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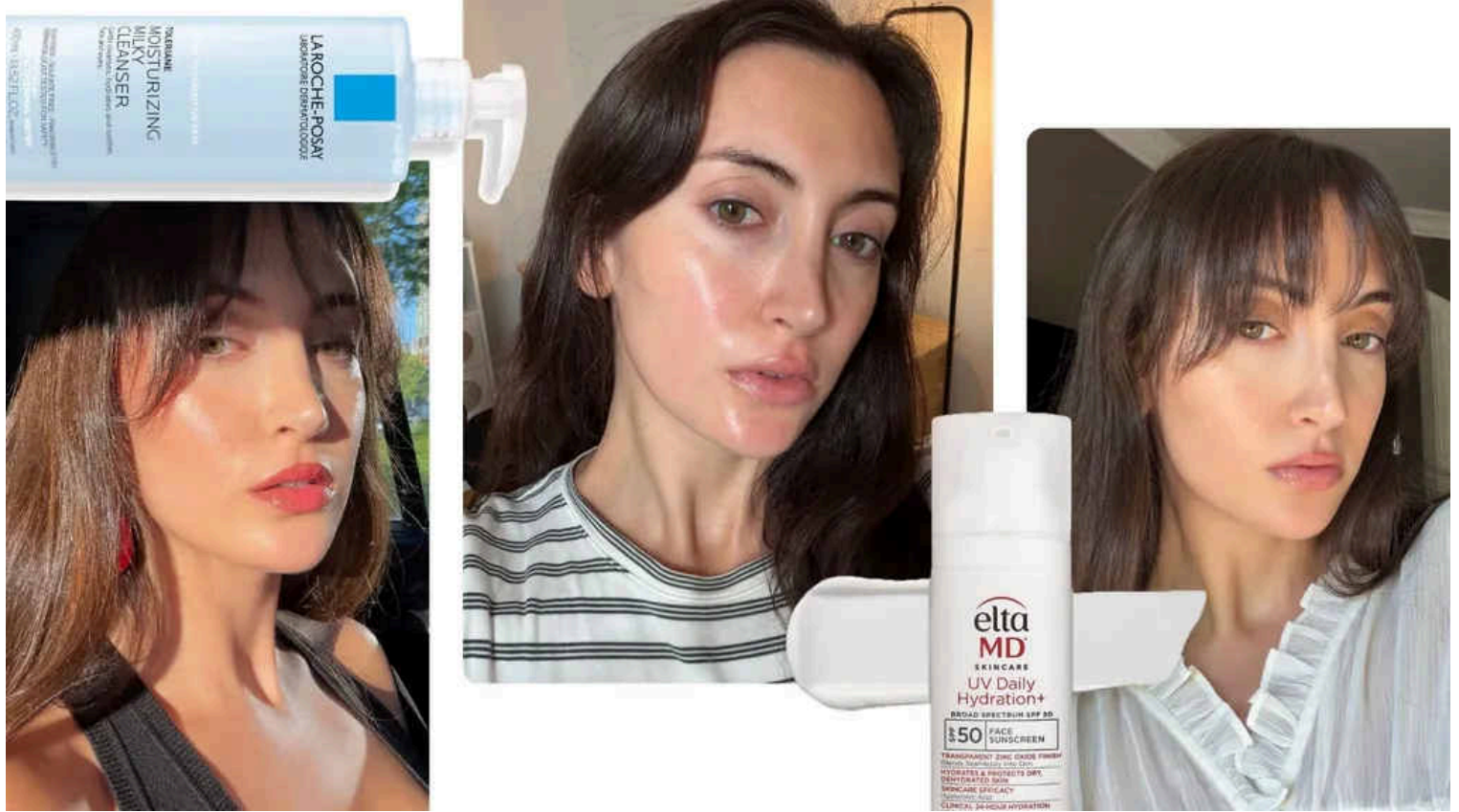
I'm Anti-12-Step Skincare Routine—This Is the Simple Approach That Keeps My Skin Clear Year-Round

Allow me to deinfluence you.



BY ALYSSA BRASCIA | PUBLISHED 20 HOURS AGO IN [FEATURES](#)

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(Image credit: @alyssabracasia; @fridacashflow; La Roche-Posay, Ulta; EltaMD; Dermstore)

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Not to toot my own horn, but I've long been on the receiving end of "You have such good skin!" compliments. That's not to say that I have an unproblematic complexion. With rosacea and eczema, I have my fair share of tribulations, but despite small setbacks, I've maintained a somewhat healthy glow year-round. You could, in theory, shake your head and chalk it up to my medicine cabinet stocked with luxury creams and easy access to celeb-loved derms. The perks of having a job in beauty, right? In your mind, it might be customary for me to have good skin. What else would you read my skincare articles for, if not?



(Image credit: [@alyssabrascia](#))

While I *do* occasionally test a handful of new glowy serums and buzzy skincare devices, these products are not what have kept my skin clear for the better part of my teen and adult years. On the contrary, my clear skin—which could

withstand body lotion as face cream in high school because I didn't know any better—had never been more congested, dull, and prone to both breakouts and barrier damage than it was just a few years into my career. In this time, my face became a testing lab for every new potion on the market, and this year, I had enough. After an aesthetician confirmed that my skin barrier was broken, I went back to the basics.

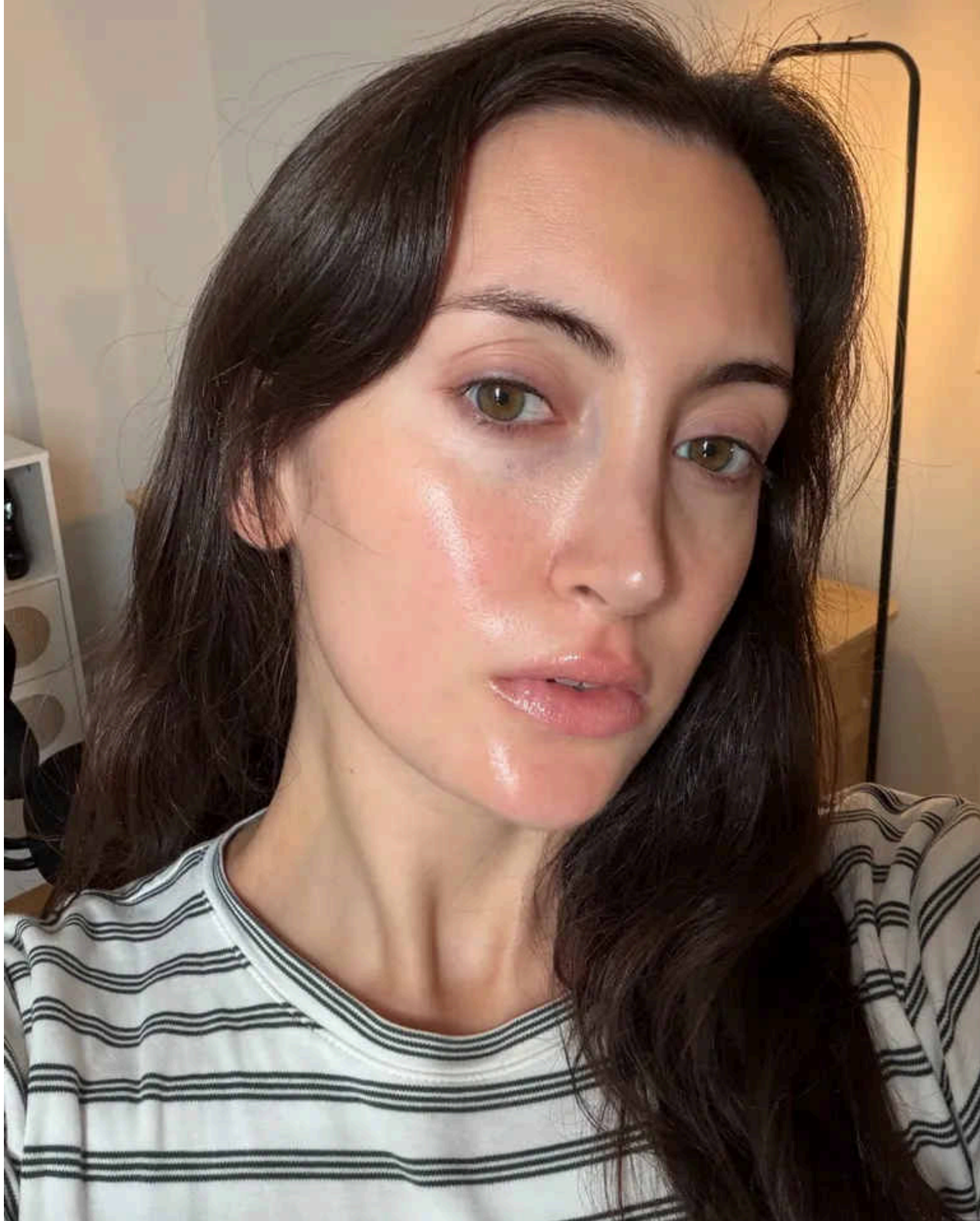
"I emphasize to patients that a healthy skincare routine does not have to be complicated," says board-certified dermatologist Debbie Palmer, MD. In fact, Palmer says that most skincare routines can be simplified to four pillars: "gentle cleansing, moisturizer, sunscreen, and targeted treatment." This means that the 12-step nighttime routines you absorb on TikTok—the ones that promise the glowiest glass skin of your life if you buy into their exact, often expensive, routine—are outdated and unnecessary. Today, I once again receive compliments on my skin, and it's not because I try everything under the sun. It's because I rely on very few trustworthy products to keep my sensitive skin happy.

WHY *NOT* A 12-STEP ROUTINE?

"The benefit of a simple routine is that it is easier to stick with and do consistently," says board-certified dermatologist Marisa Garshick, MD, FAAD. "Additionally, using too many products may increase the risk of irritation, particularly when multiple active ingredients are layered together. A simple routine may help to more easily identify what is working and what may be causing a reaction."

The Basic Skincare Routine for Your Best Skin

1. START WITH A GENTLE CLEANSER



WWW associate beauty editor Alyssa Brascia with glowy skin

(Image credit: [@alyssabascia](#))

"The basic requirements for a healthy skincare routine include a cleanser, a moisturizer, and sunscreen," says Garshick. Whether you wash your face with a cleanser once or twice a day (if once, it should always be at night), this step is necessary to remove makeup, oil, and buildup from the day. Palmer recommends a gentle, fragrance-free cleanser, which is exactly why I ditched other options in favor of no-frills winners. These formulas are budget-friendly, never strip the skin, and have not created or exacerbated irritation or dryness. Just make sure to avoid hot water and overcleansing, as this can dry out the skin, says Palmer. Shop my favorite dermatologist-recommended picks below.

YOU MAY LIKE



The Ultimate 4-Step Glow-Boosting Routine from e.l.f. SKIN



The 4-Step Minimalist Routine from E.L.F. SKIN That Will Reset Your Skin Before Summer



Derms Reveal the Ultimate Tretinoin Skincare Routine for The Best Skin of Your Life

SHOP GENTLE CLEANSERS



CERAVE
Hydrating Cleanser

~~\$16~~ \$12

[SHOP NOW](#)

"This cleanser effectively gets rid of dirt and buildup without leaving the skin feeling dry," says Garshick. "It contains hyaluronic acid to hydrate the skin, as well as ceramides that support and strengthen the skin barrier. It is a great option for all skin types, including those with sensitive skin, as it is fragrance-free."



LA ROCHE-POSAY
Toleriane Moisturizing Milky Cleanser

\$20

[SHOP NOW](#)

As someone with dry and sensitive skin, I started using this new spring water-spiked cleanser as soon as I heard about it. It effectively washes away debris and makeup without making my skin feel dry, and it seems to calm my rosacea flares as well.



VANICREAM
Gentle Facial Cleanser

~~\$16~~ \$11

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"This is a great option because it's free of common allergens like fragrance, dyes, parabens, formaldehyde, and other preservatives," says Garshick. "It effectively removes makeup, dirt, and excess oil without causing irritation. It's gentle enough to be used every day and can remove makeup and excess oil without drying the skin out, making it ideal for those with sensitive skin."



PCA SKIN
Hydrating Toner

\$48

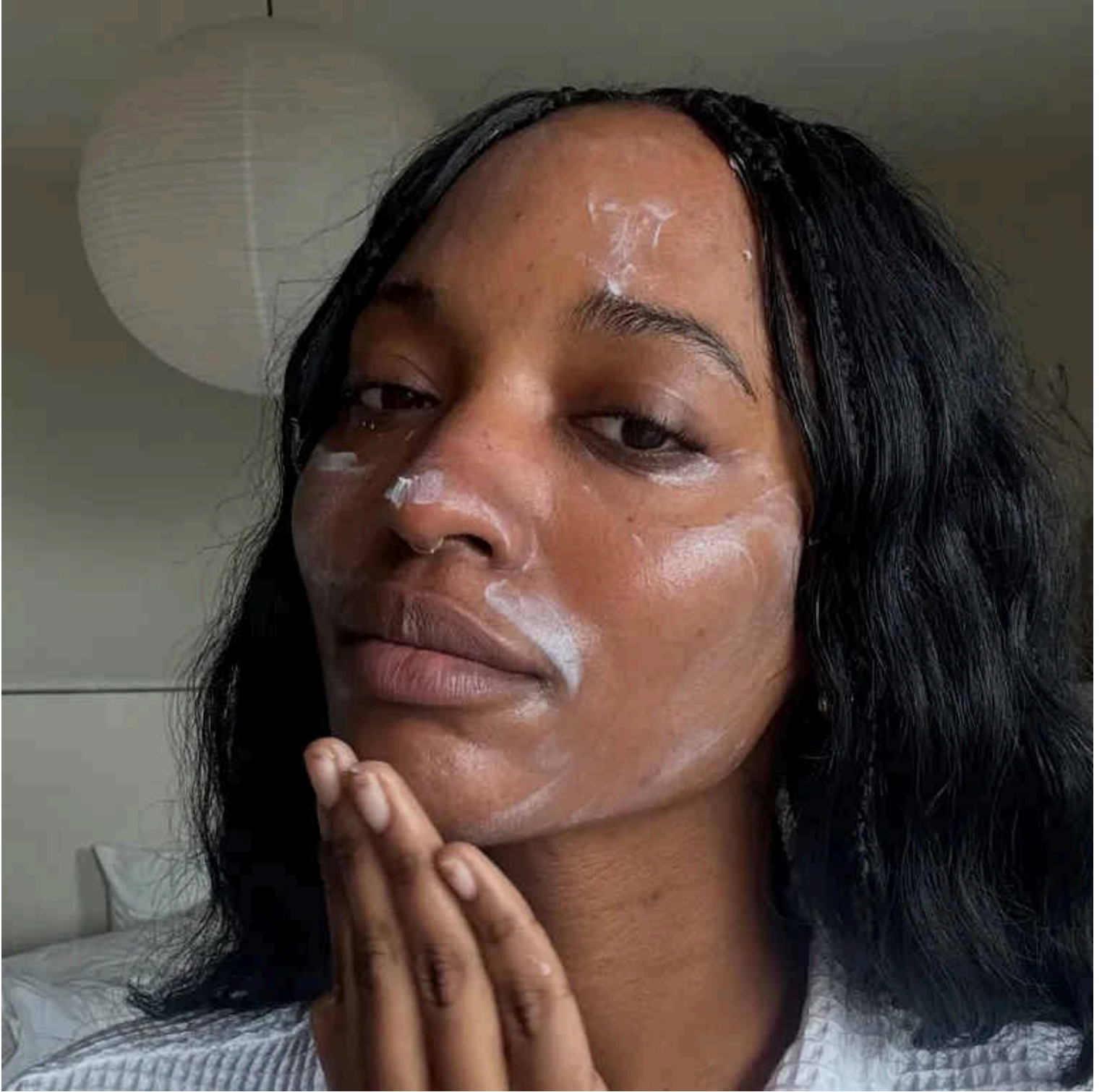
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Pro tip: If you have dry, irritable skin (ahem, me), it may not be in your best interest to wash your face in the morning. To still effectively cleanse the skin, try using a gentle, hydrating toner on a cotton pad instead. Not only is it a refreshing first step, but it also sweeps away any sweat or overnight buildup without overstripping the skin. My favorite is PCA's viral Hydrating Toner, which is infused with multiple plant oils and extracts for a treatment that replenishes hydration as it removes unwanted gunk.





2. MOISTURIZE YOUR SKIN



(Image credit: [@fridacashflow](#))

While some would argue for the importance of a serum or face oil after cleanser, the next step in a simple routine would be moisturizer. (You can certainly slot a serum or oil before moisturizer if your skin requires it. I recommend either Sofie Pavitt Face's Mandelic Clearing Serum for breakouts or Clarins's Double Serum for hydration and radiance.) Garshick explains that using moisturizer after cleanser is essential not only for barrier support but also for moisture replenishment. "It also reduces transepidermal water loss," says Palmer. "I advise patients to look for products that contain ceramides, hyaluronic acid, and glycerin." Below, shop a few favorites.

SHOP BASIC MOISTURIZERS



LA ROCHE-POSAY
Toleriane Double Repair Face Moisturizer

\$25

[SHOP NOW](#)

"This moisturizer contains a combination of ceramides to help strengthen the skin barrier, and niacinamide, which has soothing properties, supports the skin barrier and calms the skin," says Garshick. "This lightweight cream helps to replenish moisture using glycerin and can be used all year. It is a great option for all skin types, as it is oil-free and won't leave the skin feeling greasy while still being suitable for those with sensitive skin."



DR. ALTHEA
345 Relief Cream

\$27

[SHOP NOW](#)

I call this K-beauty formula an everything moisturizer. It not only hydrates and supports the skin with a potent mix of ceramides and hyaluronic acid, but it also targets dullness and pores with niacinamide, improves breakouts, lightens hyperpigmentation, and alleviates rosacea-induced redness. I could keep going, but we'll be here all day.



AVÈNE

Tolerance Control Soothing Skin Recovery Face Cream

~~\$40~~ \$30

[SHOP NOW](#)

"This lightweight yet deeply hydrating moisturizer also contains postbiotic ingredients to calm the skin and balance the skin's microbiome," Garshick explains. "It can be especially good for someone with rosacea-prone skin or sensitive skin looking to simplify a routine."

3. USE SPF



(Image credit: [@alyssabrascia](#))

To finish off a very basic daytime skincare routine, you'll want to apply a layer of sunscreen to your face, neck, and any exposed parts of the body before heading out for the day. "Using a broad-spectrum SPF 30 or greater sunscreen

is important for anti-aging and skin-cancer prevention," says Palmer. You can also opt for a tinted sunscreen for more of a makeup effect—evening out your skin tone with a wash of sheer pigment in the process. "Tinted sunscreens and antioxidants provide additional protection from visible light," Palmer adds. The dermatologist only asks that you don't forget to reapply every two hours, especially after sweating or swimming. Dermatologists agree with my all-time favorite tinted and non-tinted SPF products below.

SHOP EVERYDAY SPF



ELTAMD
UV Daily Hydration+ SPF 50

\$47

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"In addition to offering SPF 40 broad-spectrum coverage, this [sunscreen] delivers lightweight hydration, incorporating hyaluronic acid as well as antioxidant benefits with vitamin E," says Garshick. "It is great for daily use, as it is noncomedogenic, so it won't clog pores and can be layered easily under makeup. It is available in a tinted version as well."



ISDIN
Fusion Water Magic SPF 40 Sunscreen

\$38

[SHOP NOW](#)

This multitasking European SPF is suitable for sensitive skin, quenches dry complexions, and protects the skin from blue light (ahem, your computer screen) and free radicals. It's my favorite to layer underneath makeup because it doubles as a grippy primer.



LA ROCHE-POSAY
Anthelios Tinted Mineral Sunscreen SPF 50

\$40

[SHOP NOW](#)

I love a tinted SPF on super-hot days that require a bit of makeup, and this mineral formula from La Roche-Posay cuts my routine down considerably. The lightweight formula blends into the skin without leaving a white cast, offers SPF 50, and blurs the skin with tinted mineral pigments that come in four flexible hues.

4. USE A TARGETED TREATMENT

While a basic, no-frills skincare routine is best for someone with sensitive skin, your best routine may require an extra step or two. (But by no means does it require an extra eight.) "TikTok can make it seem like everyone needs a 10-step routine or the latest device when, in reality, skincare should be individualized," says Garshick. However, derms agree that some skin types need a little extra love when targeting certain concerns. "Patients may ask for help

with fine lines, wrinkles, firmness, texture, hyperpigmentation, erythema (redness), oily skin, or dry skin," Palmer adds, which is where add-ons like vitamin C serums, retinols, and eye creams come into the picture.

"A more involved routine can be beneficial when trying to treat or address specific skincare concerns, including skin aging," says Garshick. "For example, a more advanced routine that is still relatively simple may include an antioxidant in the morning and a retinoid at night." It's also, understandably, a soothing wind-down experience for some. But if your skin is smothered under too many products, it may begin to suffer for it. "Layering multiple acids, retinoids, exfoliants, and other active ingredients can compromise the skin barrier and lead to dryness and irritation," she explains. "If incorporating multiple products, it may be best to start with just one new product at a time to minimize any potential dryness or irritation."

SHOP TARGETED TREATMENTS



SKINCEUTICALS
C E Ferulic

\$185

SHOP NOW

"A tried-and-true vitamin C with a new, enhanced formula delivers antioxidant benefits, combining vitamin C, vitamin E, and ferulic acid in addition to carnosine and endophytol, which also help to calm inflammation," says Garshick. "Together, this helps to protect against environmental stressors while also brightening the skin."



MAD HIPPIE
Wrinkle Relaxing Eye Treatment

\$35

[SHOP NOW](#)

"This is a peptide-packed eye treatment that reduces fine lines, brightens dark circles, and de-puffs tired eyes," Palmer explains. "It can be applied both morning and night. It is great for all skin types and is vegan and cruelty-free, paraben- and phthalate-free, and does not include synthetic fragrances."



ROC

Retinol Correxion Deep Wrinkle Serum

\$30

[SHOP NOW](#)

"This lightweight formula offers an effective way to address overall texture, firm the skin, and reduce the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles," says Garshick. "It's both gentle and effective. In addition to retinol, it is formulated with glycerin and bisabolol to help hydrate and soothe the skin."



ALYSSA BRASCIA Associate Beauty Editor, Who What Wear



Alyssa Brascia is an associate beauty editor at Who What Wear. She is based in New York City and has 3+ years of industry experience. Brascia has personally tested more than a thousand beauty products and services—from the hottest new eye shadow palette to the buzzy manicure sweeping New York Fashion Week. Brascia graduated with a BS in apparel, merchandising, and design from Iowa State University. She was formerly a shopping writer at [People.com](https://www.people.com). Her earlier work can be found at *InStyle*, *Travel + Leisure*, *Shape*, and more. When Brascia isn't writing, researching, or testing new beauty products, you can find her watching the latest movie to generate Oscar buzz, taking a workout class with friends, or updating her wardrobe post-shopping spree in her beloved city.

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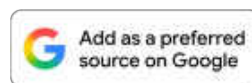
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