



beauty products, skin
**The Surprising Reason You Might Want
to Avoid Essential Oils**

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Those with touchy skin know to steer clear of skin-care products with added fragrances, alcohol, and harsh chemicals. Many natural-leaning beauty brands exclude these potential irritants from their formulas. Skin-care companies Drunk Elephant and Restorsea take it even further, renouncing seemingly pure and wholesome essential oils. It's somewhat counterintuitive; essential oils are often lauded because they represent a natural means of adding fragrance to a product and usually come with a host of other benefits. But as it turns out, they also have the potential to majorly irritate skin.

"Essential oils are the fragrance essences from plants that have been extracted for use," explains dermatologist Rebecca Kazin. "They are much more concentrated than regular oils." Because of their potent fragrance, the plant-derived oils are commonly added to beauty products as a natural alternative to synthetic scents, but when Drunk Elephant founder Tiffany Masterson was formulating the brand's line of natural (and *Allure*-editor-acclaimed) products, she decided to leave them out because of their potential to upset skin. "I was focusing solely on quality, pH, and levels of actives, plus the exclusion of toxins and irritants," she says. "When choosing the ingredients, I couldn't find one reason to include essential oils. They definitely have aromatherapy benefits, but smelling pretty wasn't a priority for me."

Restorsea founder Patti Pao also opted to make her products free of essential oils. "I'm allergic to everything, and my allergies have caused my skin to be *very* reactive," she says. "I wanted to create a line for all skin types—including extremely sensitive, reactive skin types. If you have allergies, essential oils may be very allergenic and can cause a reaction." But according to Kazin, essential oils can aggravate those with sensitive skin, not just those with allergies. "Because essential oils are so concentrated, they can be irritating or allergenic to sensitive skin," she says.

It's fair to say that essential oils are not problematic for everyone, but people with sensitive skin, to be safe, should add them to their topical-things-to-avoid list. It may seem counterintuitive that a natural substance would cause inflammation, redness, and overall skin crankiness for some, but Masterson points out that "there are good and bad natural ingredients, just as there are good and bad synthetic ingredients."