

SKIN BARRIER

REPAIR GUIDE

A simple guide to calmer, stronger and more comfortable skin

THE MOST IMPORTANT MESSAGE

When your skin is irritated, doing less is often better. Pause strong products, use gentle basics and give your skin time to recover.

What is the skin barrier?

The skin barrier is the outer protective part of your skin. It helps keep water in and irritants, allergens and germs out. Think of skin cells as bricks and natural fats, called lipids, as the mortar holding them together.

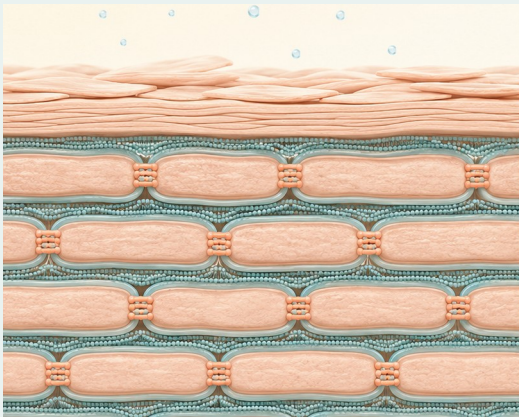
Signs that your barrier may be struggling

- Tight, dry, flaky or rough skin
- Stinging or burning when you apply products
- Redness, itching or new sensitivity
- Products you used before suddenly feel uncomfortable
- Skin feels oily on top but dry underneath

What can weaken it?

Common causes include using too many acids or retinoids, frequent scrubs, harsh cleansers, hot water, sun exposure, dry weather, rubbing the skin and trying several new products at once. Some professional treatments also temporarily weaken the barrier as part of the treatment process.

NORMAL, INTACT BARRIER



Keratinocytes: orderly skin cells
Lipid envelopes: continuous and even
Desmosomes: strong links between cells

COMPROMISED BARRIER



Keratinocytes: uneven, with wider gaps
Lipid envelopes: broken or reduced
Desmosomes: weakened links between cells

Why skin lipids matter

Lipids are natural fats in and on the skin. Between the outer skin cells, they form a waterproof seal. This seal reduces water loss and helps protect the skin from irritation. Surface oil, called sebum, also keeps the skin flexible, but it is not the same as the deeper barrier lipids.

Ceramides, the main building blocks

Ceramides make up a large part of the lipids between skin cells. When ceramide levels or quality fall, the barrier may become dry, rough and more sensitive. A moisturiser works best when it combines ceramides with cholesterol and fatty acids, because these lipids support one another.

Cholesterol and fatty acids

Cholesterol helps the barrier stay flexible and repair itself. Fatty acids help organise the barrier and support the skin's naturally acidic surface. Linoleic acid is one useful fatty acid found in some plant oils and barrier products.

Squalene and squalane

Squalene is naturally found in human sebum. It helps lubricate the skin, but it can oxidise when exposed to ultraviolet light and other stressors. Squalane is a more stable form commonly used in skincare. It can soften dry skin and reduce roughness, but it does not replace ceramides, cholesterol and fatty acids.

EASY WAY TO REMEMBER

Ceramides, cholesterol and fatty acids help rebuild the barrier structure. Squalane mainly helps soften and condition the skin.

What to look for in a barrier moisturiser

- Ceramides, ideally supported by cholesterol and fatty acids
- Humectants such as glycerin, hyaluronic acid or sodium PCA
- Soothing ingredients such as panthenol or colloidal oatmeal
- Squalane for extra softness, if your skin tolerates it
- Little or no fragrance when the skin is reactive

Protect the lipids you already have

- Cleanse gently and use lukewarm water
- Avoid repeated cleansing and strong foaming products
- Use broad-spectrum SPF 50+ every morning
- Avoid rubbing, picking and unnecessary exfoliation

Your simple barrier-reset routine

Use this short routine when your skin feels irritated, over-treated or unusually sensitive. Keep the number of products low. If a product clearly stings or worsens redness, stop using it.

STEP	MORNING	EVENING
1. CLEANSE	Rinse with lukewarm water, or use a mild cleanser.	Use a mild cleanser. Do not use scrubs, brushes or cleansing devices.
2. HYDRATE	Optional, use a simple hydrating serum only if it feels comfortable.	Optional, apply a gentle hydrating product to slightly damp skin.
3. MOISTURISE	Apply a fragrance-free moisturiser that suits your skin.	Apply enough moisturiser to relieve tightness and dryness.
4. PROTECT	Finish with broad-spectrum SPF 50+.	Avoid unnecessary heat, friction and picking.

Pause these products while the skin is reactive

- Retinoids, exfoliating acids, strong vitamin C and benzoyl peroxide
- Face scrubs, peeling products and cleansing brushes
- Fragranced products and essential oils
- At-home needling, peels or skin devices
- Any new product that causes ongoing burning, itching or redness

HOW LONG WILL RECOVERY TAKE?

A mild flare may improve within a few days. A more disrupted barrier can take longer. Comfort matters more than following a fixed number of days.

After a professional treatment

Follow the aftercare instructions for your specific procedure. Laser, microneedling, peels and energy-based treatments do not all need the same recovery plan. Do not restart active skincare just because the surface looks healed.

When can you restart active skincare?

Wait until cleansing and moisturising feel comfortable, visible redness and flaking have settled, and your basic products no longer sting. Then restart one active product at a time.

1

Choose one product

Start with the active product that matters most to your skin goal.

2

Use it less often

Begin once or twice a week, unless your clinician has advised otherwise.

3

Watch your skin

Look for new stinging, persistent redness, itching or flaking over the next several days.

4

Increase slowly

Only increase use if your skin remains calm and comfortable.

When to seek individual advice

- Symptoms are severe, getting worse or keep returning
- You have marked swelling, blisters, weeping, crusting, strong pain or spreading redness
- The reaction started after a professional treatment
- You suspect an allergy or infection
- Your symptoms may be related to eczema, rosacea or dermatitis

IMPORTANT

A damaged barrier can look similar to several skin conditions. If symptoms do not settle, an individual assessment is safer than continuing to experiment with products.

Your five-point checklist

- Cleanse gently with lukewarm water
- Use a simple moisturiser according to dryness and comfort
- Apply broad-spectrum SPF 50+ every morning
- Restart active ingredients one at a time
- Ask for advice if symptoms do not improve or warning signs appear

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