

[Beauty & Style](#) > [Beauty](#)

# Succinic Acid for Skin: Everything You Need to Know, According to Dermatologists

If you have acne-prone skin, this buzzy ingredient should be on your radar.



BY **GABBY SHACKNAI**

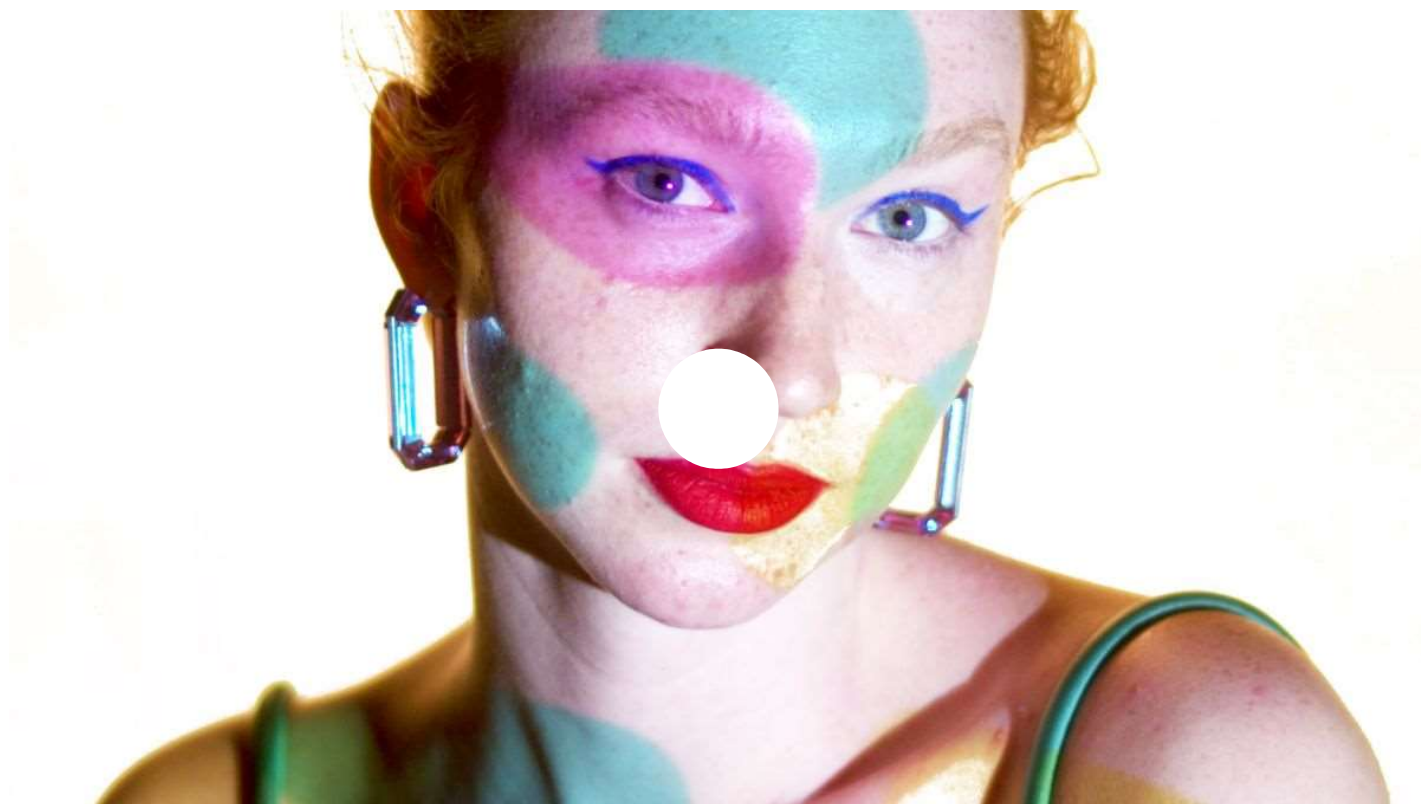
PUBLISHED: MAY 10, 2023



Anna Shvets/Pexels

If you're not yet familiar with succinic acid—the skincare world's latest ingredient obsession—you're far from alone. In fact, even some industry experts didn't know about the powerful ingredient or its impressive benefits until quite recently. But believe me when I tell you that **succinic acid is deserving of all the recent hype** and absolutely worth adding to your skincare routine—especially if your skin is sensitive and/or acne-prone.

To help break down the benefits, uses, and side effects of succinic acid, I reached out to board-certified dermatologists Rachel Westbay, MD and Jacqueline Watchmaker, MD for all the need-to-know info. Ahead, your mini guide to all things succinic acid—plus the top four products to try the buzzy ingredient in right now.



## What is succinic acid?

Succinic acid is an antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory compound derived from amber or sugar cane, says Dr. Westbay. And despite having the word "acid" in its

name, succinic acid doesn't exfoliate the skin like glycolic acid or salicylic acid does. It's actually a hydrating and soothing "acid", similar to hyaluronic acid or azelaic acid.

When used in skincare products, succinic acid **inhibits the growth of both bacteria and fungi and can be useful in the management acne**, says Dr. Westbay. And unlike other acne-fighting ingredients, like retinoids or benzoyl peroxide, succinic acid doesn't come with a long list of potential side effects or the risk of irritation.

## What does succinic acid do for skin?

“For such an under-the-radar ingredient, succinic acid actually does a lot,” says Dr. Westbay. It has antioxidant properties help protect the skin against oxidative stress from pollution and UV damage, says Dr. Watchmaker. “Meanwhile, the anti-inflammatory effects **can help soothe irritated skin and reduce skin conditions like eczema and rosacea**.”

And of course there are the anti-acne benefits. "Succinic acid's antimicrobial properties help **decrease bacteria on the skin that can lead to breakouts**, like whiteheads and cysts,” says Dr. Watchmaker. It even has analgesic properties as well, meaning it can help relieve at least some of the discomfort associated with acne, adds. Dr. Watchmaker.

Because succinic acid has a chemical structure that's similar to the skin's own lipid barrier, it **can also have a hydrating effect**, which can be amplified when paired with hyaluronic acid. On top of all of this, succinic acid has also been shown to speed up skin's metabolism and consequently, accelerate cell turnover, which can improve signs of aging.

4 top-rated products with succinic acid:

## THIS TONER WITH SUCCINIC ACID

### **FaceGym Skin Changer 2-in-1 Exfoliating Succinic Acid Essence-Toner**

**\$55 AT SEPHORA**

**\$55 AT NORDSTROM**

**\$55 AT SAKS FIFTH AVENUE**

Credit: Courtesy of Face Gym

THIS SERUM WITH SUCCINIC ACID

**Cetaphil Gentle Clear Triple-Action Acne Serum**

**\$21 AT WALMART**

Credit: Courtesy of Cetaphil

THIS SUCCINIC ACID SPOT TREATMENT

**The Inkey List Succinic Acid Acne Treatment**

**\$10 AT SEPHORA**

Credit: Courtesy of The Inkey List

**THIS SUCCINIC ACID FACE WASH**

**Rael Beauty Miracle Clear Exfoliating Cleanser**

**Now 25% Off**

**\$12 AT AMAZON**

Credit: Courtesy of Rael Beauty

## How long does it take for succinic acid to work?

As with any topical skincare ingredient, succinic acid takes weeks of regular use before you'll notice a change in your skin. In general, **full benefits usually aren't seen until four to six weeks** of consistently using the ingredient, so remember to be patient and don't give up if you don't notice a change right away.

## Can succinic acid be used every day?

Don't let succinic acid's name fool you: although it is an acid, it's actually quite gentle on skin. "The ingredient **can be used daily—either in the morning, at night, or twice a day,**" says Dr. Watchmaker. "And typically, it's applied in the form of a leave-on serum or treatment after cleansing the skin."

## Is succinic acid better than salicylic acid?

This really depends on your skin type and concerns. While both succinic acid and salicylic acid are both technically acids, they serve different purposes. "Salicylic acid is a beta-hydroxy acid that works as a keratolytic to disrupt the bonds between cells so it has an exfoliating effect," says Dr. Westbay. On the hand, succinic acid does not exfoliate skin, so **if you're looking to unclog pores and nix dead cells, salicylic acid will be the better choice** for you.

That said, succinic acid may be a better choice if you have super sensitive skin or are looking to add an additional skin-clearing ingredient to your routine, since it plays nice with other actives.



# What are the side effects of succinic acid?

As previously mentioned, one of succinic acid's greatest benefits is the fact that **it's well-tolerated by just about everyone**. Both Dr. Westbay and Dr. Watchmaker agree there are no known side effects to using the ingredient. If you have particularly sensitive skin and want to err on the side of caution, though, Dr. Watchmaker suggests trying out succinic acid (or any new product for that matter) on your inner wrist for a few days to see how your skin reacts before applying it to the face.

## The takeaway:

Succinic acid may not be on everyone's radar just yet, but with its many benefits it honestly should be. The ingredient can help soothe irritation, reduce breakouts, and protect skin from oxidative stress. And one of the best things about the ingredient is that virtually anyone can use it, so it's a great alternative to harsh acne actives for those with sensitive skin or as complement to other active ingredients in your routine.

---

## Meet the experts:

- **Rachel Westbay**, MD, is a board-certified dermatologist at Marmur Medical in New York, NY. Dr. Westbay has a primary focus on cosmetic and general dermatology, with a specialty in in-office procedures, but treats a full range of skin concerns.
- **Jacqueline Watchmaker**, MD, is a board-certified dermatologist at Southwest Skin Specialists in Scottsdale, AZ. Dr. Watchmaker practices general and cosmetic dermatology, helping her patients with all aspects of their skin, from acne and aging to skin cancer.

# Why trust Cosmopolitan?

**Gabby Shacknai** is a New York City-based journalist with years of experience researching, writing, and editing beauty and wellness stories. Gabby is an authority in all skincare categories, but is an expert when it skincare ingredients like succinic acid. She regularly works with the industry's top dermatologists and plastic surgeons to assess new skincare treatments, trends, products, and technologies.

## Related Story

WTH Is Tranexamic Acid and Why Is It Everywhere?

Gabby Shacknai is a New York-based journalist and editor who produces high-quality content for a wide variety of outlets and brands across various industries.