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Myths THAT Age Your Skin

Skin should feel squeaky clean after washing, you can't undo sun damage, and other beauty misconceptions you can safely ignore

■ by **GENEVIEVE JAMES** ■ photographs by **DAVID TSAY**

WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW—or think you do know—about your skin can sap its youthful luster. One particularly dangerous misconception: After a certain point, the damage is done—and can't be erased. In reality, there are lots of simple, effective ways to minimize fine lines, erase brown spots, and firm up sagging skin. "If you stick to just a few basics, your skin can look younger longer than you thought possible," says Dennis Gross, MD, a dermatologist in New York City and founder of the Dr. Dennis Gross Skincare line. Here, experts separate fact from fiction and reveal the best ways to keep years off your face.

MYTH: SKIN SHOULD FEEL TIGHT AFTER WASHING.

TRUTH: If your skin doesn't feel fresh and supple, you're probably washing with a cleanser that's too harsh. Daily cleansing banishes blemish-causing bacteria and removes radiance robbers such as makeup, oil, and dead cells. However, harsh detergents and overwashing can increase the appearance of fine lines and can often trigger breakouts, too, as oil production kicks into overdrive to compensate for a lack of moisture. Switch to a creamy cleanser with hydrators such as glycerin as well as mild surfactants like sodium or disodium cocoyl glutamate or cocamidopropyl PG-dimonium chloride phosphate (CPG), which are derived from coconut oil. "They all wash away makeup but restore moisture too," says Marianna Blyumin-Karasik, MD, a clinical instructor of dermatology at the University of Miami. Try **Avalon Organics Lavender Renewal Facial Cleansing Gel** (\$12; drugstores) and **Origins Never A Dull Moment Skin-Brightening Cleanser** (\$18.50; origins.com).

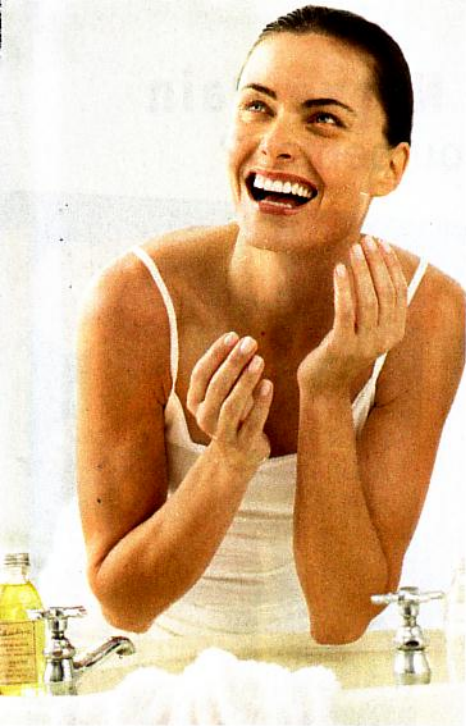
MYTH: DRUGSTORE PRODUCTS AREN'T AS GOOD.

TRUTH: "Regardless of where they're sold, most anti-aging lines contain the same

ingredients," says David Bank, MD, a dermatologist in Mount Kisco, NY. These include scientifically proven anti-agers such as retinoids, alpha hydroxy acids, peptides, and antioxidants (like vitamin C and green tea). To get the most bang for your buck, look for packaging designed to maintain a product's freshness and potency. For example, an airless pump keeps oxygen (and your fingers!) out of a cream, while an opaque coating around a bottle blocks sunlight. Another tip to boost effectiveness: Check the ingredient label to be sure the rejuvenators you want are listed high up—ideally, within the top 10.

MYTH: ANTI-AGERS MAKE SKIN LOOK WORSE THAN BEFORE.

TRUTH: Topical creams won't leave skin as red and blotchy as either of the big anti-aging guns—lasers or chemical peels. But key rejuvenators like retinoids, which speed cell turnover and stimulate collagen production, can be so irritating you may just want to give up. Don't! These simple tricks will keep you from hoisting the white flag: First-timers should prep skin for 2 weeks with an antioxidant like green tea. Try **June Jacobs Advanced Cell Repair Serum** (\$78; junejacobs.com). And consider



opting for a milder OTC retinol instead of a stronger Rx version. Try **Vichy LiftActiv Retinol HA Night** (\$42; drugstores). Mix a pea-size amount of retinol with your face cream to help offset dryness, and apply it every second or third night. Skin still too dry? Build up tolerance for a few weeks by putting the cream on for 5 minutes every other night and then rinsing it off. As skin becomes acclimated, work up to full nightly applications.

MYTH: AFTER AGE 40, SUNSCREEN IS POINTLESS.

TRUTH: By now, your skin has seen only about half its lifetime sun exposure. So don't put away the SPF—there's still plenty of time to ward off sun-induced aging. Bonus: Protecting your skin on a daily basis allows it to repair itself from past

assaults. Surprisingly, most of the damage isn't from baking on the beach—it's the result of cumulative, incidental UV exposure from, say, a quick drive to the supermarket or a midday walk. Besides damaging skin directly, "UV rays trigger free radicals, destructive molecules that act like little darts, poking holes in skin's support structure that lead to lines and sagging," says Gross. The protection in a daily lotion with built-in sunscreen might not be enough, though. Even when the SPF is 30 or above, these formulas often lack adequate coverage against UVA rays, the main culprit behind skin aging. To fully safeguard your skin, wear a separate sunscreen over your face cream or choose a moisturizer with avobenzone, Mexoryl, or zinc oxide, the best UVA blockers. Two sunscreens that contain potent UVA protection and antioxidants: **Neutrogena Ultra Sheer Liquid Sunblock Fluid SPF 55** (\$12; drugstores) and **La Roche-Posay Anthelios 45 Ultra Light Sunscreen Fluid** (\$34; CVS).

MYTH: IF A PRODUCT DOESN'T WORK QUICKLY, MOVE ON.

TRUTH: It's crucial to stick to a regimen long enough to see what works for your skin and what doesn't. "I suggest waiting 8 to 10 weeks before you abandon a product and try the next thing," says Mark G. Rubin, MD, an assistant professor of dermatology at the University of California, San Diego, and author of *Your Skin, Younger*. And keep in mind that not everyone's skin will respond the same way to an anti-ager. "Most active ingredients do work on everyone—just to varying degrees," he says. ■