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Dreams in a Bottle:

Caring for Your Skin

When my sister has a new boyfriend, she sleeps with her makeup on. I'm an actress and when I get off the set, I can't wait to take my makeup off, so I can't understand this. I nag her all the time to take better care of her skin. Besides, I say, what happens if you marry the guy? You can't wear makeup twenty-four hours a day for the rest of your life.

—Claire, 32

In general, what you put on your skin must come off. Yet with all the attention and money paid to make up the face to be beautiful, many of us forget that makeup removal and the cleansing of the skin need to be approached carefully, so that your skin will remain in good shape for years to come. Using the right cleanser is so important that we'll begin this chapter with a thorough discussion of the various kinds of soaps and other cleansers—a topic that should be of equal concern to men and women—before going on to look at cosmetics.

▪ KEEPING THE SKIN CLEAN

Every day the skin is bombarded with dirt and dust particles, and if you wear makeup, then you have to add grease to the list. Most makeups are very greasy and cannot be removed with water alone.

You can take your pick from soaps of all kinds (including deodorant soaps, medicated soaps, or soapless soaps), washing creams or lotions, and cleansers that come in cream or lotion form. And that's just the beginning. Toners, astringents, and what are called clarifying lotions are also available, depending on how much time and money you wish to invest in skin care.

Soaps work to remove dirt because of chemicals called surfactants and emulsifiers. These chemicals are composed of molecules that can attach to both water and grease and thereby dissolve grease and oils from the skin.

If you are in a pinch, any soap will do. Whenever you have a choice, however, you'll want to use soaps sparingly and ideally select a nonsoap cleanser. The same qualities in regular soap that help lift off external oils and grease will also dissolve away the skin's natural fats or lipids, which keep the skin's own moisture locked in. The key principles to remember are:

- Too much washing leads to dry skin.
- Too much soap leads to dry skin.

OF AIRPLANES, AIRPORTS, AND SITTING ON THE TARMAC

As any seasoned traveler knows, the air in airplanes is brutal on the skin. It is very dry and all the sloughed skin cells contribute greatly to the dust in the closed environment.

Mode of travel aside, travel in general can wreak havoc on your body. Here are some skin tips for travel:

1. Drink plenty of water.
2. Do not spray water on your face—it will only evaporate in the dry environment of the airplane leading to drier skin.
3. Use a very light moisturizing cream.
4. Don't use hotel soaps—pack your favorite nonsoap cleanser.
5. Travel with your own shampoo.
6. Try to get some rest.

Probably the best approach to cleaning your face is to wash once a day and rinse once a day:

1. Wash your face with tap water and a nonsoap cleanser, such as Neutrogena Extra Gentle Cleanser, Aquanil, or Cetaphil once a day.
2. Rinse gently with tap water (no cleanser), once a day.
3. Always pat dry with a soft towel—do not rub.

SQUEAKY CLEAR ABOUT SOAPS

Regular soaps, also known as toilet soaps, are made from animal fats, vegetable oils, or olive oils. Other oils, such as coconut or palm kernel oil, may be added to promote lathering. Toilet soaps are inexpensive and can clean off dirt, dust, grease, and most cosmetics. Because they are alkaline by nature, however, they often irritate the skin. Also, when combined with “hard” water, soaps can leave behind a filmy residue on the skin.

Superfatted soaps are toilet soaps to which a moisturizer has been added. These contain 5 to 15 percent fat, compared with 2 percent in most soaps. Some people find these soaps less irritating than ordinary toilet soaps, while others complain they leave a greasy residue behind.

Soapless soaps are less paradoxical than they may sound. Simply put, they substitute fatty acids, petroleum products, or other substances for the ingredients found in regular soaps. They tend to irritate the skin less frequently than ordinary soaps.

WASHING CREAMS AND LOTIONS

Washing or washable creams or lotions are not much different from plain old bar soap except in price and packaging. The major difference is that a moisturizer is usually added to a soap or detergent base. The lotions are just like the creams, with more water added. These products are very popular now, especially for shower use. I have not seen many problems from the use of these cleansers.

CLEANSERS

Cleansers come in creams and lotions. Many of them are soap-free and therefore appropriate for those people who have allergic reactions to most soaps. Cleansers contain water and a cleansing agent, such as cetyl alcohol. The cleanser is applied to the skin and usually rubbed in until it begins to foam; it's then wiped away with a soft cloth rather than washed off with water, and a thin layer of moisturizer is left on the skin.

If you use heavy makeup, it is a good idea to use a second, lighter cleanser to make sure the skin is clean before leaving a layer of moisturizer behind. If makeup is left on the skin, it can clog pores and cause pimples.

Abrasive or exfoliating cleansers are also available. These contain granules intended literally to abrade your skin, sloughing off the dead cells. These cleansers may contain up to 25 percent pumice, a nice word for ground volcanic rock. Needless to say, such aggressive cleansing is not ideal. If you need a jackhammer to remove makeup residue, you should change makeup products.

Most people with normal skin find that exfoliating cleansers dry and irritate the skin, rather than leaving it smooth and glowing. Do not use these products if you have active acne since the pumice will only aggravate the condition.

WHAT KIND OF SKIN DO YOU HAVE?

The most common comments I hear from patients about their skin are: "My skin is too oily" or "My skin is too dry." Here's how to figure out where you are on the spectrum:

Normal skin has small pores, is smooth to the touch, and is neither dry nor oily.

Dry and/or sensitive skin possesses little natural oil and small pores. It becomes dehydrated, dulls easily, and is prone to lines and wrinkles.

Oily skin is prone to excessive oil secretion and is generally shiny. Pores are large and open. The skin is coarse and subject to blackheads.

Combination skin has both oily patches, usually on the central forehead, nose, and chin (the so-called T zone) and dry patches, usually occurring on the cheeks, jawline, and outer portion of the forehead.

If you really feel better using these products, be stingy. No matter how good you feel about the results of a single usage, you should refrain from frequent use. You'll find that the more you use one, the drier your skin will become. It may even start to flake and, in some cases, you may begin to notice broken blood vessels. So, proceed with caution.

TONERS, ASTRINGENTS, AND CLARIFYING LOTIONS

This group of skin-care products are often alcohol-based. Toners and astringents remove excess oil from the skin because alcohol dissolves fatty chemicals. They are usually scented to cover the medicinal smell of the alcohol. While the coolness they impart may give the impression of tighter pores and better skin tone, this tends to be a passing fancy.

An astringent or toner may also include other ingredients. Menthol or camphor adds to the cooling sensation. Salicylic acid or witch hazel are strong astringents that may even have a light peeling effect on the skin. In general, keep alcohol-containing products away from your skin as much as possible.

CLEANSING MASKS

If you wash your face regularly with a good cleansing agent, most cleansing masks will add little to your cleansing regime. However, if you do have oily skin, you may want to use an antibacterial cleansing mask now and then to help minimize the oil on your skin.

Some facial masks claim to reduce the redness in the skin and tighten pores. Although there is no solid evidence that this is so, many people report that using a light facial mask helps them feel better about their skin. If you can afford it and find the feeling of a facial mask pleasant, that is a good enough reason to indulge yourself when you have a spare ten or fifteen minutes. Facial masks will not remove large facial pores but may temporarily remove accumulated cells and oils that enlarge the pores and make them look big.

BATHING AND WASHING

Contrary to what you might think after riding on a crowded bus or subway or squeezing through a large crowd at the football stadium, we probably wash ourselves too often, sometimes bathing twice daily. Such frequent bathing dries skin, and the problem can be compounded by the use of

harsh soaps. Remember, dry skin looks older and may even “age” more rapidly.

A mild soap should be used to wash areas that perspire a lot, such as the neck area and under the arms, and to wash the genital area. The dirt and grime accumulated during the day on the rest of the body can be removed, *without soap*, by cleaning the skin gently with a soft wash cloth or skin massage gloves and then rinsing with water. Avoiding the frequent use of soap will help maintain the proper natural oils on the surface of the skin which provides protection in the skin’s daily battle with the world. Soapless soaps or cleansers may also be substituted for traditional bath soaps.

▪ MOIST IS GOOD, DRY IS BAD

Our skin is cleverly designed to prevent evaporation of moisture from within its topmost layer. Yet when the skin dries out, this protective ability is lost and the integrity of our skin and our comfort suffer. For this reason, proper moisturizing is critical.

Moisturizers can’t make you younger, but they can keep your skin hydrated. Dry skin is the result of water loss in the stratum corneum—the surface layer of the epidermis. As the stratum corneum loses moisture, your skin starts to become drier and drier, until it eventually begins to flake. A good moisturizer serves two important functions: it retards moisture loss and helps to draw water back into the stratum corneum.

There are two kinds of moisturizers, oil-based and water-based. Moisturizers contain different kinds of oil, and the ratio of water to oil varies from product to product. Obviously, which type you choose will depend on your skin type. If your skin is oily and adulthood has brought you little relief from the acne blues, you’ll want to use a water-based moisturizer in order to avoid burdening your pores with more oil. If your skin is dry to normal, you can go ahead and choose an oil-based moisturizer.

People with so-called combination skin (areas of dry skin and patches of oily skin) should stick with a water-based product. However, in winter-time, I advise my patients with combination skin to spend a little extra time on skin care and use two moisturizers—a water-based one for general skin care, and an oil-based one for particularly dry patches of skin. Avoid moisturizers that contain alcohol. These can sting and dry the skin as well.

Once you get past the basics—oil-based vs. water-based—there are scores of moisturizers to choose from. There are moisturizing creams,

lotions, gels . . . you name it. There are moisturizers that contain a sunscreen. The best advice is to find a product you like—it doesn't have to have an expensive label—and apply it after showering. Keep a small tube of special hand cream such as Neutrogena Hand Cream at the ready if you tend to have dry hands and chapped lips, especially during the winter.

▪ COSMETIC OR “COSMACEUTICAL”?

No one would doubt that lipstick, blush, foundation and even hair coloring are cosmetics. They are removable or they wear off, and they don't change the structure or function of your skin.

However, the issue gets a bit trickier when talking about those creams that include vitamin C, enzyme CoQ 10, or any other agents that are intended to function as antioxidants. This category of compounds—on whose behalf claims are made about decreasing fine lines and wrinkles and even, perhaps, preventing skin cancer—is increasingly being called “cosmaceutical.” In time we will probably identify a class of compounds that do live in the no-man's-land between true cosmetic and true drug. For now, be suspect of claims that seem unreasonable.

▪ COSMETICS

Most women know what cosmetics they like, tolerate, and prefer to buy. Every consumer has her own preferred product, but the search for new lipsticks, lip gloss, eye makeup, etc., nonetheless continues. Open any medicine cabinet and you will see proof of this. The cosmetics industry is marketing-rich: just like the cereal industry it knows that people will likely buy many different brands of the same product. What drives this is the human desire to get the newest and latest, and there is nothing wrong with that. Just be sure to follow some simple rules:

- When it comes to makeup, keep it simple. Don't overspend. Don't overapply.
- Use only non-comedogenic (non-acne causing) products that are also hypoallergenic. Usually, the label clearly states these features. Makeup that is very oily can clog pores and precipitate acne. Chemicals in non-hypoallergenic makeup can lead to rashes.

- Once you've found a product or product line you like, stick with it. If you bounce around from one to the other, you increase the risk that you will happen upon a product that your skin doesn't like.
- In searching for the ideal product, go with a major brand. These manufacturers have enough money to thoroughly research their products before bringing them to market. (Regarding buying animal-tested products, this is purely a matter between you and your conscience. There is nothing intrinsically better, from the scientific viewpoint, about products that have not been animal-tested.)
- If you are buying a product from your doctor's office, be sure he or she knows what is in it.
- If you are buying herbal or "natural" products, be sure that the ingredients are listed. If you develop a rash, it will be helpful to know what it might be due to.

There are usually three types of ingredients to be concerned with when choosing a cosmetic. Active ingredients actually do something for your skin, such as moisturize it or protect it from the sun. Inactive ingredients are there to thicken, stiffen, or preserve the product—in essence, they are necessary to make the cosmetic "work." Finally there are exotic ingredients that may be hyped but are not yet proven to be of value.

WHAT DOES HYPOALLERGENIC MEAN?

Strictly speaking, hypoallergenic means that the cream or lotion will not cause an allergic reaction of the skin, akin to poison ivy or some other reaction that your immune system causes. These days, however, this term is taken by the public to mean a broad range of things. The labels on cosmetic products contain many of the following words, which all intend to imply hypoallergenicity in the broad general sense:

Hypoallergenic
Non-sensitizing
Irritant-free
Allergy-tested

Preservative-free
PABA-free
Non-irritating
Allergy-free

WHAT ABOUT ALLERGIES?

When you have a true allergic reaction to ingredients in the cosmetics you use, some patches of scaling and redness may develop. Fragrances and preservatives within cosmetics are among the most common causes of allergic reaction in skin. In one study, two-thirds of people with facial rash had some form of allergic contact dermatitis—in other words, their rash was due to something they were putting on their face. If you do develop a rash and believe a cosmetic or fragrance is to blame, see your dermatologist. An elimination program may be followed by skin-patch testing with specific compounds; this will help you avoid purchasing products that contain the specific offending agent.

SKIN CARE OR SKIN HEALTH?

Cosmetics are used to make our skin feel better and look better. Pharmaceuticals and even certain cosmaceuticals are used in an attempt to actually change the biology of our skin. Cosmaceuticals don't require FDA approval; medicated creams do. The main things to watch for with any cosmetic are irritation, acne, and allergic reaction. Not all sensitivities are allergic, but a red, rough, stinging rash or a pimply outbreak should be enough to get you to switch products.

Here are suggestions to get the most bang for your makeup buck:

1. Use a moisturizer that has an SPF of 15 or higher. This way, when you apply your facial moisturizer daily you'll at least know you have that baseline sun protection. After all, sun protection is the most important thing you can do to keep your skin looking young.
2. Always use lip balms with an SPF of 15 or higher.
3. Clean makeup brushes regularly with a gentle shampoo, such as a baby shampoo.
4. To get a subtle but noticeable glow on your cheeks use about a peppercorn of Vaseline on your cheekbones.
5. Be alert to eyelid rashes. These can be due to an allergy to your nail polish, which comes in contact with your eyelids when you rub your

eyes. The thin skin of the eyelids is especially sensitive to allergic reaction.

6. As often as possible try to let your hair dry naturally. If you must use a blow-dryer, wait until your hair is just damp, virtually dry.

▪ MAKEUP

CONCEALERS

When it comes to face makeup foundations are the heavy hitters. They are applied to the entire face and, as the name suggests, provide a base coat of facial “paint” that helps to hide blemishes, scars, fine lines, and small irregularities. Think of foundation as a housepainter would think of primer.

If you don’t use that much makeup, but do want to hide that telltale blemish or slight skin discoloration, concealers offer a choice. They also help hide dark circles and shadows. Because they are heavier and creamier than foundation makeups, concealers should be used sparingly and only on specific areas of the face. Concealers are usually oil-based moisturizers with added pigments. If you are prone to acne, it’s possible to find oil-free, medicated concealers that will help clear your acne while covering it up.

COVER STICKS

Some cosmetic users find cover sticks an easier and more convenient form of concealer that can camouflage a multitude of minor sins. It should be noted, however, that cover sticks do contain a lot of wax. This gives the makeup body and thickness, but it can also irritate the skin and cause acne-prone skin to break out.

POWDERS

Powders are used to absorb oil and reduce shininess, but in the process they can also clog pores. The popularity of face powder is probably due to the widely held belief that a shiny nose or cheek is an uglier nose or cheek.

The active ingredients in powder cosmetics are pigments and powders. Iron oxides are a common pigment. Other ingredients include talc, clay, starch, and agents that hold the powder together.

For very oily, acne-prone skin, a powder alone should be used; it will cause less pore clogging than a base or pancake with a powder applied on top.

To wash off powders and cream-based makeup, you might want to use two cleansers to be sure that you have removed every trace of these pore-clogging cosmetics.

BLUSH

Blushes can be oil-based or oil-free. They are used to add contour and color to your skin. Find one brand you like and stick to it.

EYE SHADOW AND EYE PENCIL

These are composed of pigments mixed in oil-wax bases. Cream eye makeups should be applied with a soft brush or sponge and washed off thoroughly with a gentle cleanser.

The skin of the eyelid and surrounding eye region is perhaps the most sensitive of your body's skin. It is extremely thin and is thus easily irritated. Therefore, treat it with care and kindness. Watch for makeup that contains mica, which may irritate the eye. If your eye makeup causes even minor irritation, try another product.

LIQUID LINER AND MASCARA

Inorganic pigments are the basic ingredient in liquid liners; film-forming or plasticizing chemicals, acrylic copolymers and acrylates, are then added. Such chemicals help the liners adhere and provide sheen. Don't apply these products under the rim of the eyelid or too close to the corners of the eyes, or you may experience itching and irritation.

MASCARA

Applied to the eyelashes to add the illusion of thickness and luster to thin or short lashes, mascara is formed by adding pigment to a moisturizing base. Conditioning mascaras, which contain water-based moisturizers, are also available. Waterproof mascaras contain oil-based moisturizers to which shellacs and other hardeners may be added. Although many mascara manufacturers tout special mascara removal aids, you can easily remove mascaras with a gentle moisturizer.

LIPSTICK AND LIP GLOSS

Lipsticks can be the stuff of romance and seduction. They are basically wax, oil, and pigment mixed together.

Many of the new brands boast that they protect against chapped lips and the sun's rays. Select lipstick with sunscreen that does not contain PABA since some people are allergic to this ingredient. In the absence of PABA, the dye in lipstick should be suspected if you develop lip irritation.

Many natural lip glosses are available. These do not color the lips, but they do keep them moist and shiny. Plain cocoa butter is a fine lip balm. Eye sticks, used to moisturize the particularly sensitive skin under the eyes, also work well to keep lips moist and healthy.

If you have an active herpes lesion, don't share your lipstick or lip gloss with someone else. By the same token, don't borrow lip products from someone with a fever blister.

▪ COSMACEUTICALS

The many claims made for all sorts of over-the-counter products are hard to sort out. As an experiment, pick up a copy of your favorite women's magazine (or even men's magazine) and look at the ads that are designed to catch your attention. In general, those for skin creams convey the impression that in some way the product will stall or reverse the aging process in your skin or make you look younger. The wording is carefully phrased—close enough to keep the Feds (the Food and Drug Administration, actually) parked outside on lookout, but not so outrageous that they barge in with a battering ram. It's good that companies know their claims are being very carefully watched, since it helps keep them honest.

▪ CELLULITE

A wide range of products claim to reduce cellulite, or the puckered appearance of fat on the thighs. I know of no cream, however, that has an effective chemical that penetrates the skin and dissolves the fibrous tethers that cause cellulite.

Cellasene is an aggressively marketed herbal remedy for cellulite that the manufacturer claims increases circulation. It contains ginkgo, sweet clover, bladder wrack, grape seed extract, fish oil, and lecithin, among

other ingredients. Keep in mind that each capsule contains 240 milligrams of iodine, so people with thyroid problems can be adversely affected by chronic use of Cellasene. Also, the sweet clover and ginkgo might increase the risk of bleeding for patients on aspirin or warfarin.

Cellasene costs about \$300 for a full course of treatment. As far as I know no peer-reviewed study has been published confirming that use of this supplement reduces cellulite or thigh girth. Although the risks are low, pregnant or nursing women should of course not use it.

Endodermologie is not a pill or cream but a treatment that involves passing a probe over cellulite-ridden skin. SilkLight is another one of these massage therapies. Although the FDA permits manufacturers of these devices to say that they can help make the skin look better, this is certainly not the same as saying that in proper trials it is proven to eliminate cellulite.

CELLULITE CREAMS

Most cellulite creams, sold by reputable companies, include the words *firming* and *body* in the name of the product. These are pretty safe words to use, since they don't specifically say what they are firming (most moisturizers can be said to be firming the epidermis). People who use these products say that their skin feels smoother, if they notice any effect at all.

STRETCH MARKS

Stretch marks that develop after pregnancy can be very frustrating. If they are noticeable because of redness, laser treatment of the redness may help improve their appearance. Some dermatologists believe that even Retin-A can help build up the collagen in the area, just as it does in sun-damaged skin, and thereby improve the appearance. Others have tried resurfacing lasers, like the kind used to remove wrinkles. Most recently, a new cream is being marketed as a cosmaceutical to improve or remove stretch marks. It has not been proven to work in any clinical trials although the manufacturer is now conducting a survey to see if it works (kind of backwards, in my opinion).

Stretch marks result from thinning of the epidermis and loss of collagen. The only way to improve the problem is to actually replace what is missing.

▪ VITAMIN C

The rationale for including vitamin C, an antioxidant, in skin creams is that it may remove the free radicals that cells produce. These free radicals are associated with skin cancer and premature aging of the skin such as that due to sun exposure. Many cosmaceuticals advertise that they contain vitamin C, but most forms of vitamin C are unstable when exposed to the air. Cellex C is a product that claims greater stability and even penetration into the skin.

While topical vitamin C may help lighten solar lentigos and melasma, it has not been shown to help rebuild collagen in the skin. There has been some scientific evidence that the correct form of topical vitamin C provides additional protection against the harmful effects of the sun.

Until it can be reliably shown that vitamin C penetrates through the epidermis, there is no reason to believe that it will have an effect on collagen production, and thus on wrinkles.

▪ RETIN-A

The news regarding salvaging damaged skin is promising. Skin that has been regularly overexposed to the sun will never look as good as skin that has been consistently protected from the sun and other damaging environmental elements. I can safely say that some improvement of skin quality is possible through treatment with Retin-A.

The improvement Retin-A helps to make in sun-damaged skin begins reasonably quickly, within three months. Tretinoin, the active ingredient in Retin-A, and its cousins Renova and Retin-A Micro, is approved by the FDA as a safe and effective means to improve the appearance of sun-damaged skin. Many people have tried Retin-A but complain that it doesn't help improve the fine lines and wrinkles. Upon further investigation, it is clear that these people have usually discontinued use of the medication because of dryness or irritation. See recommendations for a home facial program on page 74 on how to step into the use of Retin-A slowly and carefully. When using Retin-A it is also important to keep your skin well moisturized (to minimize dryness) and use sunscreen regularly.

▪ WHAT ABOUT NATURAL INGREDIENTS?

Guess what? Retin-A is a form of vitamin A, which comes from carotene, which is present in carrots. Carrots come from the ground and are of course natural. So it goes with so many compounds in medicine. There are many “natural” agents that can be found in health care products.

Here are just a few of the natural ingredients you’ll find in some of the most popular skin care products. Look for them when you read the labels before choosing a product.

- *Alpha-hydroxy acids (AHAs)*, an ingredient in a wide range of moisturizers and anti-aging creams, are as natural as they can be. Glycolic acid is derived from sugar cane. Lactic acid comes from milk, malic from apples, and tartaric from grapes. Citric is an AHA that has been around for a while. AHAs are thought to soften lines and wrinkles, improve skin tone, help erase age spots or sun spots, and even control acne.
- *Clay* is used as a base in many facial masks. It is rich in minerals and is known as nature’s detoxifier. Clay masks may help improve circulation temporarily, cleanse the surface of the skin, and revitalize it. Clay is not considered a cause of allergic reactions in the skin.
- *Oat* is a natural grain that is rich in vitamins and minerals. This cereal protein, with an excellent balance of amino acids, is used in many cosmetic products. It is known to soothe sensitive skin and relieve itching and other irritations. It is also an effective moisturizer since it is a humectant, which means it promotes the retention of moisture—just what your skin needs.
- *Plant oils* were used to make the first cosmetics and are now back in vogue. You’ll find them in many of today’s most popular moisturizers. Some of the most popular plant oils used in cosmetics are almond, apricot, avocado, flaxseed, hazelnut, olive, sesame, and wheat germ oils. Some of these oils are comedogenic (see Appendix 4, Selective Guide to Skin Care Products).
- *Aloe vera* is a useful, versatile addition to the skin care world. The spearlike, fleshy leaves of this tropical plant contain a clear and

viscous natural gel. When applied to the skin, this gel helps promote healing. The therapeutic properties of aloe vera gel in burn treatment have long been known, but now this rather remarkable plant is becoming recognized for other reasons as well. Aloe vera gel is also a humectant, helping the skin to retain moisture as it penetrates to the deeper layers. For this reason, it may help heal wounds other than burns, such as scrapes and abrasions.