

Acne Health Center

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How to Manage Oily Skin

Get more glow and less shine with skin-clearing solutions from leading dermatologists.

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WebMD Feature

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Oils produced by the body help keep [skin](#) healthy, but there can be too much of a good thing. Excess oil can lead to blemishes and [acne](#) flare-ups. "Fortunately, there are plenty of ways to cut down on oiliness," Andrea Cambio, MD, medical director of Cambio Dermatology in Cape Coral, Florida, says. Clear [complexion](#) strategies range from over-the-counter cleansers to prescription lotions and cosmetic treatments.

Cleansers

Dermatologists agree that the most effective way to manage oily skin is to cleanse your face both morning and night. "Always use a gentle cleanser since harsh soaps can trigger the skin to increase oil production," April Armstrong, MD, assistant professor of dermatology at the University of California, Davis, says. Also, beware of the buff. A washcloth or buff puff can actually stimulate more oil secretion.

If a basic facial cleanser doesn't cut oiliness, try a product that includes an acid such as [benzoyl peroxide](#), [salicylic acid](#), glycolic acid, or beta-hydroxy acid. "Many products containing these acids are marketed as [acne](#) facial care products. They're great for people with acne, but they're also fine for people whose problem is just oily skin," Armstrong says. "Since some of these ingredients can be irritating, buy a small size to see how your skin responds. People often have to try several products before they find the one that works best for them." Wash with warm water, not hot, because temperature extremes can irritate skin.

Toners

Dermatologists are divided on whether the oil-reducing properties of toner are legitimate. "I'm not a big fan of astringent toners because they tend to irritate the skin and can lead to more oil production," Cambio says. "Still, if people like using them, I recommend applying toners only on oily areas of the skin, such as the forehead, nose, and chin. Avoid using them on areas that tend to be dry or you're likely to create dry patches on your skin."

That's advice worth remembering for all your skin care regimens. "There's a myth that some people have

[dry skin](#), some people have oily skin. In fact, most people have combination skin, oily in some places, dry in others," Ellen Marmur, MD, associate professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York, says.

Medicated Pads

Pads medicated with salicylic acid, glycolic acid, or other oil-cutting acid ingredients are another [beauty](#) routine option. "Medicated pads are a favorite among my patients with oily skin," Marmur says. "You can carry them in your purse and use them on the run to freshen up your skin and remove excess oil."

Blotting Paper

Cosmetic blotting papers offer a great option for removing oil because they don't dry out your skin. "Patients with oily skin really love blotting paper because it's convenient and easy to use," Armstrong says. Apply it to oily areas, such as forehead, nose, and chin. Don't scrub your skin with the sheet of blotting paper. Instead, simply press it against the oily area long enough to absorb oil, usually 15 to 20 seconds. Some blotting papers are lightly powdered, which further reduces shine.

Masks and Clays

Applying masks and clays to the skin helps draw out oils and cleanses pores, but there is also concern for over drying. "My advice is to apply them only to problem areas and use them only occasionally," Rebecca Kazin, MD, director of Johns Hopkins Cosmetic Center, says. She suggests limiting masks and clays to real big events such as a wedding, a birthday dinner, or a big presentation.

Moisturizers

"People who have oily skin often steer clear of moisturizers, [worrying](#) that they'll make their skin look even shinier," Kazin says. That's a bad idea. "Even oily skin needs to be moisturized to look its best," she says. To avoid an oily sheen, choose an oil-free moisturizer. Vary the amount you apply depending on whether the area tends to be dry or oily.

Oil-free Sunscreen

"Traditional sunscreens can pose a problem for people with oily skin since they tend to go on pretty thick and can block pores," Armstrong says. Even so, protecting skin from ultraviolet [radiation](#) is absolutely essential. [Sunscreen](#) gels are less likely than creams and lotions to make your skin look oily, and there are a variety of new oil-free products for oily skin. Some of the newest products, including facial powders, offer enough protection to ward off [sun damage](#) in most situations.

Adapt Your Facial Regimen

How oily your skin appears can vary season by season, week by week, even day by day. "Oil production is influenced by hormones, by mood, even by the weather," Cambio says. "For example, some people have problems with oily skin only in the summer when they're [sweating](#)." It's important to be aware of how your skin varies so that you can adjust your regimen accordingly. "You may need cleanser with glycolic acid or beta-hydroxy acid every day during the summer but only now and then during the winter," Kazin says. "That's important to know since overusing these products can cause skin to dry out."

Talk to Your Dermatologist

If over-the-counter products aren't enough to help you manage oily skin, talk to your dermatologist. Laser and [chemical peels](#) can help reduce oiliness and improve the overall look of your skin. Creams laced with [tretinoin](#), [adapalene](#), or tazarotene can also help by altering pores and reducing oiliness. "Since these products can be irritating, it's best to use them only on oily areas and only as often as you really need it," Kazin says.

It's worth remembering that oil production is a normal part of healthy skin. "People with naturally oily skin tend to have fewer [wrinkles](#) and healthier looking skin," Marmur says. So don't go overboard in your effort. Remove excess oiliness when you need to look your best, but be careful to preserve your skin's natural anti-aging mechanism.

SOURCES:

Andrea Cambio, MD, medical director, Cambio Dermatology, Cape Coral, Fla.

April Armstrong, MD, assistant professor of dermatology, University of California, Davis.

Rebecca Kazin, MD, dermatologist, Johns Hopkins Medical Institute.

Ellen Marmur, MD, associate professor of dermatology, Mount Sinai Medical Center, New York; author, *Simple Skin Beauty*.

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