

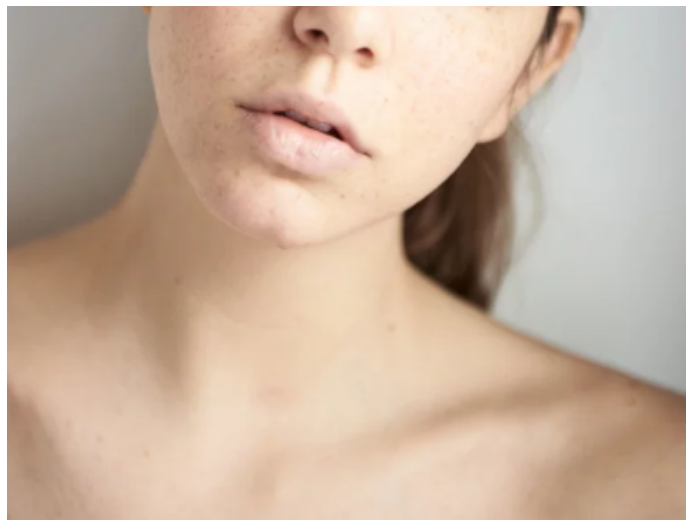


InStyle

What Type of Exfoliator Should You Be Using?

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By Victoria Moorhouse | January 22, 2019



More than eye creams, more than shampoo, and way more than mascara, the most common question I get as a beauty editor is how I exfoliate. I can't say I'm all that surprised, either. While exfoliating is considered one of the most essential skincare steps and is crucial for preventing breakouts, brightening the skin, softening the skin, *and* boosting your skin's glow, it's also *shockingly* difficult to figure out how to exfoliate.

That's mostly because there's not only one way to slough off the dead skin cells on your face (which is exactly what exfoliating is, btw). The exfoliation category is actually broken down into two different methods: chemical exfoliation and physical exfoliation. And in order to buy the best exfoliator for your skin type (and your lifestyle), you need to know how each works. Keep scrolling for your long-awaited answers.

Chemical Exfoliation



"Chemical exfoliation means using chemicals to dissolve the dead skin surface cells," Dr. Ellen Marmur, a board-certified dermatologist in New York City, says.

The most common chemical exfoliators include alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs), like glycolic acid and lactic acid, and beta hydroxy acids (BHAs), like salicylic acid. Other enzymes, especially those found in fruit, are also often used in chemical exfoliating products.

Dr. Marmur says that these chemicals actually dissolve the intercellular bonds that are holding all the dead skin cells together. Essentially, this then enables you to sweep them off of your face. There's a variety of different chemical exfoliation product formulations, but some of the most popular are at-home peel pads, like Dr. Dennis Gross Alpha Beta Extra Strength Daily Peels, and masks, like the Goop Instant Exfoliating Facial.

Now, there's no doubt about it: The phrase "chemical exfoliation" sounds super intimidating (and like the recipe for an ultra-irritated, red face), especially if you have dry or sensitive skin. However, chemical exfoliation can be used on all skin types — you just have to be mindful of what acid you're applying on your skin. "For dry skin, you'll want to steer more towards lactic acid, as it is gentler on the skin as opposed to glycolic acid," Dr. Marmur suggests.

Physical Exfoliation

If you grew up with St. Ives Fresh Skin Apricot Scrub in your shower, or if you use a loofah with your body wash, you already know what physical exfoliation is. This process is mostly done with cream or gel-based facial scrubs that are made with tiny physical particles, like ground-up seeds, to peel up and sweep away the dead skin cells. Microbeads, or little plastic spheres, used to be the most popular particle used in physical scrubs, but due to their dangerous environmental impact, they have since been banned.

But physical exfoliation (also known as mechanical exfoliation) isn't just limited to scrubs. Dr. Marmur says brushes and lasers also fit under this category.

Like its chemical counterpart, there are some downsides to physical exfoliation, especially for the skin found on the face.

"The particles [in a scrub] can be jagged and can lead to micro-injuries of the skin, which can cause pigmentation and irritation," board-certified dermatologist and celebrity beauty expert, Dr. Anna Guanche, says. Because of that, she actually prefers the chemical process.

To find out which form of exfoliation you're the best candidate for, reach out to your dermatologist for advice.

<https://www.instyle.com/beauty/how-to-exfoliate>