Vitamin C tops the list of the most searched for skincare ingredients

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Vitamin C has topped a list of the most searched for skincare ingredients so far in 2020 with squalane, retinol, and niacinamide being named “top climbers”.

Cult Beauty used Google data to discover which ingredients were being sought out online as well as answering the most Googled questions of the year.

Vitamin C has long been a popular anti-ageing ingredient and the data revealed it was keeping its top spot with the most googled question about it being, “What does vitamin C do for your skin?"

There were more than two million combined searches for squalane, retinol, and niacinamide with the most Googled questions being “What does retinol do to your face?", and "What does squalane do?".

Hyaluronic acid was another ingredient consumers searched for, asking "What are the benefits of hyaluronic acid?"

Searches for hydrating ingredient polyglutamic acid were also on the rise with 19,280 searches in 2020 in comparison to 9,280 in 2019.

The ingredients with the biggest year-on-year increase included clay and bakuchiol, a plant-based alternative to retinol.

But what are these active ingredients and how can they work for your skin?

Leading cosmetic doctors reveals what constitutes an ‘active’ ingredient and which ones are right for YOUR skin

‘Active ingredients are the ingredients contained within skincare products that actually work to address the skin concern the product is designed to target. They are the key ingredients that have been clinically proven to treat the relevant symptoms,’ explains cosmetic doctor, Dr Rekha Tailor (www.healthandaesthetics.co.uk).

Usually active ingredients are considered a good thing, however Dr Rekha Tailor gives a warning there are things to be weary of too: ‘Since the ingredients in our skincare are more active and effective than ever, they can also irritate the skin if overused or used in combinations that are not right for your skin type. Using multiple forms of exfoliation at once-acids and retinoids can do more harm than good, causing irritation and exacerbating skin conditions such as rosacea. Similarly, overloading sensitive skin by pairing active ingredients such as glycolic or salicylic acid containing products with retinoids.’

For this reason it’s important to learn which ones are right for your skin type.

‘For those wanting to exfoliate the skin, alpha hydroxy acids are a great active to include,’ reveals Dr Rekha Tailor. ‘Glycolic, lactic, and mandelic acids are common AHAs, and, while they shouldn’t be applied to chapped or open skin they are usually safe even for sensitive skin. For those wishing to brighten their skin a great addition would be vitamin C. It is a super potent antioxidant that combats the ill effects of UV damage and improves the efficacy of sunscreen when layered underneath it. For its anti-ageing properties, retinol is a powerful active to include within a skincare regimen. Retinol is a vitamin A derivative that boosts skin cell turnover, smooths skin, unclogs pores, lightens age spots, and refines skin texture.’

In order to be able to make an informed choice about which active ingredients to use on your skin, it’s helpful to know a bit more about them, here the doctors reveal the basics:

VITAMIN C

Harley Street Cosmetic doctor, Dr Paris Acharya, explains:

‘Vitamin C (also known as ascorbic acid) is a powerful antioxidant and one of the few skincare

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ingredients that has been proven to help in the battle against skin ageing. It neutralises free radicals and helps your body repair damaged cells. It encourages collagen production, helps protect skin against damage from the environment and can improve pigmentation caused by sun damage and scarring.

Nowadays we are fortunate because it comes in lots of different sorts of skincare.

However, ascorbic acid breaks down with regular exposure to air and light and so it's one that needs to be looked after properly and kept in airtight packaging and included in products that are used once daily only.

For most effective results use Vitamin C in the morning followed directly by a broad-spectrum SPF.

It should be used as the last layer prior to your SPF but does mix with other skincare ingredients if layered underneath, including exfoliating acids and other vitamins and antioxidants such as niacinamide.'

Should we be looking for specific concentrations?

'Skincare products contain different percentages of Vitamin C so it's best to check with your skincare expert or doctor before embarking on a new routine or using a new product,' says Dr Acharya.

Is there anyone who shouldn't use it?Are there any other ingredients that boost its efficacy?

'Vitamin C mixes well and layers with other skincare ingredients, including exfoliating acids and other vitamins and antioxidants such as retinol and niacinamide.'

What types of products can you find it in and are some formulas better than others (eg serums/creams/masks)?

'I would recommend PCA's CE Advanced serum (https://www.pcaskin.co.uk/search?type=product,article,page&q=C). It uses two potent antioxidants in its anhydrous (waterless formulation), Vitamin C and E become activated on contact with the skin. They help brighten and strengthen whilst also minimising fine lines and wrinkles. The powerful antioxidants provide protection against environmental stressors and free radicals making for a fantastic serum with proven therapeutic results,' says Dr Acharya.

SQUALANE

What is it?

'Squalane is a hydrocarbon derived by the hydrogenation of squalene. Squalene with an 'e' is a lipid (or a fat) produced naturally by your skin cells. The amount of squalene your body produces declines with age. The difference between Squalane and Squalene is that Squalene isn't stable enough for use in skincare products because they're intended to be kept on the shelves for a long period of time. Squalane is derived from Squalene and is the more stable form of this molecule. It is also colourless and odourless. Squalane is an incredible hydrator that is easily absorbed into the skin,' explains Dr Rekha Tailor.

'Squalane is derived by the hydrogenation of squalene. It is found naturally in the skin lipid barriers of plants, animals and humans. Traditionally squalene was derived from the livers of sharks however for ethical reasons most skincare companies have shifted away from this and now get squalene that is derived from plants such as olives and rice bran. It can also be derived from other plant oils including sugar cane and wheat germ. By checking that your skincare is vegan you can make sure that it doesn't contain squalene from sharks.'

Why do we need it?

‘Squalane is an effective moisturiser. It mimics your skin’s natural oils meaning that it’s a good emollient. It’s also a natural antioxidant and can also protect skin from carcinogens.’

Is there anyone who shouldn’t use it?

‘One of the brilliant things about squalane is that it’s suitable for all skin types, from oily to dry to acne-prone. It absorbs into the skin easily. It can also be used as an eczema treatment because of the fact that it’s full of natural skin-balancing properties. It’s an incredibly gentle natural emollient with anti-inflammatory properties,’ says Dr Rekha Tailor.

NIACINAMIDE

What is it?

‘Niacinamide (vitamin B3) not only normalises your skin’s oil production to keep pores clear and breakouts in check but also regulates pigment-making cells to fade hyperpigmentation. It soothes redness with its anti-inflammatory properties, protects from free-radical damage, and boosts your skin’s hydration level,’ explains Dr Paris Acharya.

‘Niacinamide is a key ingredient to powerfully treat age-related skin changes, acne, and skin discolouration. It naturally calms the skin and provides dramatic skin brightening for a wide variety of skin types. It’s also been proven to treat a number of types of acne.’

Products containing Niacinamide:

https://www.pcaskin.co.uk/search?type=product,article,page&q=niacin amide

Is there anyone who shouldn’t use it?Are there any other ingredients that boost its efficacy?

‘The only interaction to be aware of is that niacinamide inactivates L-ascorbic acid (vitamin C) if it is in a combined water-based product. You can still use niacinamide and vitamin C, but they should be in different products and preferably not used back to back,’ explains Dr Acharya.

What types of products can you find it in and are some formulas better than others (eg serums/creams/masks)?

‘I’m a massive fan of PCA Skin's Dual Action Redness Relief and Hyaluronic Acid Boosting Serum (https://www.pcaskin.co.uk/products/pca-skin-dual-action-redness-relief?variant=1382602276893) . Both of these can be incorporated effectively into your home care routine. The dual action redness relief contains four per cent niacinamide, which reduces transepidermal water loss maintaining the skin's protective barrier system. It also helps reduce excess oil production, improves congestion, and targets uneven skin tone.’

GLYCOLIC ACID

What is glycolic acid? What benefits does glycolic acid offer?

'Glycolic acid is an AHA, or Alpha Hydroxy Acid. Of the AHAs, glycolic is the simplest in structure and the smallest; it has the lowest molecular weight which means that it can easily permeate the skin. Water-soluble, glycolic acid exfoliates the outermost dead layer of the dermis and therefore increases luminosity of the skin by improving the reflection of light on the skin. Because of this, glycolic acid can be used to treat scarring, skin discoloration and signs of premature aging, like fine lines and wrinkles,’ says Dr Rekha Tailor.

How is it applied to the skin?

'If you're just starting to incorporate glycolic acid into your skincare regimen, I would suggest using a gentle, glycolic cleanser to get your skin used to it, rather than diving straight into a leave-on glycolic product. I feel however that glycolic acid is most effective when administered as a chemical peel by your cosmetic doctor. They of course utilise stronger ingredients which come hand in hand with more potent effects.'

Does the type of skin care product matter or when it's used in your routine?

'Apply your glycolic acid after cleansing in the morning. Always remember to follow up glycolic acid with sunscreen because the former makes your skin more vulnerable to sun damage. If you have sensitive skin, start off with a lower concentration of glycolic acid and slowly work your way up.'

Can it be combined with other skin care ingredients for maximum effect?

While glycolic acid can be beneficial in conjunction with other, gentler exfoliators like salicylic acid, when combined with stronger exfoliants like retinol, it can be too strong for most skin types.

Is there any risk of side effects?

I have never seen a severe reaction from glycolic acid. Overall it's actually very safe, so much so that we can use this active ingredient during pregnancy. Another benefit of glycolic acid is that it is immediately neutralised upon contact with water. Not only can you rinse it off if you feel tingling, but even if it penetrates deeply into your skin, it eventually reaches the water in the dermis. There it's neutralized and won't go any further. The only thing that you need to be aware of with glycolic acid is that it can make your skin photosensitive over time, so it can enhance the damaging effects of UV light. It's therefore really important that you use a broad-spectrum SPF in the morning and reapply it throughout the day.

What results can you expect?

Using serums that contain glycolic acid over a period can have a visible impact on the overall health of your skin. Glycolic acid will visibly tackle hyperpigmentation, dullness, and signs of skin aging, such as lines and wrinkles,' says Dr Rekha Tailor.

RETINOL

What is retinol?

'Retinol is a type of retinoid, derived from Vitamin A. It exfoliates skin and helps the skin to produce collagen and to fight free radicals. Retinol, or retinoids, work by prompting surface skin cells to turn over and die quickly, making way for new healthy fresh skin underneath. It helps to prevent collagen breaking down and thickens the deeper layer of skin to help prevent wrinkles,' says Dr Rekha Tailor.

'It's worth bearing in mind though that retinol may not be for everyone and can exacerbate conditions such as psoriasis, eczema or rosacea if not used under a clear treatment plan provided by a cosmetic doctor or dermatologist.'

When you should start using retinol and how often?

'I would suggest that you should start using retinol in your 30s, because that's when your collagen levels typically start to decrease. It's particularly good if you suffer from pigmentation or breakouts. For most people Retinol can be incorporated into your evening routine along with a broad-spectrum SPF in the morning.

What are the side effects and who shouldn't be using it?

‘People who use retinol often find it makes their skin worse before it gets better. Side effects typically include dryness, tightness, peeling and redness, especially at first. These side effects usually subside after six weeks as the skin gets used to it.

Even sensitive skin can be trained to acclimatise to retinol so really the only people who shouldn’t use it are women who are pregnant or breastfeeding.’

How to apply retinol for maximum impact

‘In the evening, make sure your face is washed with a gentle cleanser and wait a few minutes for your skin to dry. Then take a pea-sized amount of retinol and starting at your chin apply it with your fingertips in upward and outward motions. Avoid using retinol in your morning skincare regimen and always use SPF when you’re using retinol because of the fact that it makes skin more sensitive to sun damage.’

Which products to avoid using at the same time as using retinol and which ones complement the treatment

‘I wouldn’t advise mixing retinol with Vitamin C, benzoyl peroxide, and AHA/BHA acids. These acids exfoliate and dry skin and cause further irritation, and benzoyl peroxide cancels out retinol so there’s no point using them together,’ says Dr Rekha Tailor.

How to start using retinol if you're a beginner

‘I would always advise consulting a specialist to ensure that you're using the best retinol for your skin and doing so in a safe way. Retinol products on prescription are more powerful and work faster. However, prescription retinol also increases the risk of skin irritation which needs to be monitored by a doctor.'

Any specific product or active ingredient recommendations for our readers

'Used in conjunction with other products, I always suggest Retinol skin Brightener in 3 strengths, Wrinkle & Texture Repair and Radical Night Repair for my patients. It's a unique and potent blend of retinol, vitamin c, antioxidants and melanin inhibitors, this is a comprehensive multi-action formulation to minimise redness and maintain restored skin.'

Products containing Retinol:

https://www.pcaskin.co.uk/search?type=product,article,page&q=retinol

https://www.healthandaesthetics.co.uk/product/zo-skin-health-retinol-skin-brightener-1/

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