

Here's what to look for in retinol cream — plus 6 derm-approved products to try



Retinols can benefit your anti-aging skin care routine — even after you stop using them.

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When it comes to [anti-aging skin care](#), [retinol](#) is likely one of the [buzzy ingredients](#) that come to mind — and rightfully so. Dermatologists often call it a "gold standard" skin care ingredient, known for its wrinkle-minimizing and complexion-brightening effects.

[Retinol](#) comes in many forms, but retinol creams can be an easy way to introduce the ingredient to your skin care routine and reap the benefits. If you have hesitations, don't worry: We tapped board-certified dermatologists [Dr. Angela Lamb](#), [Dr. Mary Lupo](#), [Dr. Lian Mack](#), [Dr. Rebecca Baxt](#) and [Dr. Marisa Garshick](#) to give you the run down on retinol creams and share the top products they recommend for a glowing complexion.

WHAT IS RETINOL?

Retinol is a type of retinoid that's available over the counter. Retinoids are molecular compounds derived from [vitamin A](#), an ingredient you may have heard of when it comes to anti-aging skin care.

Mack says that retinol creams can help increase the [collagen](#) and elastin in your skin, even out the texture of your skin by promoting cell turnover, reduce the appearance of

pores, and decrease sebum or [oil production](#). But, Lupo warns, the ingredient can be drying and irritating for some.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN RETINOL CREAM

Mack suggests starting with a low concentration, around 0.05%.

[Dr. Marisa K. Garshick](#), a board-certified dermatologist, also suggests starting with a low percentage of retinol. She tells us, "When looking for a retinol cream, it is important to consider the concentration as those with sensitive skin or those new to retinol should opt for a lower concentration."

As far as other ingredients go, Garshick says, "For those with dry or sensitive skin it can help to use a retinol cream that also contains ingredients like hyaluronic acid, ceramides and niacinamide which can help to reduce dryness, minimize irritation and improve overall tolerability."

HOW DO I USE RETINOL CREAMS?

Mack says, "Retinols should be applied at night using a pea-size amount, spreading it evenly across the face with a [moisturizer](#) or [hyaluronic acid serum](#) overlying it." Again, some retinol creams are formulated with moisturizing ingredients like hyaluronic acid, which is a bonus. She recommends an evening application because retinol is deactivated by sunlight and can increase your risk of photosensitivity or a [sunburn](#). Lupo echoes her advice, adding a daily sunscreen with [SPF 40+](#) if you're applying retinol creams in the daytime.

[Dr. Rebecca Baxt](#), a board-certified dermatologist, also suggests an evening application. She tells us, "Also a reminder that retinol should be used in the evening, and with sunblock in the am..." Baxt goes on to emphasize the importance of reapplying sunscreen when you're outside.

As is the case with most skin care ingredients, try to exercise some patience before you appraise results. It can take up to 90 days to see a "glow" or change in the texture and tone of your skin, but you may be able to see some of these changes in your complexion in as little as two weeks, Lamb tells us.

BEST RETINAL CREAMS, ACCORDING TO EXPERTS

If you've been waiting for a retinol lotion that works for both your face and body, and that both moisturizes and exfoliates, look no further than Gold Bond's new Age Renew retinol lotion. It's said to do all that overnight — and at 7 ounces and for under \$15, it's a great value. One initially skeptical Shop TODAY editor, who still uses it, says, "After using it for only a week, my skin already was softer, and even my stretch marks look faded. The texture also feels so good and doesn't go on greasy."

The key to those results, while still being gentle enough to use overnight, according to Mack, is the lotion's formulation: "It contains a stabilized form of retinol that minimizes the risk of dryness and irritation, making it suitable for nightly use to both the face and

the body,” she says, adding that it’s also super hydrating due to its seven different moisturizers.

L’Oreal is another brand Lupo recommends reaching for when it comes to retinol creams. According to the brand, this anti-wrinkle face cream is suitable for all skin types. While the exact concentration of retinol in the formula is not listed, the brand says it is made with pro-retinol, “a stable derivative of retinol that is able to be stored in the epidermis and suitable for sensitive skin.”

Both Lamb and Lupo recommend this retinol cream from RoC, which uses time-released technology so your skin can get the benefits of retinol continuously for up to 12 hours — without irritating it. The cream also contains hyaluronic acid, making for a formulation that the brand says helps hydrate your skin for up to 48 hours.

While the exact concentration of retinol is not listed, the brand recommends you start by using it every other night and then gradually increasing your usage until your skin adjusts.

Lupo also recommends this anti-aging face cream from Neutrogena for anyone looking to try a retinol cream. It is formulated with retinol and hyaluronic acid, which helps to hydrate and plump the skin. The brand says it can be applied twice daily to the face and neck, but Lupo recommends applying every other evening, up to four times per week.

Lupo recommends looking at Olay for a retinol night cream. This fragrance-free moisturizer is made with a blend of [vitamin B3](#) and retinol, which the brand says helps hydrate the skin for up to 24 hours.

One Ultra reviewer reported, “I was searching for a product that would help diminish the lines on my chest from sun damage. I was blown away by this product. Within two weeks my chest looks so much better. ... It’s also helping the cells turnover faster on my skin. Love it! Will definitely buy again.”

Lamb recommends this night cream from SkinCeuticals, which has 1% retinol. Since it has such a high concentration, the brand says it is formulated for skin that has already been preconditioned with retinol 0.5%. The brand also recommends you start by using it once or twice a week, then gradually increase the frequency to every other night, then every night, as can be tolerated.

Like Stratia’s face cream, this one is gentle enough to use nightly, thanks to soothing, moisturizing players like squalane, vitamin E and cocoa butter. But even while feels luxuriously creamy on the skin, it doesn’t feel oily, which is a plus.

Having tested it ourselves after several months, shortly after Gold Bond’s Age Renew (the other body cream on this list), this one has a comparatively milder scent and feels more milky on the skin. The minimal percentage of the ingredient retinol is just right for those new to it, too.

This retinol hand cream aims to act as sunscreen, hand cream and retinol product in one: It helps prevent sun damage, moisturize and condition your hands and nails, as well as minimize lines and wrinkles. This is thanks to its combination of retinol, vitamins A, C and E, and green tea extract. One reviewer gave it five stars, saying that it goes on

non-greasy and that, after a week of use, “I noticed that the sun spots on my hands had faded dramatically.”

Got dry, uneven or [acne-prone skin](#)? This cream from Paula’s Choice is said to help with all three; its 0.1% retinol works with shea butter and antioxidants in its formulation. You can use it either for spot treatments or all over.

Customers like that it smooths, hydrates and evens skin texture, in addition to its acne-fighting benefits. One happy customer who purchased this to help fade scars raves, “I didn’t expect that this would also totally clear up my back of acne!”

Having tried this ourselves, we can attest that it’s good for skin new to retinol and for various skin types. In fact, unlike other retinol creams, this one’s designed to be used every single night. It’s creamy but non-sticky, and even feels soothing. Even though it has a midrange retinol concentration of 0.15%, because it’s encapsulated, the release of the ingredient is controlled so that sensitive skin gets a milder percentage, and at the right time. We like this for virgin skin because of its complementary soothing ingredients like hydrating squalane, calming Cica and barrier-strengthening ceramides.

This “line-smoothing” retinol eye cream by RoC targets some of the top signs of aging, says the brand: [wrinkles](#), [dark circles](#) and [puffiness under the eyes](#). Pure retinol and RoC’s proprietary mineral complex work together to visibly reduce under-eye puffiness and circles in four weeks, and lines and wrinkles in 12 weeks, according to RoC’s clinical studies.

This night cream uses an encapsulated form of pure retinol (though the percentage isn’t listed) to keep it working on your skin cells overnight. Alongside the star ingredient, ceramides and glycerin work to hydrate your skin, while peptides help with plumping and fighting wrinkles.

One Ulta reviewer reported, “Highly recommend this to anyone who’s tried retinol in the past, but thought it was either too harsh or too drying. [This] is the only retinol night cream I’ve ever used that did not dry my face out! It instead hydrated and plumped it up, giving me a virtual facelift from smiling!”

Murad claims that this retinol night cream targets “signs of aging you can see (and the ones you can’t).” How? According to the brand, its retinol “tri-active” technology combined with niacinamide and [peptides](#) work to minimize wrinkles and fine lines, protect the [skin’s protective barrier](#), and firm up the skin’s appearance. Plus, a bonus, from one reviewer: “Totally controls my [adult acne](#) in T-zone.”

[Shop TODAY](#) enlisted the help of trusty skin care experts who shared their recommendations on products that work based on their experience. We also took their advice on which key ingredients to look for in retinol creams and researched other products that fit the bill. We also included positive reviews from customers who have used them. In addition, we tested some of these products for ourselves for a first-person perspective on its effects.

EDITOR’S NOTE: *Mack is Gold Bond’s dermatologist partner. While she uses this lotion personally in her nighttime routine, this pick was chosen independently, based on our our editor’s months-long real-world testing and online shopper reviews.*

Source: <https://www.today.com/shop/best-retinol-creams-t257844#anchor-Whattolookforinretinolcream>