

Everything You Need to Know About Cleansing and Exfoliating



Image link: <https://pixabay.com/en/woman-beauty-face-girl-model-2498668/>

Alt tag: Beautiful Asian woman cleanses her skin in the bath

Meta description: What is the best facial cleanser for your skin type? How often should you exfoliate? Get all the answers on cleansing and exfoliating here.

Cleansing and exfoliating go hand in hand because they both remove buildup off the skin's surface. Choosing the right facial cleansers and exfoliators and implementing them into your routine properly can make all the difference in their effectiveness.

What type of cleanser works best for combination skin? Should you exfoliate before you cleanse? How many times per day should you wash your face? How to exfoliate your skin without damaging it?

Who knew that cleansing and exfoliating would be so complex! Well, they don't have to be.

People have been cleansing and exfoliating their skin for years, but as humans evolve, so do our skin care routines. This means more steps, more ingredients, more products, and more confusion.

Let's dive deeper into these hot topics, weigh your options, and get you on track to starting your skin care routine off right.

Intro to Facial Cleansers: 4 Benefits of Face Wash

The purpose of cleansing your face regularly may seem obvious, but face wash goes beyond the surface (literally).

You may not be able to see it, but your face actually gets pretty dirty throughout the day and even as you sleep. This is why a good cleansing routine is essential.

As you're exposed to the elements during the day, unwanted contaminants build up on your skin. Do you want dirt, pollutants, debris, and bacteria sitting on your skin? Of course not, as that could lead to oiliness, breakouts, and even premature aging. Removing makeup is likely a core part of your beauty routine, and cleansing your face thoroughly should be, too.

We don't even realize it, but as we sleep, your skin sheds dead skin cells. These dead skin cells accumulate, resulting in dull, flakey skin and clogged pores. You might also sweat in your sleep, which could also lead to breakouts. Cleansing breaks these cycles by removing dead skin cells and preventing sweat from clogging your pores.

In addition to cleansing the day and night away, face wash has several other benefits to promote skin that looks and feels healthy:

1. Remove dirt, bacteria, and dead skin cells

Point blank, no one wants these contaminants sitting on her face. When you're exposed to the elements, and even when you're inside, buildup is bound to happen.

Skin cell regeneration is a good thing, but it also means that your skin will be shedding a lot of dead skin cells in the process. Sometimes this process slows down—due to aging, improper skin care routine, skin conditions, and environmental factors—and dead skin cells hang on for a little too long.

A good face wash busts the buildup of both dirt and dead skin cells, which prevents breakouts and promotes healthy skin.

2. Improve skin care product absorption

By removing the excess buildup of dirt, bacteria, and dead skin cells, your skin care products can do their jobs more effectively.

Cleansing your skin first gives your incoming skin care products a clean canvas to work with. This allows your skin care the best fighting chance to absorb deep within your skin's layers and deliver the hydration and nutrients your skin needs.

3. Remove makeup

If there's one thing you know not to do, it's go to bed with makeup on. Always remove your makeup at the end of the day, but don't rely on makeup removing wipes alone—makeup isn't formulated to be removed that easily.

To get the leftover makeup residue, thoroughly wash your face with a good cleanser. Oil-based cleansers are the best at removing stubborn makeup.

4. Treat acne

Cleansing isn't just for acne-prone teenagers. Adult acne affects many people, but consistent use of facial cleansers can help treat acne in people of all ages.

Cleansers usually contain acne-fighting ingredients like salicylic acid and benzoyl peroxide, making them effective agents to remove impurities and prevent breakouts. [1]

How Often Should You Wash Your Face?

This the age-old question: should you wash your face once or twice a day? You should always wash your face at least once a day, but depending on your skin type, washing your face twice a day might help you yield the best results.

People with oily or acne-prone skin should cleanse twice a day, preferably in the morning and evening. This is to remove the buildup of dead skin cells that may form during sleep and to get rid of impurities that settle on the skin during the day.

People with dry, combination, or sensitive skin can get away with cleansing once per day, preferably in the evening. If you choose to forego your face wash in the morning, you can still wash your face with water and continue with your regular skin care routine.

Regardless of your skin type, you should always wash your skin after exercise to prevent sweat from binding to dirt and clogging your pores. If you wear makeup throughout the day, you should also always wash it off thoroughly before bed.

Before you go washing your face several times per day, keep in mind that over-washing has some cons. If you're using multiple face washes in one cleansing period or washing your face more than twice a day, you may throw off the moisture balance in your skin. This means that if you're removing too much oil, your skin could become dehydrated. Keep cleansing to twice per day at most.

Different Types of Facial Cleansers

Cleansing your skin isn't as simple as taking a bar of soap to your face. For every skin need, there are hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of options to choose from.

How to know what type of cleanser will get the job done? Different cleansers serve different purposes and suit different skin types.

Let's go over the main types of facial cleansers and then go over which face wash type goes with which skin type.

Water-based cleansers

Oil-free cleansers have been a cult favorite for decades, and this is usually the type of cleanser we start out on as teens. Water-based cleansers are a great place to start for making sure impurities are cleansed from your skin.

Because some cleanser don't contain oil-based ingredients, they don't leave a greasy, shiny feel like other cleansers. However, they can be overly drying and cause a mattifying effect in dry skin or excessive oiliness in acne-prone skin. [2]

Water-based cleansers are usually recommended for oily and acne-prone skin types, but all skin types can benefit from oil-free cleansers. If you have dry skin, make sure that your water-based cleanser has hydrating ingredients so as to not strip your skin of all its moisture.

Oil-based cleansers

Oil dissolves oil, so it's no surprise that oil-based cleansers have quickly risen to the beauty hall of fame. Oil-based cleansers also go by the name of cleansing oils, and it's ok if you're feeling a little skeptical. Fear not—oil-based facial cleansers won't clog your pores.

Oil-based cleansers are formulated with the good type of oil that pulls impurities from the skin. When you rinse away the cleansing oil, you're also rinsing away excess oil, oil from leftover makeup, and other impurities that your natural oil clings on to.

Gel cleansers

Similar to cleansing oils, gel cleansers utilize oil-based ingredients to get rid of excess oil and remove impurities from the skin. They're a bit more gentle than cleansing oils, and the texture is exactly how would you imagine—gel-like.

If you want the gentleness of an oil-based cleanser but the deep cleansing power of an oil-based cleanser, a gel cleanser may be for you. Gel cleansers uniquely allow water and oil in both the face wash and your skin to interact with each other without stripping your skin of all its moisture and still getting a good cleanse.

Foam cleansers

Imagine the most lightweight face wash in the world—it's probably a foam cleanser. A foam cleanser is closest you'll get to putting actual clouds on your face. When you pump a foam cleanser into your hands, it may start out as a gel or cream, but as you lather, the texture turns into an airy foam.

Foam cleansers are easy to spread evenly across the face, and they're very gentle. They can be oil-free or contain nourishing oils, so foam cleansers can be beneficial to various skin types.

Cream cleansers

For a cleanse that also hydrates, cream cleansers come in handy. They also go by milk cleansers and cleansing lotions, but this is not your average lotion.

Cream cleansers may remind you of a moisturizer, and while they're hydrating and nourishing, they also have antibacterial properties that strip away dirt, unclog pores, and deliver moisture to parched skin.

Since this type of cleanser is so hydrating, it's best suited for dry and sensitive skin. With a cream cleanser, dry and sensitive skin types won't have to worry about skin feeling rough and tight after cleansing.

How to Choose the Best Cleanser for Your Skin Type

Like most skin care products, there isn't a one-size-fits-all face wash. Dirt, bacteria, dead skin cells, pollutants, and other contaminants affect skin differently depending on whether that skin is oily, dry, or sensitive, for example.

To determine how to best cleanse your face, consider the best facial cleanser for your skin type.

Best facial cleanser for oily skin: If you have oily skin, you'll have no problem finding the best face wash for you because most cleansers are oily skin friendly. Oil-free or water-based cleansers are always popular among oily skin types because the lack of oil helps balance out the excessive oils that naturally occur within your skin. This also helps prevent breakouts if you're acne-prone.

However, oil-free isn't your only option. You can try out an oil-based cleanser if you're not acne-prone. The healthy oils will draw out impurities from the skin, and the oils will also make it easy to remove dirt, makeup, and sebum.

Best facial cleanser for dry skin: Because dry skin is lacking moisture, people with dry skin should use cleansers that won't strip the remaining moisture balance in the skin. Water-based cleansers and foams may be too lightweight for dry skin types.

Oil-based and cream cleansers are the best face washes for dry skin because they deliver healthy oils to the skin while still cleansing away impurities.

Best facial cleanser for acne-prone skin: Similar to oily skin, acne-prone skin needs a cleanser that will balance oil levels in the skin while treating breakouts. Oil-free or water-based cleansers may be the best bet for acne-prone skin.

The best face wash for acne-prone skin is one that has antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties to fight breakouts and soothe redness. Most water-based and gel cleansers are packed with acne-fighting ingredients that will cleanse your skin and keep flare ups at bay.

Good Face Tip: Look for the following words on your cleanser if you have acne-prone skin: non-comedogenic, non-acnegenic, non-irritating, and non-allergenic. [3]

Best facial cleanser for combination skin: If you have combination skin, you need a little bit of everything—an adequate amount of hydration, acne-fighting ingredients, and a mixture of water and oil.

Gel and foam cleansers often have a mix of both water and oils, so combination skin gets the hydration it needs without overdoing it. You may have to try a couple cleansers that are suitable for combination skin to see which one works best for you. Combination skin might be more oily or dry depending on the climate or season, so you might also have to rotate your cleansers depending on how much hydration you need at the moment.

Best facial cleanser for sensitive skin: Sensitive skin definitely calls for a gentle cleanser. This is where your ingredient reading skills will come in handy. Be sure that your cleanser doesn't contain any harmful or potentially irritating ingredients, such as fragrances, parabens, dyes, etc.

Many gentle, soothing cleansers are in the cream category. This is because the hydrating ingredients in cream cleansers soothe sensitive skin that may be inflamed with acne, rosacea, or other skin problems. You may see this type of face wash referred to as a cleansing balm.

The best facial cleanser for sensitive skin may also be a natural one. Essential oils, botanicals, and plant extracts are common ingredients in natural cleansers designed to cleanse and soothe sensitive skin.

Intro to Exfoliating + 3 Benefits of Face Scrubs

Exfoliating is the best follow-up step to cleansing. Once you start exfoliating, you'll never go back. The instant results from a simple face scrub can really restore your skin, making the texture noticeably softer and smoother.

Like many skin care products, exfoliation happens on a cellular level. You can't see it with the naked eye, but dead skin cells are almost always piling up on your face. This is a good thing

because you want new skin cells to renew, but sometimes those dead skin cells need a little push on their way out. That's where exfoliating comes in.

The main purpose of exfoliating is to remove dead skin cells. Not only does this make your skin softer and smoother, but it also makes your skin care easier to absorb into your skin.

Some of the other benefits of exfoliating include:

1. Improved skin texture

There aren't many skin treatments that yield immediate results, but exfoliating is an exception. Have you ever exfoliated your legs and then shaved afterward? You may have noticed a drastic difference in the smoothness and softness of your legs post-shave. This is because exfoliating removes the top layer of dead skin cells, paving the way for a clean slate.

It's the same with facial skin. Exfoliating gets rid of the buildup, even if we can't see it. Dead skin cells can create a rough, flaky texture on the surface of the skin, so your skin is noticeably smoother and softer once that layer has been exfoliated away.

2. Stimulate collagen synthesis

The true key to collagen is preserving it, not trying to add to it. Exfoliating helps preserve collagen by stimulating its synthesis. Once we enter our thirties, our [collagen production](#) decreases. Exfoliating provides a mild trauma to the skin, which kicks collagen into gear and results in more elastic skin over time.

Chemical peels, a powerful chemical exfoliant, is especially helpful in stimulating collagen. Chemical peels encourage new epidermal cells to grow, dermal collagen synthesis, and more evenly distributed melanin for more elastic and even skin. [4]

3. Intrinsic and extrinsic aging benefits

Exfoliation can drastically improve hyperpigmentation, sun damage, wrinkles, and dehydration, all of which are associated with aging.

Chemical exfoliants can actually remove skin cells that are discolored, thereby reducing the appearance of hyperpigmentation. This is linked to exfoliators' ability to reduce the appearance of sun damage through smoothing and even coloration.

Alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs), a type of chemical exfoliator, is especially useful in smoothing out fine lines and wrinkles. AHAs do this by removing dead skin cells from the edges of facial lines, creating the illusion that wrinkles aren't as deep. AHAs also increase cell renewal rate, which decreases both the signs of aging and dehydration. [5]

4. Draw out congestion

If you struggle with breakouts and clogged pores, exfoliating can help relieve some of that congestion. Exfoliating replaces dead skin cells with new, healthy skin cells, so exfoliating after a breakout can encourage healthy skin tissue to grow.

Exfoliating can also treat certain [types of acne](#), especially whiteheads and blackheads. Since these are more mild forms of acne, exfoliating helps draw out that congestion and unclog those pores.

Different Types Of Exfoliators

There are two main types of exfoliation: chemical exfoliation and physical exfoliation. Physical exfoliation is more well-known—simply use an exfoliating brush or exfoliating scrub to physically remove dead skin cells from your skin. Chemical exfoliation is lesser known, but you may be using chemical exfoliators without even realizing it.

Physical exfoliation

If you want the satisfaction of exfoliating, then physical exfoliation is for you. It involves one of two tools: a bristled brush used to scrub the skin or a face scrub with small grains that act as exfoliating agents.

Physical exfoliation requires some man power, but be gentle. Some exfoliators have large ingredients that are sharp, and this may cause light damage or tearing to the skin. If you're too rough, you may over-exfoliate, which can damage the epidermis.

There are many exfoliating brushes on the market—some of them are spin brushes, which does most of the work for you. These brushes can be combined with your regular facial cleanser to spread the face wash evenly and exfoliate at the same time.

Another option is to purchase a face scrub or make a DIY version at home. Many DIY face scrubs call for granules of sugar, which are large enough to remove dead skin cells, but small enough to not cause any damage.

Chemical exfoliation

If any of your favorite skin care products contain AHAs or BHAs, you're already chemically exfoliating. However, your skin care products aren't meant to be exfoliators, so you'll want to use a chemical exfoliating product, such as chemical peels, to get the full effect of these powerful ingredients.

The chemicals in peels are utilized to assist cell turnover by dissolving the bonds holding on to dead skin cells. [5]

The most common ingredients in chemical peels are alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs) and beta hydroxy acids (BHAs).

AHAs like glycolic acid are water-soluble, so they chemically remove dead skin cells on a surface level. BHAs like salicylic acid, however, are oil-soluble and can absorb deep into skin's pores. This doesn't mean that BHAs are better exfoliators—it just means they exfoliate deeper.

Fruit enzymes can also be used in chemical exfoliation. Papaya and pineapple enzymes go by the ingredient names papain and bromelain, respectively. [5] This is a great alternative to AHAs and BHAs if you have sensitive skin.

How Often Should You Exfoliate?

When done correctly, both types of exfoliation can play a largely important role in your skin care routine. They complement each other since they exfoliate the skin differently.

Like cleansing, physical exfoliation should be done daily. You can use an exfoliating brush or an exfoliating cleanser on a daily basis to keep up with the buildup of dead skin cells.

Over-exfoliation can irritate the skin, but gentle exfoliating with a brush or scrub will get the job done without causing damage.

Chemical exfoliation, however, shouldn't exceed three times per week in normal, dry, and combination skin types. Aim for twice a week, but three is the maximum to avoid over-exfoliation.

Dermatologists recommend that people with oily and acne-prone skin types use chemical exfoliators with of 10% or less on a daily basis. [5] However, AHAs and BHAs might be too irritating to sensitive skin.

Chemical peels should only be used every couple of weeks because they're typically more powerful than regular chemical exfoliants. [4]

When to exfoliate

Should you exfoliate before or after cleansing? Cleansing before exfoliating ensures that dirt and makeup are removed before the next step. Since you want to be gentle with your skin, cleansing removes as many impurities as possible before exfoliation, which is less gentle than cleansing.

The protocol has long been to exfoliate after cleansing, but there is a case for exfoliating before cleansing. Exfoliation gets rid of dead skin cells and can wipe away dirt and bacteria with it, leaving a smoother surface for cleansing agents to do their job.

How to Choose the Best Exfoliator for Your Skin Type

Exfoliating is beneficial to all skin types, but people with sensitive skin should be cautious. Depending on your skin type, certain exfoliating ingredients may work better for you.

Physical exfoliation is effective for all skin types, but the type of chemical exfoliator you should use depends on your skin type.

Best exfoliator for oily skin: You'd think that dry skin would have more buildup of dead skin cells, but oily skin may actually have extra buildup. It's very important for oily skin types to exfoliate regularly to bust the buildup, so it doesn't mix with oil and cause breakouts.

Chemical exfoliation is the best exfoliator for oily skin because BHAs reach the lining of the pores, allowing oil to flow freely without becoming clogged. [5]

Best exfoliator for dry skin: Dry skin may cause roughness and flakiness, but exfoliation can help with skin texture in dry skin types. Exfoliating with AHAs may be the best option for dry skin because AHAs like glycolic acid helps dissolve stubborn skin cells that won't shed on their own.

Best exfoliator for acne-prone skin: Exfoliating is an effective method for treating acne, and it's an important step in your acne prevention routine. Because bacteria clings to dead skin cells, it's important that they shed before the bacteria can spread and cause more breakouts.

Like oily skin, acne-prone skin types need an exfoliant that can absorb deep into the pores. Physical exfoliation alone won't achieve this, so enlist the help of a chemical exfoliant. Salicylic acid, one of the AHAs, is a great acne-fighting exfoliator that not only dissolves dead skin cells but helps regulate sebum production for acne management. [5]

Best exfoliator for combination skin: A combination of physical and chemical exfoliation is best for combination skin. People with combination skin can use both types of chemical exfoliators, AHAs and BHAs, to treat both the oily and dry patches of skin.

Best exfoliator for sensitive skin: Sensitive skin types have to be extra careful. Exfoliation can exacerbate existing skin issues in sensitive skin, so it's best to steer clear of harsh exfoliation, especially powerful chemical exfoliants.

To still reap some of the benefits of exfoliation, people with sensitive skin can use a soft wash cloth with a cleanser—the texture may mildly exfoliate the skin. Natural DIY exfoliating scrubs may also be a safe choice for people with sensitive skin; however, it's better to err on the side of caution and be very gentle.

The Bottom Line

There's a lot to know about facial cleansing and exfoliating—more than you may have thought. It's important to take your skin type into consideration when implementing a new product in your skin care routine.

What may be even more important is ensuring that those products contain safe ingredients that promote healthy skin instead of harming your skin. Both cleansers and exfoliators often contain toxic ingredients that counteract the benefits that the product claims.

You're likely cleansing and exfoliating already, but your skin care routine could probably use an update based on the various types of facial cleansers and exfoliators and which products suit your needs.

If you haven't already, detox your face washes, face washes, and chemical peels. Just like shedding your dead skin cells, it might be time to shed products that are doing you no good and replace them with products that live up to their promises.

Keywords:

- Facial cleanser
- Best facial cleanser
- Face wash
- Best face wash
- Face scrub
- Exfoliating scrub
- Chemical exfoliator
- Chemical peel
- Best exfoliator
- Exfoliating brush

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Best facial cleanser for oily skin

If you have oily skin, you'll have no problem finding the best face wash for you because most cleansers are oily skin friendly. Oil-free or water-based cleansers are always popular among oily skin types because the lack of oil helps balance out the excess oils that naturally occur within your skin. This also helps prevent breakouts if you're acne-prone.

However, oil-free isn't your only option. You can try out an oil-based cleanser if you're not acne-prone. The healthy oils will draw out impurities from the skin, and the oils will also make it easy to remove dirt, makeup, and sebum.

Best facial cleanser for dry skin

Because dry skin is lacking moisture, people with dry skin should use cleansers that won't strip the remaining moisture balance in the skin. Water-based cleansers and foams may be too lightweight for dry skin types.

Oil-based and cream cleansers are the best face washes for dry skin because they deliver healthy oils to the skin while still cleansing away impurities.

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<h3>Best facial cleanser for acne-prone skin</h3>

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<p>Similar to oily skin, acne-prone skin needs a cleanser that will balance oil levels in the skin while treating breakouts. Oil-free or water-based cleansers may be the best bet for acne-prone skin.</p>

<p>The best face wash for acne-prone skin is one that has antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties to fight breakouts and soothe redness. Most water-based and gel cleansers are packed with acne-fighting ingredients that will cleanse your skin and keep flare ups at bay.</p>

<p>Good Face Tip: Look for the following words on your cleanser if you have acne-prone skin: non-comedogenic, non-acnegenic, non-irritating, and non-allergenic. [3]</p>

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<h3>Best facial cleanser for combination skin</h3>

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<p>If you have combination skin, you need a little bit of everything—an adequate amount of hydration, acne-fighting ingredients, and a mixture of water and oil.</p>

<p>Gel and foam cleansers often have a mix of both water and oils, so combination skin gets the hydration it needs without overdoing it. You may have to try a couple cleansers that are suitable for combination skin to see which one works best for you. Combination skin might be more oily or dry depending on the climate or season, so you might also have to rotate your cleansers depending on how much hydration you need at the moment.</p>

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<h3>Best facial cleanser for sensitive skin</h3>

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<p>Sensitive skin definitely calls for a gentle cleanser. This is where your ingredient reading skills will come in handy. Be sure that your cleanser doesn’t contain any harmful or potentially irritating ingredients, such as fragrances, parabens, dyes, etc.</p>

<p>Many gentle, soothing cleansers are in the cream category. This is because the hydrating ingredients in cream cleansers soothe sensitive skin that may be inflamed with acne, rosacea, or other skin problems. You may see this type of face wash referred to as a cleansing balm.</p>

<p>The best facial cleanser for sensitive skin may also be a natural one. Essential oils, botanicals, and plant extracts are common ingredients in natural cleansers designed to cleanse and soothe sensitive skin.</p>

<p>Sensitive skin is even more fragile in the winter, so choose your winter face wash for sensitive skin with even more caution.</p>

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<h2>Intro to Exfoliating + 3 Benefits of Face Scrubs</h2>

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<p>Exfoliating is the best follow-up step to cleansing. Once you start exfoliating, you’ll never go back. The instant results from a simple face scrub can really restore your skin, making the texture noticeably softer and smoother.</p>

Like many skin care products, exfoliation happens on a cellular level. You can't see it with the naked eye, but dead skin cells are almost always piling up on your face. This is a good thing because you want new skin cells to renew, but sometimes those dead skin cells need a little push on their way out. That's where exfoliating comes in.

The main purpose of exfoliating is to remove dead skin cells. Not only does this make your skin softer and smoother, but it also makes your skin care easier to absorb into your skin.

Some of the other benefits of exfoliating include:

Improved skin texture

There aren't many skin treatments that yield immediate results, but exfoliating is an exception. Have you ever exfoliated your legs and then shaved afterward? You may have noticed a drastic difference in the smoothness and softness of your legs post-shave. This is because exfoliating removes the top layer of dead skin cells, paving the way for a clean slate.

It's the same with facial skin. Exfoliating gets rid of the buildup, even if we can't see it. Dead skin cells can create a rough, flaky texture on the surface of the skin, so your skin is noticeably smoother and softer once that layer has been exfoliated away.

Stimulate collagen synthesis

The true key to collagen is preserving it, not trying to add to it. Exfoliating helps preserve collagen by stimulating its synthesis. Once we enter our thirties, our [collagen production](https://www.thegoodfaceproject.com/articles/what_is_collagen) decreases. Exfoliating provides a mild trauma to the skin, which kicks collagen into gear and results in more elastic skin over time.

Chemical peels, a powerful chemical exfoliant, is especially helpful in stimulating collagen. Chemical peels encourage new epidermal cells to grow, dermal collagen synthesis, and more evenly distributed melanin for more elastic and even skin. [4]

Intrinsic and extrinsic aging benefits

Exfoliation can drastically improve hyperpigmentation, sun damage, wrinkles, and dehydration, all of which are associated with aging.

Chemical exfoliants can actually remove skin cells that are discolored, thereby reducing the appearance of hyperpigmentation. This is linked to exfoliators' ability to reduce the appearance of sun damage through smoothing and even coloration.

Alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs), a type of chemical exfoliator, is especially useful in smoothing out fine lines and wrinkles. AHAs do this by removing dead skin cells from the edges of facial lines, creating the illusion that wrinkles aren't as deep. AHAs also increase cell renewal rate, which decreases both the signs of aging and dehydration. [5]

Draw out congestion

If you struggle with breakouts and clogged pores, exfoliating can help relieve some of that congestion. Exfoliating replaces dead skin cells with new, healthy skin cells, so exfoliating after a breakout can encourage healthy skin tissue to grow.

Exfoliating can also treat certain [types of acne](https://www.thegoodfaceproject.com/articles/adult_acne_causes), especially whiteheads and blackheads. Since these are more mild forms of acne, exfoliating helps draw out that congestion and unclog those pores.

Different Types Of Exfoliators

There are two main types of exfoliation: chemical exfoliation and physical exfoliation. Physical exfoliation is more well-known—simply use an exfoliating brush or exfoliating scrub to physically remove dead skin cells from your skin. Chemical exfoliation is lesser known, but you may be using chemical exfoliators without even realizing it.

Physical exfoliation

If you want the satisfaction of exfoliating, then physical exfoliation is for you. It involves one of two tools: a bristled brush used to scrub the skin or a face scrub with small grains that act as exfoliating agents.

Physical exfoliation requires some manpower, but be gentle. Some exfoliators have large ingredients that are sharp, and this may cause light damage or tearing to the skin. If you're too rough, you may over-exfoliate, which can damage the epidermis.

There are many exfoliating brushes on the market—some of them are spin brushes, which does most of the work for you. These brushes can be combined with your regular facial cleanser to spread the face wash evenly and exfoliate at the same time.

Another option is to purchase a face scrub or make a DIY version at home. Many DIY face scrubs call for granules of sugar, which are large enough to remove dead skin cells, but small enough to not cause any damage.

Chemical exfoliation

If any of your favorite skin care products contain AHAs or BHAs, you're already chemically exfoliating. However, your skin care products aren't meant to be exfoliators, so you'll want to use a chemical exfoliating product, such as chemical peels, to get the full effect of these powerful ingredients.

The chemicals in peels are utilized to assist cell turnover by dissolving the bonds holding on to dead skin cells. [5]

The most common ingredients in chemical peels are [alpha hydroxy acids \(AHAs\)](https://www.thegoodfaceproject.com/articles/AHA_BHA) and beta hydroxy acids (BHAs).

AHAs like glycolic acid are water-soluble, so they chemically remove dead skin cells on a surface level. BHAs like salicylic acid, however, are oil-soluble and can absorb deep into skin's pores. This doesn't mean that BHAs are better exfoliators—it just means they exfoliate deeper.

Fruit enzymes can also be used in chemical exfoliation. Papaya and pineapple enzymes go by the ingredient names papain and bromelain, respectively. [5] This is a great alternative to AHAs and BHAs if you have sensitive skin.

How Often Should You Exfoliate?

When done correctly, both types of exfoliation can play a largely important role in your skincare routine. They complement each other since they exfoliate the skin differently.

Like cleansing, physical exfoliation should be done daily. You can use an exfoliating brush or an exfoliating cleanser on a daily basis to keep up with the buildup of dead skin cells.

Over-exfoliation can irritate the skin, but gentle exfoliating with a brush or scrub will get the job done without causing damage.

Chemical exfoliation, however, shouldn't exceed three times per week in normal, dry, and combination skin types. Aim for twice a week, but three is the maximum to avoid over-exfoliation.

Dermatologists recommend that people with oily and acne-prone skin types use chemical exfoliators with 10% or less on a daily basis. [5] However, AHAs and BHAs might be too irritating to sensitive skin.

Chemical peels should only be used every couple of weeks because they're typically more powerful than regular chemical exfoliants. [4]

When to Exfoliate

Should you exfoliate before or after cleansing? Cleansing before exfoliating ensures that dirt and makeup are removed before the next step. Since you want to be gentle with your skin, cleansing removes as many impurities as possible before exfoliation, which is less gentle than cleansing.

The protocol has long been to exfoliate after cleansing, but there is a case for exfoliating before cleansing. Exfoliation gets rid of dead skin cells and can wipe away dirt and bacteria with it, leaving a smoother surface for cleansing agents to do their job.

How to Choose the Best Exfoliator for Your Skin Type

Exfoliating is beneficial to all skin types, but people with sensitive skin should be cautious. Depending on your skin type, certain exfoliating ingredients may work better for you.

Physical exfoliation is effective for all skin types, but the type of chemical exfoliator you should use depends on your skin type.

Best exfoliator for oily skin

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<p>You’d think that dry skin would have more buildup of dead skin cells, but oily skin may actually have extra buildup. It’s very important for oily skin types to exfoliate regularly to bust the buildup, so it doesn’t mix with oil and cause breakouts.</p>

<p>Chemical exfoliation is the best exfoliator for oily skin because BHAs reach the lining of the pores, allowing oil to flow freely without becoming clogged. [5]</p>

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<h3>Best exfoliator for dry skin</h3>

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<p>Dry skin may cause roughness and flakiness, but exfoliation can help with skin texture in dry skin types. Exfoliating with AHAs may be the best option for dry skin because AHAs like glycolic acid helps to dissolve stubborn skin cells that won’t shed on their own.</p>

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<h3>Best exfoliator for acne-prone skin</h3>

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<p>Exfoliating is an effective method for treating acne, and it’s an important step in your acne prevention routine. Because bacteria clings to dead skin cells, it’s important that they shed before the bacteria can spread and cause more breakouts.</p>

<p>Like oily skin, acne-prone skin types need an exfoliant that can absorb deep into the pores. Physical exfoliation alone won’t achieve this, so you might need to enlist the help of a chemical exfoliant. Salicylic acid, one of the AHAs, is a great acne-fighting exfoliator that not only dissolves dead skin cells but helps regulate sebum production for acne management.

[5]</p>

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<h3>Best exfoliator for combination skin</h3>

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<p>A combination of physical and chemical exfoliation is best for combination skin. People with combination skin can use both types of chemical exfoliators, AHAs and BHAs, to treat both the oily and dry patches of skin.</p>

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<h3>Best exfoliator for sensitive skin</h3>

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<p>Sensitive skin types have to be extra careful. Exfoliation can exacerbate existing skin issues in sensitive skin, so it’s best to steer clear of harsh exfoliation, especially powerful chemical exfoliants.</p>

<p>To still reap some of the benefits of exfoliation, people with sensitive skin can use a soft washcloth with a cleanser—the texture may mildly exfoliate the skin. Natural DIY exfoliating scrubs may also be a safe choice for people with sensitive skin; however, it’s better to err on the side of caution and be very gentle.</p>

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<h2>The Bottom Line</h2>

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<p>There’s a lot to know about facial cleansing and exfoliating—more than you may have thought. It’s important to take your skin type into consideration when implementing a new product in your skincare routine.</p>

<p>What may be even more important is ensuring that those products contain safe ingredients that promote healthy skin instead of harming your skin. Both cleansers and exfoliators often contain toxic ingredients that counteract the benefits that the product claims.</p>

<p>You’re likely cleansing and exfoliating already, but your skin care routine could probably use an update based on the various types of facial cleansers and exfoliators and which products suit your needs.</p>

<p>If you haven’t already, detox your face washes, face washes, and chemical peels. Just like shedding your dead skin cells, it might be time to shed products that are doing you no good and replace them with products that live up to their promises.</p>

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