

FOCUS

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The science of skincare changes at breakneck speed, with opinions on orders, proportions, layers and formulas changing every day. Not sure what to add or switch out? Four experts clear the air. By **Avanti Dalal**

I JUST TURNED 25. SHOULD I BE USING RETINOL?

Whether you like to squeeze it out of a tube, scoop it out of a tub or decant it from a jar, you can rely on this elixir. It reduces the appearance of sun damage, prevents acne and fights fine lines. A vitamin-A derivative, retinol stimulates the metabolism of skin cells and encourages the production of collagen. While it used to be marketed as an anti-ageing miracle, it's actually a "superstar ingredient for maintaining glowing, youthful skin at any age," according to Dr Harshna Bijlani, medical director at the Ageless Clinic in Mumbai. "Start using it in your mid-to-late twenties," she says, as that's when sun damage and fine lines start to appear.

HELP! IS THERE ANYTHING THAT CAN GET RID OF MY CYSTIC ZIT OVERNIGHT?

While you're traditionally supposed to pick one spot treatment to prevent flaking, desperate times call for fast-acting measures. Dr Joshua Zeichner, a New York-based dermatologist, relies on this recipe: a dash of 2.5% benzoyl peroxide, a pinch of 2% salicylic acid and a dollop of 1% hydrocortisone cream. This should see the redness of the offending breakout reduce, making it easier to cover with concealer.

I'VE BEEN USING THE SAME MOISTURISER FOR YEARS. IS THAT BAD?

If you've been dipping into the same jar since college, it might be time to switch it up, says Dr Rao. "The medical term for the body's diminishing response to a drug is tachyphylaxis. Any drug, if taken over a prolonged period of time, loses its efficacy as your body gets accustomed to it. As your body's largest organ, your skin behaves in a similar manner," she says. Since your skin's reactivity changes with age, weather fluctuations and stress, a six-monthly or yearly check-in with your skin can help fine-tune your routine.

I'VE ALWAYS WONDERED, TONER OR NO TONER?

The CTM (cleanse-tone-moisturise) regimen is as classic as it gets: it promises acne-free skin, if you follow the process. A traditional toner leaves the skin deep-cleansed and warm, stinging slightly but leaving a wondrous this-is-really-working feeling in its wake. However, London-based dermatologist Dr Archana Rao suggests relegating it to the back of your shelf. "A toner's role in skincare remains dubious as it is usually alcohol-based, which is not great for skin. I have seen it recommended for acne-prone skin, but it can make skin more sensitive. If a toner is suggested to address open pores, a better option is to use a retinoid."

IS SHAVING THE WORST THING I CAN DO TO MY FACE?

"You can shave," says Dr Mittal, banishing what we've learnt as children—that shaved hair grows back faster, thicker or coarser. In fact, the exfoliation from shaving can promote better circulation and improve product penetration. Some even say that it can lead to better makeup application as it provides a cleaner base to work on. However, for a more long-term approach, Dr Mittal prefers laser treatments. "Technology has progressed tremendously, and laser is considered one of the best options for permanent hair reduction," she says. ■

WHERE DO FACE OILS FIT INTO MY SKINCARE ROUTINE?

"At the very end," says Dr Geetika Mittal, founder of Mumbai- and Delhi-based skin clinic Isaac Luxe. Oils are occlusive and emollient, which means they soften skin while acting as a moisture seal. When applied on top of a humectant like hyaluronic acid or glycerin, they act as a stopgap for water loss. Even though fighting oil with oil seems counter-intuitive, they can actually help mattify and balance oil production. "Applying oil on the skin sends a signal to skin cells, telling them that overproduction [of oil] is not required," she says.