

## 7 SKIN CARE "RULES" THAT ARE RUINING YOUR COMPLEXION

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There are certain "rules" in life we never question. Green means go, three strikes and you're out, wash your face twice a day for clear skin.

But what if we told you that one of the above rules couldn't be more wrong? (And, as you probably guessed, it's not the one about what green means. Or the strikes.)

Many of us have been following the same skin care regimens our whole lives, which we learned from our moms, who learned from their moms, and so on. We thought they were the perfect way to keep our faces clear and wrinkle-free. Turns out we were wrong.



Even something as simple as washing your face twice a day could be the reason for your crow's feet and pimples -- and that's just the beginning. To find out exactly what skin care "rules" to stop living by, we assembled a healthy skin dream team: **Dr. Semira Bayati, an Orange County, Calif.-based cosmetic plastic surgeon**; Alexandra Spunt and Siobhan O'Connor, authors of "No More Dirty Looks: The Truth About Your Beauty Products;" New York City dermatologist Dr. Jeannette Graf; and Dr. Michael Gold, a dermatologist in Nashville, Tenn.

They shared with us the outdated and overrated skin care advice they wish we'd all stop following, and offered some new, must-try tips to add to our regimens. Now you can stop following methods that just give you more zits and wrinkles by finding out which **seven skin care rules are keeping you from perfect skin**.

### **RULE NO. 1: YOU SHOULD WASH YOUR FACE TWICE A DAY**

While we're not saying you should abandon hygiene all together, Spunt and O'Connor say that you don't always need to wash twice a day. If you skipped wearing makeup and don't live in a polluted city, you can likely get away with sudsing up once a day or even every other day.

In fact, washing less can even be better for you. O'Connor says that cleansing (especially with a harsh product) strips your face of its natural, hydrating oils, drying skin out and also leaving it vulnerable to bacteria. Do that too often, and you could be looking at zit-causing bacteria making its way into your pores.

### **RULE NO. 2: EXFOLIATING OFTEN IS CRUCIAL**

We think of dead skin cells as the enemy, but they do serve a purpose, says Gold. What does the skin you don't slough off do? It shields your complexion from environmental pollutants and bacteria. Rather than scrubbing daily, you should only exfoliate once every two weeks, Gold says.

Graf also points out that it's not just how often you exfoliate, but the type of exfoliator you're using that also matters. She recommends avoiding face scrubs because "the sharp edges of the particles in some scrubs made from apricot pits and walnut shells can injure the skin." Instead, try chemical exfoliants (like alpha hydroxy, glycolic, or lactic acid) or more gentle scrubs made from rice or synthetic beads, like **Dermalogica Daily Microfoliant**, \$50. It uses rice powder to gently exfoliate without scratching the skin. Or if you want to go the chemical route, try a product like **DDF Glycolic 5% Daily Cleaning Pads**, \$35. Graff says to look for products that say they are gentle enough for daily use (but you should still only use them every two weeks). Chemical exfoliants may give you a slight tingly feeling, but if you're ending up with red or irritated skin, the product is too intense and you should try something gentler (look for lower concentrations of the active ingredients).

### **RULE NO. 3: RETIN-A AND RETINOL ARE JUST FOR WRINKLES**

The truth: Gold says these ingredients are for *everyone*. Or at least, everyone who wants help with acne, wrinkles, pore size, skin care prevention, or skin tone (so, as we said, everyone).

Gold adds that retinol has been around for close to 50 years and has a ton of research to prove its safeness. So rather than jumping from fad ingredient to fad ingredient, he recommends sticking with tried and true retinol to fix almost any skin issue. The best part is that these days, you can find retinol in products to fit almost any budget, from **Roc Retinol Correxion Deep Wrinkle Night Cream**, \$19.21, to **SkinMedica Retinol Complex**, \$75.

**RULE NO. 4: ACNE-PRONE OR OILY SKIN SHOULD ALWAYS USE "OIL-FREE" PRODUCTS**

There are a few things wrong with this rule. First, Graf says that "oil-free" isn't even a regulated term. Essentially, a brand could slap it on almost any product, so it's no guarantee that you won't get zits.

Second reason to ignore this label: Even the oiliest skin needs moisture, says Bayati. Skipping oil can lead to skin that's chronically dry, which is when skin starts to produce *more* oil.

Finally, Spunt and O'Connor say all skin actually needs oil -- as long as it's the right type. "We've been told to avoid oils, but there are some, like argan and coconut oil, that are skin compatible, absorb well, and even work [to prevent] acne," they say. "[These oils] have antibacterial properties and can help balance the skin." So while it may seem strange to slather on some lavender or argan oil over your broken-out skin, it may just do the trick.

**RULE NO. 5: YOU SHOULD USE BENZOYL PEROXIDE OR SALICYLIC ACID TO DRY OUT ZITS**

If you suffer from acne, your routine probably involves using a benzoyl peroxide or salicylic acid spot treatment on any blemishes that pop up. But there's good reason to re-think that advice.

Spunt and O'Connor point out that these ingredients are harsh, irritating, and drying for almost everyone. So while they may kill bacteria and eventually get rid of your zit, they can also leave you with red, flaky skin that's practically impossible to cover with concealer. A better solution? "Try gentler products like willow bark and clay to calm inflammation and draw out impurities," Spunt says. "Gentler products can still fight pimples, and do so without drying your skin and making it look worse during the process."

**RULE NO. 6: YOU NEED A SEPARATE PRODUCT FOR YOUR EYE AREA**

Eye cream seems like such a no-brainer part of your skin care regimen, right? But in most cases, you can skip it, says Gold.

"If the eye cream actually has specific ingredients that you need for your eyes, [like retinol or growth factors] then go ahead and use it," he says. "But in general you can just use your face creams on your eye area. Some eye creams are basically the same products anyway in different packaging." So there's really no need to spend more money; instead just dab some of your moisturizer and face serums around your eye area as well.

**RULE NO. 7: "NATURAL" MEANS IT'S GENTLE**

Spunt and O'Connor are big advocates of using natural products, but they point out that Mother Nature can still do some major damage to your skin. For example, tea tree oil, used sparingly, can be a great way to fight zits. But if you apply too much, your skin can end up as red and flaky as it would have been after a repeated dousing of benzoyl peroxide.

The lesson: Whether a product is "organic" or completely cooked up in a lab, follow the instructions carefully and remember, more is rarely better when it comes to skin care.