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Dermatologists Say Your Skin Has 'Winter Gunk.' Here's How To Spring Clean Your Face.

If the winter did a number on your skin, follow these seasonal skin care strategies from dermatologists.

By Julie Kendrick

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We’ve all been thinking about ways to freshen up for a new season — new clothes, tidied-up living spaces and a focus on fresh, lighter foods. With spring cleaning happening all around, it’s important to remember that your [skin](#) has had a long, hard winter, too. “Spring cleaning to remove winter gunk can be helpful as a way to eliminate dullness and buildup of dead skin cells that may occur in the winter months,” said dermatologist Dr. [Marisa Garshick](#).

To clear away winter sludge, consider exfoliating once or twice a week.

Exfoliating helps to shed dead skin cells and leaves the skin looking brighter, more radiant and refreshed,” Garshick said. Dermatologist Dr. [Rebecca Marcus](#) agreed: “Winter skin tends to be more prone to dryness and flaking, and it can feel great to gently exfoliate the skin to remove dull, dead skin cells from the surface of the skin. I recommend some sort of peel, whether a light chemical peel or a laser peel, to help freshen skin for spring.”

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Garshick tells her patients to strive for a healthy exfoliation balance, but notices a common tendency to under- or over-do it. “Some of my patients don’t exfoliate at all, while others exfoliate too much,” she said. “Exfoliation can be helpful as we transition to the spring, but it should be limited to one to two times per week to minimize drying out the skin.”

But be patient — your skin is working hard.

If you tend to err on the side of under-exfoliating, you can take heart by knowing that your skin is still working hard for you. “The skin’s natural renewal cycle means that cells are constantly being sloughed from the top layer and regenerating, with or without intervention on our part,” Marcus said.

Dermatologist Dr. [Camille Howard-Verović](#) noted that while there are times you might want to speed up your skin’s natural process by exfoliating, those cells will eventually be on their way out, anyway. “Typically, skin cells move from the bottom layer to the top layer, and later slough off, in about 30 days,” she said.

Consider these skin spring cleaning essentials.

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Foreo Luna 4 cleansing device

“If you’re looking to freshen and brighten your skin for spring, gentle exfoliation is a great way to do so,” Marcus said. “I’ve been using the [Foreo Luna 4 cleansing device](#) this year, and I love how soft and smooth my skin feels after each use. It’s a

risking damage to the skin barrier.

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Exuviance AP25 Performance Peel

“To step up your exfoliation game a bit, consider the [Exuviance AP25 Performance Peel](#),” said dermatologist Dr. [Rachel Westbay](#). “It’s a powerhouse of an at-home peel because it has a 25% blend of multiple AHAs, including glycolic and mandelic acid, plus gluconolactone. I recommend using it twice a week.”

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This is a good time to spring clean your product lineup, too.

Less is generally considered to be more by many skin experts. Westbay said she’s noticed [patients using “way too many products,”](#) so she advised a spring cleaning of product lineups, too. “Think about the formulation of your products and make seasonal changes,” she said. “For instance, increased heat and humidity allow you to swap out heavier cream or oil cleansers in favor of gentle, foaming options.”

One thing you probably won’t need for the next few months is facial oil. “They aren’t hydrating in and of themselves and so they should not be used as a substitute for moisturizer, which

said. “They aren’t bad, but they’re definitely not a skin care necessity.”

If you’re eliminating one product (like facial oil) this spring, you might have room for another. It might be a good idea if that new swap-in contains vitamin C. “Although it’s great year-round, vitamin C is even more important in warmer weather,” Westbay said. “That’s because it helps prevent hyperpigmentation, improves the appearance of fine lines and can help with collagen production by fighting free radicals encountered from UV light.”



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But remember, you still need to moisturize, even as it warms up.

“Some people think that as the weather gets warmer, they no longer need to use moisturizer, but that’s not true,” Garshick said. “You should continue to moisturize to help support the skin barrier, but instead of a thicker winter cream, you might be ready to switch to a lightweight lotion.”

“In general, though, I would say that no matter what season you’re transitioning into, just listen to your skin,” Westbay said. “Pay attention to how it feels, notice how it looks and consider adjusting your skin care regimen to best work with your surrounding conditions. If you don’t have a clear understanding of how to handle the switching of seasons, seek out the help of a professional.”

And please wear sunscreen every day.

All the dermatologists we spoke to emphasized the importance of frequently applied sun protection. “If you haven’t been consistent with wearing sunscreen all winter, this is the time to choose a formulation you’ll be comfortable wearing every day,” Howard-Verović urged.

Facial plastic surgeon Dr. [Amir Karam](#) said, “Probably the biggest mistake people make is not spending enough energy on preventing sun damage. As a result, when spring comes, everyone is happy to get out and about, and some of those old habits from winter carry over. No matter what season, sun protection is very important.”



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