

Oprah Daily

How to Practice Mindfulness With Your Skincare Routine

Author: Brian Underwood

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THIS UNEXPECTED STRESS BUSTER CAN DO WONDERS.



DELMINE DONSON/GETTY IMAGES

A meditator I am not. I respect the practice and understand, intellectually, its myriad benefits. I've just never been able to make it stick (even though there's no shortage of apps or easy tips to help you do just that). I dabbled in mantra meditation for two weeks following a wellness retreat in Pennsylvania, and now those beautiful mala beads—which weren't cheap, by the way—are hanging on my bedroom doorknob, neglected.

Then my daughter was born, and the idea of meditating seemed like even more of an impossible dream. Quiet? No such thing when you have a toddler."

Somewhere along the way, though, the idea of mindfulness entered my consciousness—and that seemed *much* more my speed. Slowing down for a few brief moments daily, connecting with my breath, becoming more aware of my body and my surroundings: Supremely doable. And since you can do it anytime, anywhere, it occurred to me that my daily skincare routine presented the ideal opportunity for a moment of mindfulness. (Heck, Alicia Keys built an entire brand around this concept).

I've written about how my skincare routine helped keep me grounded while quarantining at home, and I thought this could be a way to squeeze even more juice out of the fruit. Here's how I learned to combine skincare and mindfulness—and how you can too.

Mindfulness is a form of meditation.

Nina Smiley, director of Mindfulness Programming at the Mohonk Mountain House in New Paltz, New York says, "It's taking the opportunity to focus on our breath in order to clear the mind and calm the body."

Smiley describes our minds as hamsters in a cage—we're constantly planning, examining, figuring things out. Mindfulness offers respite from that. And you don't have to sit still or even close your eyes to do it—that's the part I like best. It's really about taking deep, intentional breaths and focusing on what's happening around you: What you're seeing, hearing, and feeling. "You can take any moment and, with intention, make it more mindful," she says.

Another appealing aspect of the practice is that you can devote as much, or as little, time to it as you like. "People say they don't have time to meditate," Smiley muses, "but all you really need is a few minutes. Even 30 seconds is enough. In this way, mindfulness removes that barrier to meditation."

The practice has multiple benefits.

The scientific literature shows that the practice can improve everything from disordered eating to chronic insomnia to age-related cognitive decline. But perhaps the best-known benefit is its ability to combat stress and the inflammatory conditions that can come along with it.

The point: Incorporating little bouts of mindfulness meditation into your life daily can pay big dividends in terms of your overall health. And, Smiley says, it's a skill that will eventually become engrained in your consciousness the more you practice it. It's a concept known as neuroplasticity. "By doing chunks of meditation repeatedly, you're building a new neural path and actually changing your brain," she explains. "So, when stressful moments do hit, you're better equipped to deal with them in a healthy way."

Here's how to bring more mindfulness to your skincare routine.

Since mindfulness is ultimately about awareness, the practice marries well with a daily skincare regimen. I mean, think about it: Skincare is a sensorial experience. "You're touching your skin, you're smelling the products, you're observing what they look like—you're checking all the boxes," says dermatologist Debbie Palmer, M.D., author of *Mindful Beauty: Holistic Habits to Feel and Look Your Best*, who's been practicing mindfulness for years.

So slow down and focus on every step in your routine. As you use your products and breathe—slowly, deeply—take a moment to process how each one looks: What color is it, what's the texture like, how does it spread onto your skin. Then hone in on the smell and how the fragrance of your product makes you feel.

Finally, how does it feel? Is it cooling? Warming? A little gritty (if it's a scrub)? What's the temperature of the water if you're cleansing? Be slow and deliberate when you apply each product—how does the touch of your hands feel on your face as you massage it in? Massage your face with your fingertips, paying special attention to pulse points along your orbital bone, on your temples, underneath your jaw.

It sounds a little kooky, but I promise you, once you get into the habit, you'll never go back. You're doing something good for your skin and your soul. Every time you step out of the bathroom, it'll feel like you just left a spa. As Ina Garten would say, "How bad is that?"

Yes, you can still be a "skinalist."

Not a fan of 10-step regimens? Not a problem. That isn't a prerequisite to practice mindful skincare—a few basic steps will suffice. "A gentle cleanser, a gentle moisturizer, and sunscreen is all you really need in the morning," says dermatologist Amy Wechsler, M.D., who is also board certified in psychiatry. Palmer agrees but thinks that adding an antioxidant serum to protect your skin from free radical damage generated by the sun and pollution might also be worth considering. Vitamin C is a topical antioxidant that's particularly effective.

The Mindful Skincare Basics



Mild Cleanser

Perricone MD
dermstore.com
\$38.00

SHOP NOW

Cleansing should be like the Hippocratic Oath: First, do no harm. This mild wash is formulated with alpha hydroxy acids and green tea to remove dirt and oil with kid gloves.



Micellar Water

Koh Gen Do
dermstore.com
\$21.00

SHOP NOW

Not in the mood to turn on the tap? On those nights, saturate a cotton round with this cult Japanese favorite. It contains mineral-rich water from the Yumaru hot springs in Izumo.



Antioxidant Oil

SUNDAY RILEY
sephora.com
\$36.00

SHOP NOW

A cocktail of protective antioxidants and vitamins plus nourishing cold-pressed seed oils, addresses fine lines while keeping skin hydrated and pampered.



Gentle Cream

La Roche-Posay
dermstore.com
\$19.99

SHOP NOW

Sensitive skin? This is the moisturizer for you. It's chock full of nourishing ceramides, which repair skin's protective barrier, and soothing balancing thermal water.



Oil-Free Moisturizer

Murad
amazon.com
\$44.00

SHOP NOW

A non-greasy hydrator with hyaluronic acid to moisturize and salicylic acid to battle blemishes. Your oily, acne-prone T-zone has met its match.



Retinol Treatment

SkinCeuticals
dermstore.com
\$88.00

SHOP NOW

At night, swap out the antioxidant serum for retinol to stimulate collagen and battle discoloration. To minimize redness and flaking, apply every other night for the first few weeks.



Everyday Sunscreen

IS Clinical
dermstore.com
\$78.00

SHOP NOW

This highly-rated SPF is a beauty editor favorite for its sheer, velvety texture. Remember: This needs to go on everyday, without fail.

At night, you can swap out your antioxidant serum for something with retinol. And, of course, if adding a few more products is your thing, feel free. “The 10th product of your regimen probably isn’t doing anything,” says Wechsler. “But massaging in all of those creams is an act of self-care that will likely reduce stress and give you a sense of control over your day. That shouldn’t be underestimated: Routines are important.”

Palmer also wants you to be mindful about how you choose your products. “Are the products you’re choosing good for your skin? Are they good for the environment? I’d encourage everyone to examine their choices on a deeper level,” says Palmer.

The takeaway:

What I’ve noticed most after incorporating mindfulness into my daily skincare routine is how mindful I’ve become during the other hours of the day. Now when I take a break to walk around my neighborhood, I’m less apt to zone out on my AirPods, and more inclined to focus on the sights and sounds around me.

I’ve become that guy. The meditation guy. But for the record, those beads are still hanging on my door.