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Do You Really Need to Exfoliate Your Eyes?

BY GRACE GOLD, CONTRIBUTOR, JULY 4, 2016, 9:00:32 AM



Exfoliating your face is like learning the ABC's of skin care—you've probably been doing it since high school. Yet even the most committed have likely been missing the one area that New York City dermatologist Neal Schultz says is the most important of all: the area around your eyes.

"The thin skin around your eyes typically looks ten years older than the rest of your face, since dead cells dull the area and lines emerge here first," says Schultz. Gentle daily exfoliation of the eye area can help it look younger and glowing by creating a smoother surface that better reflects light, he adds.

Eye exfoliation also encourages collagen production that leads to more elasticity, which means skin can bounce back more easily from lines formed while smiling or squinting. "People focus on how showing emotion causes wrinkles, but what is more important is that you're keeping skin elastic enough to flatten out again afterward, and exfoliation is an essential part of that process," says Schultz.

However, you don't want to just go at this area with scrubs or strong chemicals, warns Rebecca Kazin, MD, of the Washington Institute of Dermatologic Laser Surgery and the John Hopkins Department of Dermatology. She suggests eye creams with lower concentrations of hydroxy acids or retinol as the most effective way to exfoliate. To this point, two recently created eye creams, BeautyRx By Dr. Schultz Gentle Exfoliating Eye Cream and Cane+Austin Glycolic Treatment Eye Cream—,use mild amounts of glycolic acid to turn over skin cells in this area.

Where you apply exfoliating eye creams is important, too, says Kazin. Starting at the area lower than your eye-socket bone, tap the formula on with your ring finger, and work around to the crow's feet, up and around to the brow bone.

Those areas more closely resemble the texture of facial skin and will reap the rewards. Stay away from the area directly underneath the lower lash line and the eyelids, which are too thin and won't benefit.

While layering skin care has been all the rage for a while now, you actually don't want to overlap products in the eye area, says New York City dermatologist Craig Austin, founder of Cane+Austin. Doubling up on formulas that may contain multiple exfoliating ingredients is too much for the eye area and could leave you peeling and red, so keep your facial products away from your eyes. And pick one workhorse. "Glycolic acid and retinol should never be used together. Go with one or the other, or rotate them out on separate days around the eyes," advises Austin.

And just as you do after exfoliating your face, it's important to follow up with sunscreen. "Use a gentle SPF under the eye or an eye cream with SPF, and wear sunglasses to protect your eyes," Austin urges. After all, you'll want to make all that extra care (and those extra bucks!) you've spent refreshing your eyes worth it. And as with all things skin, harmful UV sun rays can negate and even reverse results, as well as increase your chance of skin cancer.