

What You Need to Know About Retinol Products

Retinol, Retinoids and Tretinoin: What's the Difference?

Retinol (the entire vitamin A molecule) can be broken down into more potent compounds, which are referred to as retinoids. Although the terms vitamin A, retinol, and retinoid often are used interchangeably, each has its own distinctive actions and regulations. For example, some forms of retinol can be used freely in cosmetics, while others (retinoids) can be obtained only by prescription.

A few points to help clarify it for you:

- Retinol is a cosmetic ingredient that any cosmetics company can include in its products. It does not require a prescription. Other effective forms of cosmetic-grade vitamin A that you'll see in cosmetics include retinyl acetate, retinyl palmitate, and retinaldehyde, among others.
- Retinol is effective because when absorbed into your skin, it is broken down and converted into retinoic acid. Retinoic acid is the compound that actually can affect skin cells and their behavior.
- Both the cosmetic forms and the prescription forms of vitamin A can cause irritation, but, as you would expect, the highest risk of irritation is with the prescription forms (retinoids).
- Prescription retinoids include retinoic acid also called Tretinoin, the active ingredient in Renova and Retin-A.

Is Retinol the Best Anti-Aging Ingredient?

Despite retinol's many benefits, it is important to remember that no single ingredient can take care of all of the skin's complex needs. For example, despite retinol's superstar status, it does not eliminate the need for a well-formulated sunscreen, for an alpha hydroxy (glycolic, malic, citric or lactic) acid or beta hydroxy (salicylic) acid product for exfoliation, for a gentle cleanser, or for a serum or moisturizer loaded with antioxidants.

Research shows that using a retinol product in conjunction with an AHA/BHA cleanser exfoliant **significantly improves its effectiveness** in treating sun-damaged skin. We suggest Epionce Lytic Gel Cleanser and Lytic TX Resurfacing Lotion.

Keeping skin healthy and young **requires a combination of ingredients** and products that work together to give your skin exactly what it needs. Together, all of these types of products and their various ingredients combine to create a powerful skin-care routine that will give you beautiful, healthy skin that looks and acts younger.

Sources for the information above: *The Journal of Dermatological Treatment*, May 2009, pages 276–281; *Journal of the Indian Medical Association*, April 2009, pages 219–222; *American Journal of Clinical Dermatology*, June 2008, pages 369–381; *International Journal of Cosmetic Science*, June 2008, pages 175–182; *Journal of Dermatological Science*, May 2008, pages 99–107.

Tips for use:

- **Use tretinoin sparingly.** Tretinoin is a very strong treatment, so it imperative that you use it correctly and only apply it in very small amounts. At most, a pea-sized amount of cream should be used on the face, and a little more if applying to the neck. A good technique is to dab the cream on the areas most affected by wrinkles, age spots, etc., then wipe any remaining cream over the rest of the face.
- If you are just starting to use **tretinoin**, don't apply it daily. Rather, **apply every two to three nights**. That lets your skin gradually acclimate to it. Once your skin has adjusted to it, you can build up to using it every night. If your skin becomes very irritated and sensitive, cut back on the applications or stop using it altogether until your skin has recovered slightly. Then, you can slowly build back up to using it again. It will take some skin types longer to adjust the tretinoin than others. **Retinol** is better tolerated, but you should still start start it every other night for a month before increasing to nightly use.
- Do not apply retinol/tretinoin in the morning.
- Sometimes, it can be hard to spread the recommended pea-sized amount of tretinoin to all of the areas of the face where it's needed. A good solution to this problem is to mix the tretinoin with your nightly moisturizer before applying it to the face. This way, it will be dispersed evenly all over the face. Due to the diluting effects of the moisturizer it should also be less irritating.
- Most people will experience some dryness and irritation after beginning a retinol product, and a small number will experience acne breakouts. Don't worry, as these reactions are completely normal. Any irritation should subside within a few weeks.
- Exposure to sunlight can make retinol unstable, so it's best to apply it at night. Applying it at night also gives it a chance to fully absorb into the skin.
- Be sure to **apply sunscreen daily of 30+** and avoid sun exposure as much as possible.
- Give it a chance to start working. The length of time it takes for retinols to produce noticeable results will vary from person to person. Some people will see improvement in as little as four weeks, whereas for others it might take twelve weeks.
- Don't give up! Retinols have produced proven positive results and are possibly *the* most effective anti-wrinkle cream available.