

Content is created by CNN Underscored's team of editors who work independently from the CNN newsroom. When you buy through links on our site, we may earn a commission. [Learn more](#)

[Beauty](#) / [Skin Care](#)

Korean toner pads are going viral — here are 14 expert-approved picks for all skin types

By Noelle Ike, CNN Underscored

Published 9:37 AM EST, Thu November 30, 2023



Round Lab

While it can seem like the world of [skin care](#) tips, tricks and trends is never ending — especially on TikTok — we're always in favor of simplifying and streamlining our [beauty routine](#). So when a new trend makes waves on social media that seems effective, easy to incorporate and supported by experts like dermatologists and our favorite skin-fluencers, naturally we have to test it out for ourselves. Enter the latest [K-beauty](#) product taking the internet by storm: toner pads.

What are toner pads?

The concept of toner or skin care pads is nothing new. For decades, people have been pouring different products like toners, astringents and exfoliating lotions onto cotton pads and applying that to their skin, explains [Alec Batis](#), a former cosmetic chemist and the founder and CEO of [Sweet Chemistry](#). “Toner pads came to be as a matter of convenience,” explains Batis, “so that one could apply the toner with a fixed amount, without making a mess or running out of one before the other.”

Watch now

@zoe.rammie

TOP 3 toners pads based on the Hwahae app rankings #hwahae #medih ...See more

original sound - Zoe | content creator



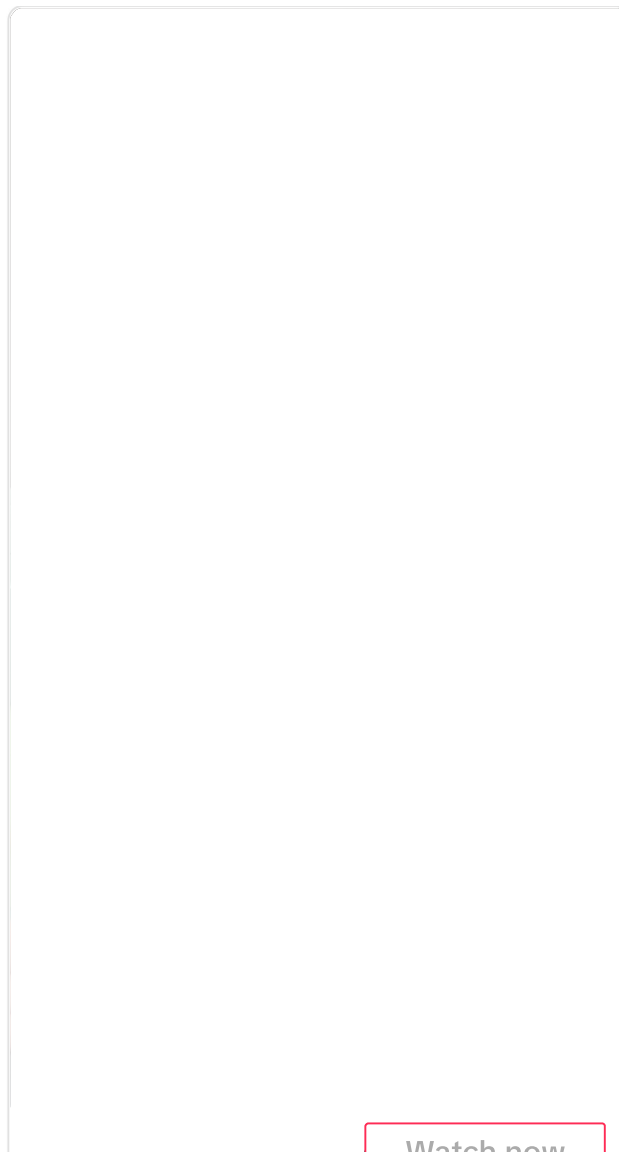
What are the benefits of using toner pads?

As pre-soaked pads that come infused with skin-enhancing ingredients, one of the most obvious benefits of toner pads is their convenience. “They’re an easy, mess-free application to get multiple key ingredients on the skin, such as gentle exfoliating acids and hydrating



pads are also a great option for frequent travelers or those constantly on the go, since they’re a lot more [TSA-friendly](#) than carrying around a traditional liquid toner and separate cotton pads, adds Batis.

Toner pads are also multi-functional, despite potentially seeming like a simple product. “They cleanse the skin by removing residual dirt and makeup, balance the pH levels, detoxify and prep the skin for subsequent skin care products,” explains facial plastic surgeon [Dr. Paul Nassif](#), known as the “Botched” co-host and the founder of [NassifMD skin care](#). “They’re an effective way to restore your skin’s pH and recover from the onslaught of environmental aggressors.” So while the texture of the pad itself gently exfoliates and cleanses, the product it’s soaked in infuses your skin, explains Batis.



Watch now

A screenshot of a tweet from the user @izzychen. The tweet text reads: "i thought toner pads were a pure marketing ploy but now they're a regular ...See more". Below the text, it says "original sound - izzychen". There is a "watch now" button in the top right corner of the tweet box.

@izzychen

i thought toner pads were a pure marketing ploy but now they're a regular ...See more
original sound - izzychen

Korean toner pads are designed for targeted application, which means different pads will serve different skin care purposes. “Like much of K-beauty, toner pads made by Korean brands tend to prioritize hydration over active ingredients,” explains Batis. “Korean beauty brands modernize this concept even further by adding a variety of functional actives, emollients and botanicals to these wondrous little sheets, making it possible to localize skin benefits depending on what and where it’s needed.” When it comes to American skin care brands, you’re more likely to find toner pads that focus on a concentration of active ingredients like [AHAs, BHAs, salicylic and lactic acid](#) or [vitamin C](#) (just to name a few) that target specific skin concerns.

How do you use Korean toner pads?

“Skin care ingredients are generally layered thin to thick in texture,” explains Song. “Toners are considered thinner products and should be applied first on clean skin prior to layering on [moisturizer](#) and [sunscreen](#), followed by [makeup](#).” While many toner pads include hydrating skin benefits, you won’t want to skip a good moisturizer, since hydrating ingredients are best left on the skin for a longer amount of time. “Since toners are generally fast-drying and quickly absorbed,” explains Song, “they’re better suited for exfoliating ingredients that may be irritating when left on the skin for prolonged duration.”

You can also use different types of toner pads to address your specific skin concerns. “Use the astringent pads for an oily T-zone, while placing other pads infused with humectants, lipids or emollients on drier areas,” shares Batis. (Reminder: humectants draw moisture to the skin, lipids are natural fats that help the skin retain moisture and emollients deliver oils to the skin to keep it soft and hydrated.) “You can let [the pads] sit on the skin for five to 15 minutes,” he explains, which works similar to a [sheet mask](#) to maximize the benefits of the product itself. One note of caution: “Physical pads are more abrasive than your hands when applying the toner,” shares Song, “and should be used with caution on sensitive skin.”

Ahead, our experts share some of their favorite Korean toner pads, in addition to equally stellar options that’ve originated stateside.

[Mediheal Watermide Moisture Pad](#)

For dry skin and de-puffing



Amazon

Batis recommends this memorable square-shaped option, which is also one of TikTok's favorite toner pads, "for those in need of intense hydration and depuffing." The formulation contains moisturizing ingredients like [glycerin](#) and olive fruit oil, he explains, along with soothing ones like licorice root extract and allantoin.

One of Korea's most popular skin care and sheet mask brands, Mediheal offers a range of other similarly popular pads, all with slightly different benefits. Its [tea tree toner pads](#) are another fan fave, and particularly great for those with irritated or acne-prone skin.

\$22 at
Amazon

\$53 \$46
for 2-
Pack at
Stylevana

Skinfood Carrot Carotene Calming Water Pad

For calming irritation



"These pads are the definition of multi-purpose skin care," shares [Felicia Lee](#), "[Beauty Within](#)" founder and co-host. "You can use them as your toning step, a DIY face mask or as a midday



Amazon

“I use this as a really pick-me-up for when your skin gets super dehydrated and dry,” she shares. “Especially in the office, this perks my skin back up and helps to calm down my red, itchy and irritated skin.”

Batis is also a fan of this product, noting that the key ingredient — carrot root extract — is sourced from organic farms and extracted by steam distillation as opposed to chemical solvents. “The reduction of pesticides that can potentially harm the skin's microbiome is a key point of difference,” he explains. The product also avoids the use of synthetic fragrance, “a plus as well for those with sensitive skin,” Batis notes.

\$26 at Amazon

Abib Heartleaf Spot Pad

For sensitive skin



Amazon

This popular K-beauty toner pad has been spotted on some of K-pop's biggest stars, so you know it's good. Abib carries a range of toner pads that target different skin care needs, but one of its most popular options is this formulation, which targets redness by calming and soothing even the most sensitive skin sans

the irritation. The unique pads feature two different textures on each of its sides. The gauze side gently exfoliates and wipes away dirt, while the non-textured side calms the skin and sticks to your face so you can wear it like a sheet mask.

\$17 at
Amazon

\$24 ~~\$17~~
at
YesStyle

Aestura A-Cica 365 Soft Calming Mask Pad

For lightweight soothing



Amazon

[Ava Lee](#), founder of [byAva](#) and a beauty influencer credited with [coining the “jello skin” trend](#), describes toner pads as a very Korean trend, and one that she’s a fan of. “There are hundreds of options out there,” she explains, “but this past summer I’ve really enjoyed using this to calm down my red, inflamed skin from the humidity.”

\$29 at
Amazon

\$29 at
YesStyle

It's Skin Firefighter LI Calming Jelly Pad

For reducing redness



Amazon

If the idea of exfoliation, however gentle, scares you, these calming toner pads —appropriately named “firefighter” for their hydration and cooling feeling — are a great option for those with dry or sensitive skin. True to the K-beauty ethos of prioritizing moisture and hydration, the 100% cellulose sheets — which are also vegan and supremely gentle on the skin — are packed with ingredients like soothing licorice root extract and chamomile flower.

\$20 at Amazon

Yadah Cactus Toning Pads

For daily use



Amazon

Underscored's associate beauty editor Sophie Shaw loves these gentle and hydrating pH-balanced toner pads. "The first ingredient in the ingredients list is prickly pear stem extract (said cactus of the product's label), which means you're not getting a diluted product," she says.

"There's also hydrating [glycerin](#), soothing allantoin, humectant panthenol and antioxidant-rich centella asiatica extract, all of which are touted for their skin benefits and are safe for

sensitive skin."

\$18 at
Amazon

\$24 ~~\$19~~
at
Stylevana

CosRX Original Clear Pad

For blemishes and breakouts



Amazon

Longtime K-beauty player CosRX creates some of the best and affordable skin care on the market, and these toner pads are no exception. For less than \$20, you get 70 toner pads, each of which will cleanse and exfoliate your skin. This formulation in particular gets rid of dead skin cells and excess sebum, preventing breakouts and reducing blemishes.

\$22 ~~\$20~~
at
Amazon

\$22 ~~\$17~~
at
YesStyle

Round Lab Birch Juice Moisturizing Pad

For all skin types



A perfect option for the [skin care minimalist](#), these moisturizing toner pads from the popular Korean skin care brand Round



Lab are scent-free, soothing and cooling. And at \$25 for a container of 80 pads, they're a great and affordable entry point into the world of toner pads.

Amazon

\$30 at
Amazon

\$28 \$20
at
Stylevana

Dermalogy by NeogenLab Lemon PHA Gauze Peeling Pads

For smooth skin



"If you wear makeup, having dry flaky skin is the worst," shares K-beauty expert and content creator [Sarah Oh](#). "These are great to prep skin," she says. And they're perfect for achieving a super-smooth glass-like skin finish.

Amazon

From \$12 at Amazon

NassifMD Detox Pads

For multitasking



One of NassifMD's bestselling toner pads, these exfoliating pads are formulated with glycolic acid and salicylic acid to cleanse and visibly reduce the look of pores, even out skin texture and



Amazon

... pores, even out skin texture and prevent breakouts while optimizing the absorption of treatment products after application.

“The best way to to use toner pads is after [cleansing your face](#),” explains Nassif. “But truth be told, these can be dual-purpose as a lazy day cleanse and tone.” Gently swipe the pad across your entire face, neck and décolleté (avoiding the delicate eye area) once or twice a day. Then your skin’s ready and prepped to fully absorb your serum and moisturizer.

\$49 at Amazon

[Belif Aqua Bomb PHA Exfoliating Toner Pads](#)

For gentle exfoliaton



Amazon

These refreshing toner pads contain PHA acids, which Song describes as slightly more gentle than their AHA and BHA counterparts, and great for mild exfoliation. The formulation also includes cica, a calming and soothing herbal ingredient that’s particularly great for those with sensitive skin.

Use code FRIEND to save 15% at Macy’s.

\$24 ~~\$20~~ at
Macy's

~~\$24~~ at
Ulta

StriVectin Daily Reveal Exfoliating Pads

For brightening and smoothing



When it comes to top-notch performance at an accessible price point, Batis shares that these are hard to beat. “You have the best exfoliation, brightening, hydration and toning from all classes of acids: AHAs, BHAs, PHAs and TXA, tranexamic acid,” he explains.

Sephora

~~\$45~~
\$38 at
Amazon

~~\$45~~ ~~\$32~~
at
StriVectin

\$45 at
Sephora

First Aid Beauty Facial Radiance Pads

For pigment and dark spots



Song recommends these daily treatment pads, which target dullness, dark spots and uneven texture. “The lactic acid and glycolic acid are gentle and effective for exfoliation and brightening properties,” she explains.

Sephora

From \$20 ~~\$38~~
at

at Sephora

at
Ulta

Drmtlgy Tingl Exfoliating Pads

For acne-prone skin



Amazon

For those with acne-prone skin, ingredients like salicylic acid, glycolic acid and lactic acid are great for managing blemishes and breakouts. Song recommends these exfoliating pads, which feature all three of those active ingredients.

\$27 at Amazon

Note: The prices above reflect the retailers' listed price at the time of publication.

More from CNN Underscored

