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## How to build an anti-aging skin care routine, according to dermatologists

*The options are many — so we got experts to break down and share what actually works.*

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When dealing with matters of the skin, everyone turns to the same type of person: a dermatologist. They're the experts on not only what's good for you, but also the [things that actually work](#). What better way to discover the most effective products than by finding out what the pros use on their own skin?

Shop TODAY interviewed several dermatologists about the [anti-aging products](#) they actually use, as well as the best practices they recommend, to keep their skin looking youthful. Some noteworthy findings: Sun exposure is a big culprit, the time of day and order you use certain products matter, and — surprise! — it's never too early to start using products with anti-aging properties. ("You can start in [your early 20s](#)," Dr. Debra Jaliman, a NYC-based board-certified dermatologist, told us.)

Keep reading to find out what exactly you should look for in an anti-aging product, what your skin care routine *should* have, answers to your frequently asked questions, and — of course — [the list of our experts' and editors' 18 recommendations](#) for the best anti-aging products.

### Types of anti-aging products and ingredients

Anti-aging products, like other kinds of skin care, come in a variety of forms, including creams, [serums](#), lotions, gels, ointments and even powders. To help you sift through the abundance of choices out there, our experts listed the following products and ingredients you should be looking for:

#### Sunscreen

***Yes, there's moisturizing and exfoliating — but preventing damage from the sun's UV rays is arguably the most important part of your skin care routine, according to Jaliman and Dr. Rebecca Baxt, a board-certified dermatologist and medical director at CosMedical in New Jersey. Why? Because those rays degrade your skin's collagen, which causes [hyperpigmentation](#) and [wrinkles](#), the latter explained.***

***"I could do a whole long article on [sunblock](#), but the basics are to make sure it's at least an SPF 30 broad spectrum and [to] apply daily to sun-exposed surfaces," she said, adding that the hardest part for many people are reapplying sunscreen every 1 to 2 hours, instead of only when they go to the beach. This leads to***

***"incidental sun exposure," one of the most common causes of skin aging, Baxt added. She also said that there's no "safe" amount of time to be outside in the sun without your skin experiencing its rays' degrading effects.***

## **Retinoids**

***After protecting your skin from UV rays and making sure it's moisturized, retinoids are the next most important ingredient to add to your regimen, Baxt said. She pointed out over-the-counter examples of this chemical compound that's a derivative of vitamin A — serums with retinol or Differin, for instance. (There's also Retin-A, a stronger retinoid, available via prescription.)***

***Retinoids have a plethora of benefits: They diminish the appearance of wrinkles by thinning the skin's top layer, reduce hyperpigmentation and stimulate collagen production, Baxt explained.*** Plus, Jaliman said, the increased cell turnover from this ingredient helps unclog pores.

## **Vitamin C products**

***After sunscreen and retinoids, there are other categories of skin care products you can use that Baxt said are less important, but that still contribute to small anti-aging improvements when added to your routine.*** The first of these is vitamin C, "a potent antioxidant that stimulates collagen production and also brightens the skin," explained Jaliman. ***When applied first thing in the morning, before sunscreen, "[it] can help reverse skin damage if any rays get through," Baxt explained.***

## **Acids, peptides and other ingredients**

[Acids](#) and peptides are similar to vitamin C in the sense that they also contribute to small anti-aging improvements, Baxt said. Examples of helpful acids include [glycolic acid](#), a sugarcane-derived alpha-hydroxy acid (AHA) that exfoliates skin, and [hyaluronic acid](#), a substance our skin produces naturally and that binds its weight 1,000 times in water (read: very, very hydrating). "It helps minimize the look of fine lines and wrinkles due to its plumping properties," Jaliman explained.

[Peptides](#) are a type of amino acid that, Jaliman said, "stimulate new collagen production [and] improve the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles." [Niacinamide](#), a form of vitamin B3, is another effective antioxidant she also recommends, not only because the substance, like other antioxidants, help counteract the stressful oxidative effects of UV rays, but also "helps even skin tone ... and is anti-inflammatory, so it helps reduce redness," the dermatologist said.

## **Moisturizers**

Moisturizing is another necessary step in your anti-aging skin care routine that Jaliman said is important to be doing "at any age." Moisturizers of any variety (e.g., lotions,

creams, serums and ointments) generally "are often labelled as antiaging since moisturizing reduces the appearance of wrinkles, and the FDA allows that labeling," Baxt added.

[Squalane](#) is another moisturizing ingredient that you'll see in many anti-aging products, said Jaliman. Squalane is a lipid that's a stable, cosmetic-ready (and thus skin-friendly) [form of squalene](#), which is the oil our skin naturally produces to protect our skin and keep moisture in. We produce less of this natural oil as we age, which is why Jaliman recommends looking out for squalane as one of the ingredients in your moisturizing and anti-aging products. "[It] is an anti-inflammatory lipid, so it reduces redness in the skin. It is also very hydrating," she added.

## How we chose

To curate this list, **we interviewed 11 dermatologists** to ask for the ingredients to look for an anti-aging product, and what best practices they recommend for a well-rounded skin care regimen. We then asked some of these dermatologists, as well as some of our skin-savvy [Shop TODAY editors](#), for their anti-aging product favorites. We also pored through dozens of bestselling products on the internet that contain top anti-aging ingredients *and* that have mostly positive verified customer reviews.

This creamy-textured emulsion of a "next-generation" retinoid that, the brand claims, achieves the same anti-aging and skin-brightening effects of other forms of non-prescription retinoids — without the latter's tendency to irritate and dry sensitive skin. Because of the creamier texture of this serum, it should be applied at night after lighter substances but before any heavier creams or ointments. You should also note that it shouldn't be used in conjunction with other retinoid-based skin care products.

We like this for people with oily skin that can't handle a lot of oil-based products like a squalane-retinoid formula, due to the fact that it's oil-free. In fact, one Ulta reviewer raved that, in contrast to an oil-based The Ordinary retinoid she previously used, "this formulation sinks nicely into my while using it."

**Budget Pick:** [Differin Adapalene Gel 0.1% Acne Treatment](#)

## Top products with anti-aging retinoids

This hydrating nighttime cream by Paula's choice contains 0.01% [retinol](#), hyaluronic acid (HA) and peptides — a combination that, the company claims, both minimizes the appearance of wrinkles, plumps up the skin and binds moisture. It's also got antioxidants in the mix, which helps tackle the effects of environmental stressors like UV damage. Reviewers with very dry skin give this cream positive reviews, with one verified customer raving: "My skin is aging and VERY dry, and after applying this to my skin, it drinks it up!"

### [Paula's Choice Resist Intensive Repair Cream](#)

### [Avon Anew Clinical Line Eraser with Retinol](#)

### [Anew Clinical Line Eraser with Retinol](#)

"I love this product because it's sensitive enough for first-time retinol users," said Dr. Kim Nichols, a Connecticut-based dermatologist.

"Retinol, a derivative of vitamin A, does a lot. It minimizes fine lines and wrinkles, diminishes [hyperpigmentation](#), blackheads and [dark spots](#) and reduces inflammation, pore size and the appearance of blemishes," she said, adding that it's not too harsh on skin.

"Two things to remember when using retinol: Always use with a moisturizer and less is more," she noted. "You only need a penny size for your whole face at night."

## **Picks with Vitamin C, acids, peptides and more**

**Staff Pick:** [L'Oreal Revitalift 10% Pure Vitamin C Serum](#)

### [L'Oreal Paris Skincare 10% Pure Vitamin C Serum](#)

"I used to use this and it's a great price point, really helps with texture and fades dark spots. It's thick so can actually be used as a moisturizer," said Shannon Garlin, editorial assistant at Shop TODAY. She's talking about L'oreal Revitalift, a serum formulated with vitamin C, which the brand claims visibly reduces fine lines and wrinkles, as well as brightens skin, in one to two weeks. It's also safe for sensitive skin and can be used both day and night.

### [First Aid Beauty Ultra Repair Firming Collagen Cream](#)

### [Ultra Repair Firming Collagen Cream](#)

Jaliman highly recommends this highly moisturizing cream for its skin-plumping niacinamide and wrinkle-fighting peptides. But, she added, the glycerin and squalane, which boost hydration, as well as firming collagen, are a welcome bonus. Its compatible with normal, dry and combination skin, and reviewers love its lightweight texture and application. Furthermore, this is one of the products Jaliman highlighted that actually *do* reduce wrinkles on the face.

**Staff Pick:** [Mario Badescu Vitamin C Serum](#)

I was given this at an event and will buy again, it doesn't smell and is really lightweight, applies nicely under makeup!" raved Garlin. In addition to the vitamin C (which targets acne scars in addition to sunspots), this gentle night serum also contains collagen

sodium hyaluronate, a combination which, the brand claims, both moisturizes and brightens the skin. All you need is a few drops, and make sure to apply before any night creams.

### [La Roche-Posay Pure Vitamin C Face Serum](#)

#### **Pure Vitamin C Face Serum**

"When I think of anti-aging, I think of protecting, preventing and correcting, so I always like to have an antioxidant in the morning," said Dr. Michelle Henry, clinical instructor of dermatology at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City.

Henry recommends La Roche-Posay's vitamin C serum because it brightens skin, gets rid of dark spots and stimulates collagen. "It makes skin look fresher and gets rid of lines and wrinkles," she added.

### [CeraVe Hydrating Hyaluronic Acid Face Serum](#)

#### **Hydrating Hyaluronic Acid Face Serum**

Henry calls hyaluronic acid a "miracle molecule" — and this serum is full of it.

"It really helps plump up your skin," she explained. "As we get older, we lose hydration in our skin and this ingredient can help restore moisture."

### [Drunk Elephant C-Firma Fresh Vitamin-C Day Serum](#)

#### **C-Firma Fresh Vitamin-C Day Serum**

### [Drunk Elephant B-Hydra Intensive Hydration Serum](#)

#### **B-Hydra Intensive Hydration Serum**

"I started researching natural skin lines a few years ago when I was looking to replace my underperforming hydrating gel," said Dr. Jessica Weiser, a New York City-based dermatologist.

"That's when I discovered this gel and serum combo. I was initially attracted to the hypoallergenic and nontoxic nature of these two products, but after I tested them, I was immediately drawn to their silky texture and smooth application — and their results."

She first found the superstar Drunk Elephant duo when they were sold in a set of smaller sizes. That set is no longer available, but don't fret! You can achieve just as radiant skin with the full-size bottles that will last you even longer.

"I apply the serum every morning — its powerful antioxidants brighten my complexion and help prevent UV and environmental damage," she said. "Then comes the gel, which

contains hyaluronic acid, which gets 'set' over the smaller molecular nutrients and vitamins in the serum. The combination leaves my skin glowing, radiant and perfectly prepped for [sunscreen](#), the final and most important step of my [skin care routine](#)."

## **[Skin Medica Age Defense Retinol Complex](#)**

### **Age Defense Retinol Complex**

"I swear by retinoids! Every dermatologist learns about this form of vitamin A in residency as part of our training," said Dr. Gary Goldenberg, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City. "As an anti-ager, retinoids help soften wrinkles and lines and decrease pigmentation caused by the sun. But they also treat breakouts and stimulate collagen and elastin fibers."

Goldenberg also loves its exfoliating properties.

"Want more? Retinoids can improve pigmentation issues, like brown spots and melasma, thanks to its exfoliating properties and they can shrink the size of your pores and give your skin a glow," he added. "Any product that's left on my fingers goes right to the backs of my hands for some anti-aging there."

### **Anti-aging face moisturizers**

## **[Aveeno Positively Radiant Daily Facial Moisturizer SPF 15](#)**

### **Positively Radiant Daily Facial Moisturizer SPF 15**

"While there are many expensive skin care treatments on the market, nothing is better at preventing both skin cancer and premature skin aging than sunscreen," Dr. Joshua Zeichner, director of cosmetic and clinical research at Mount Sinai Hospital.

"Studies have shown time and time again that regular use of [sunscreens prevents the development of skin cancers](#), including melanomas, which can be potentially fatal," he said. "In one recent yearlong study, regular sunscreen use was even shown to improve the cosmetic appearance of the skin, likely because protective skin was able to heal itself." Ultimately, consistency is key when it comes to skin care.

"The best treatment for aging skin is preventing ultraviolet light damage to begin with," Zeichner said. "Skipping one day will not result in too much loss, but if you regularly take a pass, your skin will ultimately pay the price."

Zeichner said he was impressed with the product's brightening properties.

"I was introduced to this product when I was a resident," Zeichner shared. "I love that it not only protects from UV exposure, but it's the one product that really brightens up the skin, thanks to its soy complex and light diffusers."

## [Eucerin Daily Protection SPF 30 Sunscreen Moisturizing Face Lotion](#)

### [Daily Protection SPF 30 Sunscreen Moisturizing Face Lotion](#)

"I love this anti-ager because it's dual acting: It's an oil- and fragrance-free moisturizer, plus it's a broad spectrum UVA/UVB sunscreen that contains zinc oxide and titanium dioxide but doesn't leave your skin looking pasty and chalky," said Dr. Sonia Badreshia, clinical instructor of dermatology at the University of California, San Francisco. "It's a must-wear for your face, neck, décolleté and hands. I recommend it to treat and prevent dark marks and it's my secret weapon for fighting rough knees and elbows."

## [CeraVe Ultra-Light Moisturizing Lotion SPF 30](#)

### [Ultra-Light Moisturizing Lotion SPF 30](#)

Levin recommends this combination moisturizer with SPF 30. "It has three essential [ceramides](#) that really hydrate and [protect the skin barrier](#). It also has hyaluronic acid, which is a super hydrating skin care ingredient that I love," she explained.

## [Neutrogena Hydro Boost Gel-Cream](#)

"I've been applying hyaluronic acid to my skin for years," said Dr. Rachel Nazarian, assistant clinical professor at The Mount Sinai Hospital Department of Dermatology. "It's a substance naturally found in the skin and works to maintain water for a fuller, more youthful look."

Nazarian said drugstore products with hyaluronic acid are now better than ever.

"Today, smaller molecules of high-grade hyaluronic acid with better topical absorption capabilities can be found in over-the-counter products, including this [gel-cream](#) that I apply nightly. Bonus: Its hydrating properties curb the irritation caused by retinols," she told us. "I still use a few tricks to enhance absorption, such as applying it after I shower while my skin is still damp or using it after an exfoliating wash."

## **Sunscreens that help with anti-aging**

### **Staff Pick: [La Roche-Posay Tinted Sunscreen SPF 50](#)**

#### [Anthelios Tinted Sunscreen SPF 50](#)

Shop TODAY senior editor Jess Bender swears by this tinted sunscreen, which she's been using more regularly as of late. "Aside from being a lighter option over concealer or moisturizer, it has a higher SPF, so I don't have to worry that much about getting burned throughout the day," she said.

## [EltaMD UV Physical Tinted Facial Sunscreen Broad-Spectrum SPF 41](#)

## UV Physical Tinted Facial Sunscreen Broad-Spectrum SPF 41

"Sunscreen is the most important anti-aging product because the sun is responsible for 90 percent of skin aging," said Dr. Arielle Kauvar, a New York City-based dermatologist and clinical professor of dermatology at Langone NYU Medical Center.

Better yet, this moisturizer is [perfect for sensitive skin](#).

"This is my favorite face sunscreen because it doesn't irritate even the most sensitive skin — we even use it on patients after laser procedures," said Kauvar. "It's water-resistant and adds a [light tint](#) to your skin, which is great for when you want to go sans makeup. I apply it after my moisturizer and before my makeup. Just be sure to reapply if you're outdoors all day."

## Frequently asked questions

### When should I start using anti-aging skin care products?

"[You can] never be too young to start taking care of your skin," Dr. Jaliman said. "Learning proper cleansing techniques at an early age is important — moisturizing, exfoliating and preventing damage from the sun's rays is important at any age," she added.

### What should my skin care routine consist of to help with anti-aging?

Jaliman recommended this specific order to your daily skin care regimen:

1. Cleanse
2. Exfoliate (one to two times a week)
3. Apply toner
4. Apply serum
5. Apply eye cream (if you use one)
6. Apply spot or topical treatments
7. Moisturize
8. Use sunscreen if your moisturizer doesn't contain it.

What kinds of serums, you may ask? "Serums vary depending on the specific skin concern you're addressing," Jaliman answered. "You want those ingredients to penetrate before applying your moisturizer (if you're using one)," she added. She recommends antioxidant serums for daytime use, while she suggests retinol serums for nighttime.



And yes, the order of each skin care step is very important, she concluded. "[The] wrong order minimizes the benefit of the products being used. You want the full benefit of each product you are using," explained Jaliman.

### ***What other daily practices help with anti-aging?***

***Believe it or not, the application — and reapplication — of sunscreen is the biggest daily habit you can do. "Often, the left side of people's faces is worse than the right side due to the sun coming through the car window for years and years," Dr. Baxt explained. "People get sun exposure walking the dog, running errands, etc.," she added. Her favorite type of sunblock is one that's zinc-based, but she says that "the best sunblock is the one that a patient will use daily and reapply."***

***Reapplication of sunblock is also a common issue among regular makeup-wearers, said Baxt. Luckily, "there are powder sunblocks that can be applied over makeup," she said. Just note that it's not as effective as regular sunscreen — so don't rely on it for the beach — "but it's very good for running errands. etc., for women who wear makeup and don't want to reapply creamy sunblock," she concluded.***

### ***Meet our experts***

- [Dr. Sonia Badreshia](#) is a clinical instructor of dermatology at the University of California, San Francisco.
- [Dr. Rebecca Baxt](#), MD, MBA, FAAD, is a board-certified dermatologist based in New Jersey.
- [Dr. Gary Goldenberg](#) is an assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City.
- [Dr. Michelle Henry](#) is a clinical instructor of dermatology at Weill Cornell Medical College in New York City.
- [Dr. Debra Jaliman](#) is board-certified NYC dermatologist, assistant professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai and author of the book, "[Skin Rules: Trade Secrets from a Top New York Dermatologist](#)."
- [Dr. Melissa Kanchanapoomi Levin](#) is a board-certified dermatologist and founder of Entière Dermatology in New York City.
- [Dr. Arielle Kauvar](#) is a New York City-based dermatologist and clinical professor of dermatology at Langone NYU Medical Center.
- [Dr. Rachel Nazarian](#) is assistant clinical professor at The Mount Sinai Hospital Department of Dermatology.
  - [Dr. Kim Nichols](#) is a Connecticut-based dermatologist.
  - [Dr. Jessica Weiser](#) is a New York City-based dermatologist.
- [Dr. Joshua Zeichner](#) is the director of cosmetic and clinical research at Mount Sinai Hospital.