

Resources provided by Umber Ghauri (they/them)

<https://www.umberghauri.com/>

Skincare and Self Love

Intro

People are always telling me to have a ROUTINE to fix my brain and body. They say, go for a walk, eat three home-cooked meals a day, sleep enough but not 'too much' don't watch tv in bed, put your phone away. And, to be frank, the only routine I've kept up is a skincare routine. And I'm here to tell YOU why it is simply the only routine I care about.

Skincare helped me almost completely stop obsessively picking my skin, and the progress in that area, seeing the marks fade, counting how many days I went without doing it, it all made me feel much more capable as a person.

It gave me something to focus on morning and night, instead of letting my brain run wild, I know for a few minutes every day exactly what I'm doing.

It helped me not dissociate. Skincare forces you to be present, I don't do the same routine every night, I look at and feel my skin and decide what it needs.

It helped build my self esteem in my physical appearance. I felt quite proud of the glow of my skin, and knew it was me who did that for me. It's a good feeling to see your skin change and no longer feel a new hard painful bump somewhere on my face almost every day. Finally I didn't have that on my mind every day.

Skincare is like real life. You make consistent and small changes to your behaviour and you see gradual improvements. Its really encouraging when you lack motivation to look at one area where you've been committed and made real progress, whether its visible to others or not, you know it.

It is simply, a kind thing to do for yourself.

To start let's discuss what your skin needs and then we can add things you might want to add.

What you need

Cleanser

Moisturiser

SPF

Cleansing means you get rid of the bad stuff but not the good stuff. If you cleanse too much it can sensitise skin. Applying spf, moisturiser etc without cleansing means trapping in dirt and bacteria. That's why makeup and SPF can cause acne when they actually are fine for your skin, because the trapped bacteria is in the makeup and isn't being cleaned off. Of course sometimes you may be intolerant or allergic to your makeup or skincare in which case you'll have more irritation.

Cleansing also means exfoliation- massaging dislodges some of the dead skin on the surface. Using a flannel is also going to do some surface exfoliation.

Protection can be in many forms but mainly I mean sun exposure, barrier protection and water loss.

The sun causes multiple signs of ageing like wrinkles and hyperpigmentation (freckles, dark spots like scarring). It is the most potent ageing factor. Melanin can only provide an spf of 1-4 if you have deep skin.

Dehydration is also a common issue, causing fine lines, dullness and overproduction of oil. Hydration means water. Most creams are a mix of hydrators (attracting water) and occlusives (stopping that water from evaporating).

What you want?

Masks

Exfoliators

Eye cream

Serums

Toners

All of these are just various vehicles to deliver your ingredients, some are more watery, some are oily, some are gels. Its about preference and texture!

Treating specific issues- i.e. using a retinol, niacinamide, vitamin c, etc.

You don't need any of these, you shouldn't use many at once either. Because remember, skin is like a plant, it can be overfed and then freak out.

For proper dermatologist prescribed options try a service like Dermatica or Skin + Me. This takes away some of the guesswork and slots right into your night time routine after cleansing

and before moisturising (or after moisturising if you want to introduce the ingredients more gradually). I use my prescription of Tretinoin and niacinamide 2-4 times a week as I need some nights off to let my skin repair and heal and to exfoliate. I like to do one thing at a time to avoid overwhelming my plant/skin.

Listen to your body. Sensations tell you things, like when your skin feels tight, burns, doesn't produce oil, produces oil a lot, breaks out, feels rough, feels raw. All these things are signs and cries for help. Some products can tingle and that's ok, but if you notice a reaction like redness, roughness, breakouts, burning, tightness, dryness, etc, that tingle was not good. You could be allergic or it was simply too harsh for you.

Tips to care for your skin:

-Don't use hot water on your face, it can make your skin more inflamed, it can cause dehydration and dryness. Try to get used to using cold water, if that's horrible for you, try slightly warm. Leave the steam to professionals.

- Anything you apply on damp or wet skin isn't going to be diluted, it'll actually penetrate your skin more, this is why stronger ingredients like retinol and peels often say to use on dry skin, follow the instructions! Because some exfoliants like toners are formulated to be used on wet skin. This also means your nice day to day products like antioxidants, hydrators, etc will be good things to out on damp skin (either water or damp from the last product, like toner or serum).

- If something isn't good for your face but now you've spent the money, use it on your body. E.g. I use The Ordinary AHA/BHA peel on my feet and cuticles. I tried to use The Ordinary Glycolic acid toner this way but it felt horrible and burny everywhere so that went in the bin.

- skin 'type' isn't that relevant, its more about tendencies for me, my skin tends to break out when its not happy, it also tends to get tight and dry on the surface, usually the centre of my face gets oily, so I'd be combination, acne prone and dehydrated. But this is just a bit confusing and doesn't help me as much as just paying attention to what my skin looks and feels like and sometimes my chin needs something different to my forehead.

- Open pores with black/dark spots are most likely sebaceous filaments- meaning they are just a part of the skin for a majority of people. Pores get larger as we age. Blackheads are more prominent, darker and larger. These are a form of acne. Sebaceous filaments can look less prominent with exfoliation and retinols but will probably always be there. Just remember no one cares, it's not acne, everyone has them and its just a sign that your skin is alive.

- Apply products according to the label if in doubt, and try to go from water to oil or thin to thick as you layer, generally you shouldn't be using so many products at once that you even have to worry about what order to apply them. E.g. toner, serum, cream, oil.

- Research! Look up products on youtube and read online customer reviews, you don't need to understand the ingredients list if others can explain it to you. Influencers or professionals online I watch or follow are Caroline Hirons (who has a really useful website), James Welsh, Sacheu, Tiara Willis, Gothamista, Fairy Glow Mother, Glow by Ola, Sknperfect, Skndoctor, The Beauty Breakdown, Labmuffin. Take their advice and opinions and consider them in relation to what you know about your skin. Your budget, your preferences. Don't buy everything they like just because they like it.

Products

All products are ones I've personally used or currently use. There are many great options I haven't used, just do your research, read reviews and try one product at a time. There is also always a chance my recommendations will not suit you, or maybe you'll experience a reaction or allergy to them. This is, sadly, not avoidable, its just a part of learning about skincare. If you're worried, avoid common allergens like fragrance, SLS, or anything you're allergic to in your diet. E.g. my mum can't use propolis/honey products as she's got a pollen allergy.

I like to double cleanse- I use an oil based cleanser and then a more traditional foamy one. I recommend avoiding cleansers that are drying, I avoid SLS as an ingredient as it does dry my skin out so all my recommendations are SLS free. I also avoid shea butter as it tends to break me out. It is totally fine for most people though, so I didn't list any moisturisers that contain shea butter because I haven't used them myself so I didn't want to add anything I haven't used.

All prices are current and based on websites I shop from, they can vary!

The Asian products listed are available on Yesstyle, Stylevana, Kosame Beauty, and many other sites. Avoid using Ebay, and be careful to get it from the brand on amazon, not a reseller.

Some UK shops stock them too but usually the prices are very marked up, e.g. Cosrx on Boots, but if you don't mind that, it is more convenient.

I have a discount code for Yesstyle which is Umber26 and I get a small commission if you use it.

Oil, cream and balm cleansers

These will be most effective at removing hard to remove products like SPF and makeup as well as debris and oily build up. Oil attracts oil. The second cleanse will then remove anything left over.

My favourite is the Inkey List Oat Balm. It's a thick balm which melts and becomes an oil and then rinses off well with water. I massage it onto dry skin with dry hands and then rinse with warm but not hot water. While still wet I apply my next cleanser. If you aren't using a second cleanser I like to use a warm flannel to remove the cleanser properly. I use a new flannel each time to keep things hygienic.

In the morning you should cleanse once, or just use water, or nothing, depending on your skin concerns. Now here are my product recommendations.

There are literally hundreds of Korean and Asian brands making great cleansers too

The Inkey List Oat Cleansing Balm £9.99

Simple Kind to Skin Hydrating oil cleanser £6.99

Superdrug Naturally Radiant Hot Cloth Cleanser £6.99

Body shop camomile cleanser £11/£12 (the oil and the balm)

The ordinary Squalane Cleanser £4.99

DHC Deep Cleansing Oil £19 (the OG, so reliable, no scent or unnecessary ingredients, effective)

Foamy cleansers

Etude House Soon Jung Whip Cleanser £14.99 (great for sensitive and dry skin)

Cerave Cream to Foam cleanser £12.50

Simple Water Boost Micellar Gel wash £4.50

Fenty Skin Total Cleans'r £20 (my current favourite, a little expensive, lovely fragrance, feels so creamy and nice)

Cosrx Low PH Good Morning Cleanser £11

Cosrx Salicylic Cleanser £10 (for rough texture or breakout prone skin, not suitable for very dry or sensitive skin)

Cerave Salicylic cleanser £12 (for rough texture or breakout prone skin, not suitable for very dry or sensitive skin)

Inkey List Salicylic cleanser £10.99 (for rough texture or breakout prone skin, not suitable for very dry or sensitive skin)

You can use any cleanser in the morning. If I wake up feeling dry I use an oil cleanser, but usually I use a foam one. Your skin isn't getting very dirty at night usually and your night-time skincare should have totally absorbed by the morning.

Moisturisers

The Ordinary Natural Moisturising Factors £4.90 (good for people who don't like moisturisers or feeling oily)

Beauty Bay Thirst Class £7 (light but nourishing, has oat and squalane)

Cosrx Ultra Moisturising Lotion Oil Free £19.19 (lovely and smooth and light, very hydrating, not heavy at all)

Illiyoon Ceramide Ato Concentrate Cream £23 (a cult K beauty cream, has skin repairing ceramides, works for many people, not heavy but feels substantial)

Cosrx Sleeping Masks £15 (there are multiple types like rice, honey, etc, all are great for night time to lock in moisture)

Huxley Good Night Sleep Mask £24 (a lightweight, delicious smelling night-time moisturiser which I find soothing. It has a gel texture)

Huxley Oil Essence £33.79 (its marketed as an oil or serum but as it has a little oil it can also be a nice light moisturiser, its more luxury, smells good, feels good)

Mizon All in one Snail Repair Cream £16.40 (contains snail secretions which really has helped my skin but maybe controversial. However, this cream is lovely and lightweight, feels luxurious and cooling)

SPF

Some people like to avoid chemical sunscreens but I exclusively use chemical because they have much less visible residue or white cast. I personally don't think science backs up any of the claims that chemical sunscreens are bad. If you are very pale, mineral or physical sunscreens may work well for you. Use SPF after anything else as a final step, don't mix your SPF with anything as the formula will change and try to reapply every few hours until the sun sets.

Anything labelled with SPF 30-50 broad spectrum or PA is good. Even makeup can be SPF but most people wouldn't apply enough foundation to get real protection, so I recommend using a sunscreen or moisturiser with SPF in it. I follow the 2 finger rule to cover my face and neck. And yes I use it at home too. If there's enough sunlight to light your room, there's UVA and UVB rays damaging your skin too. Everyone should use SPF, but you really need to if you use chemical exfoliants or retinol.

Sun damage causes not just cancer but also around 80% of visible signs of ageing as well as worsening dark marks and stubborn scarring (hyperpigmentation). Even the darkest skin only

has a natural SPF of 1-4 so sunscreen is still very necessary. Skin cancers are less common in deep skin but are more deadly when they do occur.

Nivea Sun UV SPF 50 Shine Control £12

Bondi Sands Face Sunscreen SPF 50 Fragrance Free £6.95

Biore Aqua Rich Watery Essence SPF 50 £9.99 (this is my personal favourite. Like most lightweight options it contains alcohol but this isn't an issue for me as I moisturise before I apply it and it doesn't dry out my skin, it actually gives me a nice glow. Its water and sweat resistant so its my go to for if I'm actually in direct sunlight like on a holiday or in the summer.

Missha Safe Block Sun Essence SPF 45 £7.79 (nice for dry skin, feels like a nice cream rather than sunscreen, but not heavy or greasy at all, has a nice fragrance)

Missha Safe Block Aqua Sun Gel £10.99 (great for oily folks, very lightweight, more of a thin fluid than a gel though)

Etude House Sunrise Mild Airy Finish Sunscreen £9.59 (light lotion, scented, it was my first K beauty sunscreen and I was blown away when I tried it, but it is similar to many other K beauty sunscreens)

Supergoop Unseen Sunscreen SPF 30 £15 (totally transparent, like a gel or primer texture)

Cosrx Aloe Soothing Sunscreen SPF 50 £11.99 (feels like a nice moisturiser, my mum's favourite, she has eczema)

Skin Aqua UV Super Moisture Gel SPF 50 £19.49 (similar to missha sun gel, also water and sweat resistant and comes in a bigger pump bottle)

Extras: Exfoliation

Some people just love a physical exfoliation, but you need to ditch the scrubs (use them on your body not your face) and try some more effective and gentle methods. Every exfoliant is different, some are gentle enough for daily use, some weekly or fortnightly, some brands encourage you to exfoliate daily or more than you need to simply to sell their product more. Start with once a week and build up if you feel you can. Don't use more than one exfoliation product at a time. One product in your stash is enough!

To be safe its best to use exfoliants in the evening and wear your SPF the next day.

You don't need to understand what every chemical exfoliant is but if you want info lots of people have explained in videos such as this one by The Beauty Breakdown. She does these 'shorts' which explain skincare products and the science behind them in simple short videos.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4M7Up0O7gTs&ab_channel=TheBeautyBreakdown

Dermalogica Daily Microfoliant £51/ £14 travel or trial size(I wouldn't use this daily but it's a lovely combination of physical and chemical exfoliation)

Indeed Labs Exfoliator II £24.99 (very similar to the Dermalogica option but cheaper. Powders like this are a good option if you like the feeling of scrubbing, and lots of brands make them)

Paulas Choice BHA Liquid Exfoliant £26/£10 travel or trial size (this is one of the most popular chemical exfoliants, its gentle but effective, especially for acne and texture, but its could be drying for dry skin)

Cosrx Blackhead Power Liquid £11.89 (similar to the paulas choice but not as strong, and less expensive)

Cosrx Whitehead power liquid £17.70 (the same kind of thing but it's an AHA which is better for more dry skin and helps give you radiance)

The Ordinary Lactic Acid 5% £.5.50 (great for all skin types, hydrating and smoothing)

The Ordinary Mandelic Acid 10% +HA £5.75 (good for super gentle exfoliation)

Glossier Solution £19 (combines all 3 types of chemical exfoliants, good all rounder)

Paula's Choice Azelaic Acid Booster £37 (I use this one, its in a cream form and its great for inflammation, redness and acne. The Ordinary makes one which I dislike in terms of texture but could give similar results for much less money)

Toners

Some of the exfoliants above are toners, some are serums, some are creams so I'll stick to what I haven't already mentioned. Again, this step is wholly unnecessary but can be beneficial. Applying your products to dampened skin from water or toner can help your skin stay hydrated and help other products penetrate better. If you have trouble staying hydrated, layering a hydrating toner, serum and moisturiser is going to really help that.

Klairs Supple preparation toner £15 (this is a fab all rounder, it hydrates, plumps, you can layer it up to be extra juicy)

Cosrx Centella Toner £ 16.81 (centella is so fab for soothing and can be good for all skin types, this is a nice fresh feeling mist)

Missha Artemisia Essence £26.79 (this has mugwort or artemisia which is nice for soothing and for acne, I like that it comes in a mist as its easier to spray on than use my hands or a cotton pad)

I'm From Rice Toner £25.99 (moisturising and brightening)

I'm From Mugwort Essence £27.19 (soothing and acne calming)

Serums

Serums are a minefield, I don't actually use them much because my needs are covered by other steps so the list is short, but as I've said, this is just my list. Loads of good serums are out there, just do your research, get samples and travel sizes before committing to a big purchase, and stay calm!

Mizon Snail Repair Ampoule £11.90 (Ampoule and serum are the same thing really, this one is really hydrating, it has anti-ageing properties, it helps healing and inflammation too, I use it around my eyes as well as on my face and neck)

The Ordinary Buffet £12.50 (good if you want a nice all round hydrating, anti ageing serum)

The Ordinary Marine Hyaluronics £5.90 (lovely for hydration)

Glossier Futuredew £23 (this is a hybrid oil serum and makeup product which gives skin a glow)

The Inkey List Niacinimide Serum £6.99 (I could write an essay on Niacinimide but basically it suits all skin types, the one from the Ordinary is not good, and it can help clear up spots, repair the skin barrier, balance oil, brighten dark spots, it's a magic ingredient but its also in a lot of products and works well at low percentages, so you may not need to buy a separate serum)

Eye products

Eye creams are usually a scam. They're simply moisturisers. There are a handful of eye products which can make some difference to dark circles and fine lines though, but don't expect miracles.

Niod Fractionated Eye Contour Concentrate £43 (a blend of potent anti ageing ingredients, one of two only products I've noticed a visible difference with)

Medik8 Retinol Eye TR £19

Inkey List Retinol Eye Cream £9.99

The Ordinary Caffeine Solution £5.80

Ole Hendrikson Banana Bright Eye Cream £33 (gives a temporary radiance and mild colour correction as well as moisturising)

Oils and balms

Sometimes you've overdone the exfoliation, the cold weather has worn out your skin, you've had a runny nose, or you just need the TLC of an oil or balm. I sometimes mix a couple drops of oil into my moisturiser as it just blends into the skin nicely compared to applying it straight on. With the balms I will put a tiny scoop into my hands, melt it into my palms and press it all over in a thin layer, or just put it straight onto the target area, like around the nostrils). The balms are better for night time, oils can be used day and night but SPF should always be the final step over it all.

The Ordinary Plant Based Squalane £5.50 (as we discussed, this is one of the safest oils to use as its identical to what our skin naturally produces so won't cause breakouts, good for hair too)

Biossance Squalane £27 (another more lux option)

The Ordinary Marula Oil £8.10 (marula oil can be found from many brands and its great for dry skin!)

Cerave Healing Ointment £11.75 (on iHerb)

Vaseline £1.50

(a tiny bit of petroleum jelly is a great way to seal things in and protect the skin when you really need it. Gives the skin a good environment for healing. Its safe and simple. Cerave's version includes ceramides which help even more)

Ren Evercalm Overnight Recovery Balm £42 (great fancy option if you need some recovery! Has such a nice blend of oils to repair the skin, pricey but it has a much more complex and luxurious formula than petroleum jelly!)

Retinols

Retinol can be slapped on so many labels. I recommend following someone like Caroline Hirons recommendations on products if you can spend a little more. She also has a very informative video about this ingredient. I'd recommend going for what I did which is starting with The Ordinary Retinol in Squalane, going from 0.2% and gradually increasing to 1% as each bottle finishes, and then going into prescription level such as Dermatica, Skin + Me or Differin from Boots/Superdrug online pharmacy.

The Ordinary Retinol in Squalane 0.2% £4.20

The Ordinary Retinol in Squalane 0.5% £4.20

The Ordinary Retinol in Squalane 1% £5.80

Dermatica is £19.99 per bottle, you can get the first month free and adjust how often you want to receive your prescription. I've done every 60 days as mine lasts that long. I don't use it every day.

Shaving and irritation

If your hair is coarse you can help any irritation by incorporating centella/cica, mugwort, niacinamide, ceramides, snail essence, or anything that helps repair and/or soothe the skin. It is a good idea to cool the area after shaving, you can refrigerate your products before using them, you can use a roller or massage tool made from a cooling stone or metal (I use the Sacheu stainless steel tools) or just very cold water. Make sure to moisturise well, shaving removes the top layers of skin and can harm the skin barrier, hence the irritation.

If you shave in the mornings, you should use your exfoliant at night or before shaving, not after shaving. Try to shave after the shower or bath so hair is a bit softer. Remember you can use products on only some parts of your face if you need them there, so you could treat your chin with a balm to soothe after shaving, but you may not need to put it on your forehead too. Traditional after shaving treatments marketed to men tend to have harsh 'manly' fragrance and I would advise you to avoid heavy fragrance after shaving. If you suffer from ingrown hairs, exfoliation is one of the only ways to prevent and treat them, other than laser hair removal.

If you are doing laser hair removal, avoid 'actives' like acids and retinols in the few days or week before your laser treatment.

Colour correctors are great for hiding the shadow from facial hair, especially if you don't want to do a super close shave to save your skin from some irritation. I recommend the Coverx click stick in peach (£14.75), LA girl corrector in Peach (£5), and the Makeup Revolution Conceal and Correct in Peach (£4.95). For deep skin I recommend a deeper peach shade like LA Girl corrector in Orange (£5). The biggest mistake people make with corrector is using a red or orange shade which they then need to layer foundation over to cover. Your corrector shouldn't be such a starkly different colour from your skin.

If you have a foundation or concealer which is too orange to match your skin, you can repurpose this as a colour corrector, this can work even better than a dedicated corrector. Go over your corrector with a foundation, tinted moisturiser, powder foundation, whatever works for you. You may not need to put anything over the corrector if it blends well into your skin tone.

