

ELLE Canada Magazine - October 2009

Truth Serum

By Michelle Villett

Does your skin really need a serum? Top derms weigh in.

Layering is a big transformation for fall, and not just on the catwalks. Once considered a luxury skin treatment, serums - which you apply before your moisturizer - have hit the mainstream.

A serum is a concentrated formula created for a specific concern, and its benefits are purported to be cumulative. "Serums are clear liquids that contain active ingredients like antioxidants and vitamins," explains Dr. Peter Vignjevic, a Dermatologist based in Hamilton, Ont. They're also multi-taskers: Besides fighting wrinkles, serums can improve your skin's texture, hydration and tone.

SPECIAL DELIVERY

The secret to getting the most out of the skin-care product is its delivery system - the method by which active agents like retinol, ceramides, and vitamins get into your skin. And that depends on whether a product is formulated as a cream, lotion, or serum. "Serums offer a more stable environment for unstable compounds," says Dr. David Zloty, a Vancouver based Dermatologist and clinical assistant professor of Dermatology at the University of British Columbia. "They generally contain a higher concentration of silicone or glycols, and the active agents can be fat-loving. They tend to mix together more easily, and the ingredients are less likely to come out of the solution - but that depends on the quality of the formulation." Say **Dr. Lisa Kellett**, a Toronto-based dermatologist: "Serums contain (more) actives because they're created in a more concentrated form."

Vignjevic and Kellett recommend serums as a part of the daily skin-care regime, but how they work is up for debate. Vignjevic and **Kellett** hypothesize that certain serums penetrate more deeply because they contain smaller molecules than those of moisturizers. "Most serums penetrate to the lower levels of the stratum corneum (the outer layer of the epidermis)," says Zloty. However, he adds, the active agents can stimulate signalling pathways that could transfer their benefits to deeper layers. And now there maybe a breakthrough delivery system: after five years of research, this fall Dr. Nicholas Perricone, a Dermatologist based in Connecticut, is introducing Cold Plasma, which has been formulated to prevent and correct signs of aging with a delivery system charged by phospholipids, which mimic the lipids in the skin cells. Because they are skin compatible, nutrients are quickly absorbed through the cellular membrane, were they can be most effective.

SECRET AGENTS

Some ingredients in serums, such as **retinol**, have had impressive results. "There is little evidence that cosmetic and anti-aging products can produce similar effects to prescription - only topical retinols," says Stewart Long, scientific advisor for Boots Skincare. "But our results shows that (the retinol-based No7 Protect and Perfect Beauty Serum) stimulates production of fibrillin, a component of the skin's elastic tissue." Besides retinol, Vignjevic recommends serums with **vitamins C** and **E** which he says can help repair sun damage and improve texture and hydration. If you have sensitive skin, start with a low concentration of retinol because it can be irritating. And, since over-the-counter products are not required to list the percentage of actives on their labels, consult a dermatologist first.

TARGET PRACTICE

No matter what serum you use, exfoliate your skin first, says Dr. Yves Hebert, a Montreal-based physician who specializes in aesthetic medicine. Then, "morning and night, apply a thin layer on clean skin and massage it in," says Vignjevic. Since serums aren't as hydrating as moisturizers, you will still need a lotion or cream and, of course, sunscreen.



Print

© 2007 DLK on Avenue Inc. 108 Avenue Rd. Toronto, ON M5R 2H3. Tel (416) 440-2597