

marie claire

Retinol: The only ingredient that will reduce wrinkles



By [Charlotte Clark](#) February 2, 2018 2:07 pm

And how it became the stuff of skincare legend...



Retinol has long been worshipped by beauty editors, dermatologists and skincare fanatics alike as the hero ingredient in the battle against fine lines and wrinkles. It's

recently been thrust into the spotlight again after being featured on the BBC documentary, *The Truth About Looking Good*, when consultant Dermatologist Anjali Mahato explained, ‘**retinoids are the only ingredient shown to meaningfully reduce fine lines, wrinkles and pigmentation** by boosting collagen production and improving cell turnover.’ High praise indeed, but it’s no surprise when the results of retinol have been clinically proven time and time again.

If you’ve never used retinol before and want to know the best way to use it, how to apply, dos and don’ts or, if you simply want to brush up on your skincare knowledge, keep scrolling to find out everything you need to know about the beauty industry’s favourite ingredient. As well as our pick of the best retinol products, creams and serums out there...

What is retinol?

‘Retinol is an excellent anti-ageing agent,’ says Dr Bernard Hayot, Medical Director and Aesthetic Surgeon at Epilium & Skin. ‘It’s the most effective ingredient, along with vitamin C, **hyaluronic acid** and fruits acids, against wrinkles and loss of firmness in the skin.’

Does retinol work?

In short – yes. Retinol is one of the most revered ingredients in the beauty industry and has been proven to be effective at tackling early signs of ageing such as pigmentation including sun damage, fine lines and wrinkles. As well as having ‘an exfoliating effect that smoothes skin texture and gives a natural glow, it also has **antioxidant** properties and reduces the appearance of brown spots,’ says Dr Bernard Hayot.

Dr Hayot explains that retinol ‘stimulates flexibility and elasticity of the skin, collagen and also helps to create a bright complexion as well as regenerating melanin to tackle pigmentation.’

Make sure you’re using a product that contains the right form of retinol, though. Check the ingredients list first to make sure it contains ‘retinol or retinaldehyde rather than one of the less effective derivatives such as retinyl palmitate,’ recommends Dr Stefanie Williams.

Is retinol the same as vitamin A?

Retinol is a form of retinoid, which is a derivative of vitamin A. Dr Hayot goes into further detail, ‘retinol is a vitamin A acid, which is the natural precursor to retinoic acid. Then body transforms retinol into retinoic acid.’ It’s in this form, as retinoic acid, that the benefits of retinol are truly felt on the skin.

How to use retinol?

‘Start, at the latest, when you see the first signs of reduced skin elasticity, fine lines and also irregular pigmentation,’ advises Dr Stefanie Williams, dermatologist and Director of the Eudelo clinic.

When first using retinol you can experience some irritation such as dryness, redness and even flaky skin. So if it’s your first time using it, ease yourself in by applying a low percentage of retinol and only use twice per week at intervals, gradually increasing to daily use if your skin can tolerate it well. As your skin adapts and, if you don’t suffer from too much sensitivity, you can increase the percentage of retinol too. ‘Even if you can’t build up to anymore than

two days per week it's still effective and worth doing so don't be put off,' says Dr Stefanie.

When you first apply only use a pea-sized amount. Trust us – with retinol a little goes a long way.

When to use retinol in your regime?

Retinol can cause skin sensitivity and, after use, it's important to be particularly careful in the sun and apply a high factor SPF 30 or 50, even if it looks cloudy or grey outside. It's safe to apply retinol day and night, as long as you're careful to apply SPF afterwards but most people prefer to use it at night, when the chances of any sun damage or skin sensitivity are lower.

Where to apply retinol?

Retinol is effective on all parts of the body. It is even included in some hand creams, though it is most commonly found in facial skincare products. A good routine is to start by applying to the forehead, then the nose, cheeks and chin. Be careful to avoid the eye area and around the nostrils as this area is prone to suffering from dryness.

Can you use retinol around the eyes?

'Avoid using retinol around the eyes because the skin is thinner, more delicate and sensitive in that area,' advises Dr Bernard Hayot.

What age should you use retinol?

‘When it comes to age it’s less important what the number is but more important to consider the biological age of your skin,’ explains Dr Stefanie Williams. ‘From your mid-thirties collagen production starts to deplete so in principle everybody could start using retinol then. However, if your skin has any signs of premature ageing or has been subjected to sun damage or other environmental or lifestyle factors you might start showing signs of ageing earlier. In which case you can start using retinol in your late 20s or early 30s.’

Is retinol good for acne?

‘Vitamin A acid or retinoic acid was first used to treat acne on young adults before it’s skincare benefits were fully realised,’ says Dr Bernard Hayot.

Be careful if you’re on any prescribed acne medication though. Certain ingredients commonly found in acne medication such as salicylic or glycolic acid can cause irritation and redness if combined with retinol so be sure to check with your Dr. before using.

How long does it take to see results?

Like all skincare products you should be patient with the results. ‘Skin is renewed after 28 days on average, which means the new cells migrate to the surface of the skin after which time you should start seeing results,’ says Dr Hayot.