

DR. REBECCA BAXT INTERVIEWED BY THE AMERICAN  
ACADEMY OF DERMATOLOGY

“DERMATOLOGIST-RECOMMENDED SKIN CARE FOR YOUR 20’S”

Your  
Dermatologist  
Knows

WHAT ONE THING CAN WOMEN IN  
THEIR 20S DO TO KEEP THEIR SKIN  
LOOKING YOUTHFUL?



Protect your skin from the sun! Wear sunglasses and a hat, a broad-brimmed hat works best. Seek shade. Your future self will thank you!

— *Rebecca Baxt, MD, FAAD*



Wear big sunglasses! The big lenses help to protect the delicate skin around your eyes, which can prevent those fine lines that many people start seeing in their 30s.

— *Rajani Katta, MD, FAAD*

Your 20s is an ideal time to start a skin care routine and adopt skin healthy habits. “The skin care choices you make now will affect what your skin looks like in your next decade – and beyond,” says board-certified dermatologist Rajani Katta, MD, FAAD.

### 6 skin care practices to start in your 20s

With an overwhelming array of products and skin care trends, it can be difficult to know what’s good for your skin. That’s why we asked two board-certified dermatologists to share their expertise. Here’s the skin care advice they recommend for women in their 20s:

1. **Use these two skin care products daily:** To keep your skin looking its best, dermatologists recommend using these two skin care products every day:

- **A mild cleanser:** When selecting a cleanser, choose one for your skin type. Dr. Katta says, “For example, if you have acne-prone skin, use a mild cleanser that removes oil.” Dry skin does better with a hydrating cleanser.

To get the best results from your cleanser, wash your face twice a day – when you get up and before bed. You also want to wash after sweating.

- **Sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher, broad spectrum, and water resistant):** Any time you plan to be outside during the day, even if it’s to take a walk or drive to work, you expose your skin to the sun’s harmful rays.

If you will be outside during daylight, protect your skin. Apply sunscreen to your face and any skin that clothing won’t cover, putting the sunscreen on 15 minutes before you go outdoors. Always put sunscreen on after other skin care products – and beneath your makeup.

Like your cleanser, you want to use a sunscreen formulated for your skin type. If you have oily skin, look for the words “non-comedogenic” or “won’t clog pores” on the product. Women with darker skin tones may want to use a tinted sunscreen. Most tinted sunscreens won’t leave a white cast on your skin.

2. **Add in a skin care product that addresses your primary skin concern:** “In our 20s, women’s skin care concerns can vary greatly,” says Dr. Katta. While some women have acne-prone skin, others are noticing fine lines and other signs of aging. Dark spots can be the biggest concern for some.

The best way to address your concerns is to use a skin care product that contains science-backed ingredients, says board-certified dermatologist Rebecca Baxt, MD, FAAD. She recommends the following ingredients:

- **Vitamin C serum or cream:** Science shows that this ingredient can reduce skin aging and dark spots.

Like other skin care products, you want to use a product formulated for your concern and skin type.

**When to apply vitamin C:** Dr. Baxt tells her patients, “Apply it after washing your face in the morning, before you put on your sunscreen.”

- **Retinoid:** The term “retinoid” is a catch-all for an array of vitamin A-based products used on skin. It can treat mild fine lines and wrinkles, acne, and dark spots. It can also improve skin texture.

If you’re looking to treat uneven skin tone, dark spots, or your skin’s

texture, look for the word “retinol.” It’s a type of retinoid that’s used for these purposes.

Retinol can give you younger-looking skin by speeding up new skin cell turnover, which starts to slow in your 20s.

To treat acne, dermatologists prescribe one of these retinoids – adapalene, tazarotene, tretinoin, or trifarotene. You’ll also find adapalene in an acne-fighting product available without a prescription.

When spread on acne-prone skin, a retinoid can unclog pores. This can give you clearer skin and allow other acne gels and creams to work better.

**When to apply a retinoid:** Dr. Baxt recommends applying a retinoid before bed. After washing your face, wait 20 to 30 minutes and then apply it.

If you find the retinoid too drying, apply a moisturizer immediately after washing your face, using a moisturizer that won’t clog your pores. Then apply the retinoid 20 to 30 minutes later.

3. **Make your skin care routine Adjustable, Consistent, and Tailored (ACT).** To help her patients remember this point, Dr. Katta tells them to build ACT into their skin care. Here’s why.

“For a skin care routine to meet your needs, it must be adjustable,” says Dr. Katta. For example, you may need a moisturizer during the winter when the air tends to be dry. You’ll also need to adjust your skin care with the passing years. If a product you chose irritates your skin, you’ll want to stop using it right away.

When it comes to creating a skin care routine, consistency is also key. Unless a skin care product is irritating your skin, you need to keep using it. It takes at least 30 days to know whether it’s working.

With so many skin care trends and products available, following one routine can be difficult. The results you see on social media can tempt you to add in another product or two. That’s understandable.

When temptation to try a new product or routine hits, remember this fact. To get results, you need to use products consistently. It takes time to see results.

If you try new skin care products too often, you may not see any progress. In fact, all you may have to show for it is irritated skin. You also want to create a skin care routine tailored to your needs, as discussed above.

4. **Keep your skin looking its best with healthy habits.** Drs. Baxt and Katta stress that keeping your skin looking its best requires more than a skin care routine. Here's the are key skin-healthy habits they recommend:

- **Stop tanning.** "Tanning is 100% awful for your skin and your health," says Dr. Baxt. Every day dermatologists tell their patients that it can cause wrinkles, brown spots, and skin cancer. Dr. Baxt's advice: "If you use tanning beds or any other indoor tanning device, stop immediately."
- **Protect your skin from the sun.** To protect your skin from the sun, the AAD recommends that you seek shade, cover up with clothing, and wear sunscreen that offers SPF 30 or higher, broad-spectrum protection, and water resistance."

Protecting your skin from the sun every day that you go outside is one of the best things you can do to keep your skin healthy.

For most people, going about your day exposes you to the sun's harmful rays. "Without sun protection, you're constantly damaging your skin with everyday activities like walking around your neighborhood, taking a train, and going to and from an outdoor parking lot." says Dr. Baxt.

She adds, "I see so many women in their 40s lamenting the damage they did to their skin in their 20s because they didn't protect their skin from the sun."

Dr. Baxt sees many women who think that makeup with SPF protects them. To get the SPF benefits, you'd have to use a makeup that has SPF 30 or higher. You'd also have to reapply your makeup every two hours.

- **Don't scrub your skin.** Dr. Baxt says, "Scrubbing usually irritates your skin and then makes it hard to tolerate helpful products."
- **Always remove your makeup before going to bed.** Leaving makeup on while you sleep can age your skin more quickly and cause breakouts.
- **Limit sugar.** Dr. Katta tells her patients that sugar is an ingredient you want to limit.

She says, "The World Health Organization (WHO) advises us to consume no more than six teaspoons (about 25 grams) of sugar per day." That's not much. "A sweetened, iced coffee drink can have up to 15 teaspoons of sugar and a can of ginger ale more than six," she says.

5. **Be cautious about skin care trends that you see on social media.** Some skin care trends you see on social media can do more harm than good.

One skin problem that dermatologists frequently treat is the damage done by overusing exfoliating products people see on social media. An exfoliator is designed to remove the top layer of skin, leaving you with glowing skin.

When overused, an exfoliator can damage the protective layer called the skin barrier. A damaged skin barrier leaves you with raw and irritated skin. “You may develop allergic reactions to products that previously didn’t cause a problem,” says Dr. Katta.

To get helpful skin care advice, Dr. Katta recommends following board-certified dermatologists on social media.

You’ll find plenty of advice from board-certified dermatologists on the American Academy of Dermatology’s social media platforms. To find us, type #AADskin into your browser’s search box.

6. **See a dermatologist if you have a skin condition.** Dr. Baxt says, “Anyone with a skin condition that affects their quality of life like eczema or rosacea should see a board-certified dermatologist.”

**Bottom line:** Your 20s is an ideal time to start a skin care routine and adopt skin-healthy habits. If you’re unsure about which products to include in your routine, a board-certified dermatologist can recommend products and a routine tailored to your specific needs.

#### *Related AAD resources*

- [Skin care tips dermatologists use](#)
- [Skin care basics](#)

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## **Images**

Courtesy of Rebecca Baxt, MD, FAAD, and Ranjani Katta, MD, FAAD

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### ***Written by:***

Paula Ludmann, MS

### ***Reviewed by:***

Rebecca Baxt, MD, FAAD

Shani Francis, MD, MBA, FAAD

Ranjani Katta, MD, FAAD

Elan Newman, MD, FAAD

William Warren Kwan, MD, FAAD

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