act as a barrier, which will weaken the strength of your retinol but helps with tolerance.. Also 15 minutes after retinol, use a really rich moisturizer. [Skin Food](#) or aestura is tops

Night 2: Regeneratives

(Skin is primed to receive regenerative ingredients on this night)

This is where your growth factors, your exosomes, and your peptides are going to do their heaviest lifting. After retinol primes the skin, these ingredients can penetrate more deeply and work more effectively.

The routine:

- Cleanser
- Regenerative product with growth factors, exosomes, or PDRN
- Peptides serum (optional)
- moisturizer

Product Recommendations

- Cleanser: [DHC Deep Cleansing Oil](#)
- Growth factor serum /exosomes or regenerative treatment of choice (choose one or alternate):
 - [ALLIES OF SKIN Multi Peptides And Growth Factor Advanced Lifting Serum](#)
 - [DR. DIAMOND'S METACINE InstaFacial Plasma](#)
- Peptide serum: I like [MEDIK8 Liquid Peptides](#) or [Sweet Chemistry Hydra Serum](#)
- Moisturizer: [CeraVe Daily Moisturizing Lotion](#) or [Skin Food](#)

Night 3: Exfoliate

(Keratinocytes ready to shed - gentle exfoliation is in order)

Do not overdo this. Use a gentle chemical exfoliant- I don't use a lot of physical exfoliators because they tear up my skin barrier. I keep this simple - any gentle AHA or BHA will work.

The routine:

- Cleanser
- Exfoliating toner
- Peptides serum (optional)
- moisturizer

Product Recommendations

I like Paula'sChoice- affordable and effective. [This one](#) (strong) and [this one](#) (less strong)- [this one](#) if you can handle it (side note- If an exfoliant is ever too strong for your face, use it on your body :)

Night 4: Barrier Repair Night

DO NOT sleep on barrier repair - also note that moisturizer is different than barrier cream.

Steps:

- Cleanse
- Peptides (optional) like [MEDIK8 Liquid Peptides](#) or

- Barrier Support serum - [this one](#) by Experiment Beauty and [this one](#) are constantly in rotation
- Lipid barrier repair cream like : [AESTURA AtoBarrier 365 Cream](#).
- Peptide serum: [MEDIK8 Liquid Peptides](#)

If your skin is feeling sensitive or irritated, add another barrier repair night here!

Night 5: Retinol Again

We're back to retinol! Your skin has had time to recover and repair from the first retinol application, and now it's ready for another round of cellular turnover stimulation.

- Cleanser: [DHC Deep Cleansing Oil](#)
- Retinol: [MEDIK8 Crystal Retinal 10](#). The Medik8 line is excellent because it offers a gradient of strengths, allowing you to start lower and build tolerance over time. I've worked my way up to the Crystal Retinal 10, which is their strongest formulation. If your skin can handle it and you want even more potency, speak with your dermatologist about prescription tretinoin (Retin-A). However, my sensitive skin finds the Medik8 to be the perfect balance of efficacy without excessive irritation.
- Wait 15 minutes
- Occlusive moisturizer:

Night 6/7 Hydration + Barrier

Layer hydrating serums (hyaluronic acid, niacinamide, peptides) and your favorite moisturizer

I love [this duo](#) with this [Beekman Barrier boosting facial oil](#) and this [AESTURA AtoBarrier 365 Cream](#) moisturizer again. You can also layer in some peptides here as well. Or just go HAM with the [Sweet Chemistry-](#) I love this stuff

Let your skin rest before starting the cycle again.

Category	Products
Retinol	MEDIK8 Crystal Retinal 10
Hydrating Toners	Acwell Licorice Toner , Prequel Hydrating Duo

Cleansers	DHC Deep Cleansing Oil
Growth Factors/Exosomes	SKIN TYPE SOLUTIONS Multi Peptides And Growth Factor Advanced Lifting Serum DR. DIAMOND'S METACINE InstaFacial Plasma Bioactive Growth Factor Serum
Peptides	MEDIK8 Liquid Peptides
Hydrating Serums	EXPERIMENT Super Saturated Barrier Support Serum Beekman Barrier Boosting Facial Oil SweetChemistry HYdra Serum
Barrier Repair Creams	AESTURA AtoBarrier 365 Cream
Moisturizers	CeraVe Daily Moisturizing Lotion , Skin Food
Vitamin C	MEDIK8 C-Tetra Luxe Serum
Sunscreen	My Favorite Sunscreen SPF 30+
Exfoliants	Paulas Choice BHA/ Mandelic and BHA or Ordinary Glycolic Toner
Beauty Tools	CURRENTBODY Skin LED Light Therapy Mask FACE GYM Pure Lift Face (Microcurrent Device)

The Science Behind Skin Cycling

Why Skin Cycling Works

Skin cycling is a strategic approach to skincare that alternates between active ingredients and recovery periods. This method prevents over-exfoliation, reduces irritation, and allows the skin to maximize the benefits of each product category while maintaining barrier integrity.

The Lipid Barrier: Your Skin's Protective Shield

The stratum corneum (outermost layer of skin) functions as a critical barrier against environmental stressors, water loss, and pathogen entry. This barrier is composed of corneocytes (dead skin cells) embedded in a lipid matrix, often described as a "bricks and mortar" structure.

The lipid matrix consists of three key components:

- Ceramides (50%)
- Cholesterol (25%)
- Free fatty acids (25%)

When this barrier is compromised through over-exfoliation, harsh actives, or environmental damage, transepidermal water loss (TEWL) increases, leading to

dehydration, sensitivity, and accelerated aging. Barrier repair products containing ceramides, cholesterol, and fatty acids help restore this critical structure.

How Skin Cells Create Radiance

Healthy skin appears radiant due to the organized arrangement of corneocytes in the stratum corneum. When these cells are uniformly flat and well-hydrated, they reflect light evenly, creating a smooth, luminous appearance.

Conversely, when the skin barrier is damaged or dehydrated, corneocytes become irregular and lifted at the edges, scattering light diffusely rather than reflecting it uniformly. This results in a dull, rough-textured appearance. Proper hydration and barrier maintenance keep these cells flat and reflective, maximizing skin radiance.

The Strategic Rotation: Retinol, Exfoliation, Hydration, and Actives

Retinoids (Nights 1 & 5):

Retinoids increase cellular turnover, stimulate collagen production, and normalize keratinization. However, they can be irritating and temporarily compromise the barrier. By spacing retinoid nights and following them with recovery periods, the skin can adapt while minimizing irritation.

Regeneratives (Night 2):

After retinoid priming, the skin is more receptive to peptides, growth factors, and exosomes. These ingredients support collagen synthesis, cellular communication, and tissue repair. Applying them on primed skin enhances penetration and efficacy.

Exfoliation (Night 3):

Chemical exfoliants (AHAs/BHAs) remove dead skin cells that retinoids have loosened. This accelerates cell turnover and prevents pore congestion, but must be used judiciously to avoid barrier damage. A single exfoliation night per cycle is typically sufficient.

Barrier Repair (Night 4):

After three consecutive nights of active ingredients, the skin needs intensive barrier support. Lipid-rich formulations restore the stratum corneum's structural integrity, reduce inflammation, and prepare skin for the next retinoid application.

Hydration & Recovery (Nights 6-7):

These nights focus on hydration and gentle actives without aggressive exfoliation or retinoids. This allows the skin to consolidate gains from earlier in the cycle while maintaining hydration and addressing specific concerns with targeted serums.

Scientific References

1. Elias PM. Stratum corneum defensive functions: an integrated view. *J Invest Dermatol.* 2005;125(2):183-200.
2. Feingold KR. Thematic review series: skin lipids. The role of epidermal lipids in cutaneous permeability barrier homeostasis. *J Lipid Res.* 2007;48(12):2531-2546.
3. Kligman AM. The treatment of photoaged skin with topical retinoids. *Eur J Dermatol.* 1998;8(Suppl 1):S15-S19.
4. Mukherjee S, Date A, Patravale V, Korting HC, Roeder A, Weindl G. Retinoids in the treatment of skin aging: an overview of clinical efficacy and safety. *Clin Interv Aging.* 2006;1(4):327-348.
5. Proksch E, Brandner JM, Jensen JM. The skin: an indispensable barrier. *Exp Dermatol.* 2008;17(12):1063-1072.
6. Rawlings AV, Harding CR. Moisturization and skin barrier function. *Dermatol Ther.* 2004;17 Suppl 1:43-48.
7. Verdier-Sévrain S, Bonté F. Skin hydration: a review on its molecular mechanisms. *J Cosmet Dermatol.* 2007;6(2):75-82.