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How Young Is Too Young For Skin Care?

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Can you remember what beauty products you were using when you were 10? Chances are you were sneaking a quick swipe of [lip gloss](#) and just starting your "grown-up" nail polish collection. Your skin-care routine, if it existed at all, included an acne [face wash](#) and a [drugstore moisturizer](#) your mom picked up for you. My, how times have changed. Now, Gen Alpha – kids born in 2010 or later – have

taken a special interest in skin care, flooding TikTok with videos detailing their [daily regimen](#) or most recent Sephora haul. Some are [as young as seven years old](#) using popular brands such as Glow Recipe, Drunk Elephant, [Bubble Skincare](#), E.l.f. Cosmetics, and more.

It's not hard to pinpoint what started this. "[Social media, period](#)," [Rachel Westbay](#), MD, FAAD, board-certified dermatologist at [Marmur Medical](#), tells POPSUGAR. "TikTok and YouTube have replaced linear TV for this generation." Brand marketing also plays a role. "All I have to do is walk into Sephora to see that new and existing brands are clearly catering exclusively to Gen Alpha to cash in on this new consumer demographic."

Some would say this phenomenon has been a slow burn, as Millennials and Gen Z have also taken a deeper interest in skin care earlier than previous generations. "One might argue that Gen Alpha is simply following in the steps of the generations before them, only in their case, interest may turn obsession in light of using social media more than any other," Dr. Westbay says.

According to [Piper Sandler's](#) self-reported biannual teen survey, which polls a slightly older demographic with an average age of 15, the overall spending category of beauty is up 23 percent from last year and skin care, specifically, has grown 19 percent. That's not likely to change any time soon, but is that a problem? As fun as it can be to watch these cute videos of kids slathering serums and masks onto their flawless, already collagen-plump skin, there's also something a little unsettling about it all. Is it even safe for kids to be using such advanced skin-care products? We asked three dermatologists to weigh in.

Can You Ever Be "Too Young" For Skin Care?

The answer to this question is complicated. "It is never too young to use appropriate skin-care products if needed," says [Brooke Jeffy](#), MD, a board-certified dermatologist in Scottsdale, Arizona, and founder of youth skin-care brand [BTWN](#). The key word here is "appropriate."

"The preteen to early teenage years – roughly between the ages 10-14 – are a great time to introduce a skin-care routine because, at this age, children begin to understand the importance of hygiene and personal care and so tend to be more receptive to the idea of taking care of themselves," says Dr. Westbay. The saying less is more applies. "[It] should be very simple," says [Corey L. Hartman](#), MD, FAAD, board-certified dermatologist and founder of [Skin Wellness Dermatology](#) in Birmingham, AL.

Though there is no one-size-fits-all guidance, the doctors agree that the goal should be to merely keep skin clean and protected. That means using a cleanser (and makeup remover at night if applicable), salicylic acid or benzoyl peroxide acne spot treatment if needed, moisturizer, and sunscreen. "If a teen has more severe acne, I recommend they see a board-certified dermatologist for a more in-depth review and specific treatment that could include a mix of over-the-counter and prescription products," says Dr. Hartman.

"It's great that younger kids are taking an interest in their skin, but I want them to do it for their overall health – not because they feel like they need to look like their favorite influencer or celebrity."

The use of fancy serums, face masks (outside of the occasional fun spa night), and actives is strongly discouraged. Many of these products feature complicated formulations packed with potent ingredients that are not conducive to young skin. "Teenagers do not need to be using vitamin C serums, retinoids for anti-aging purposes, chemical exfoliants like alpha hydroxy acids, nor the vast majority of TikTok trending toners, serums, and masks," says Dr. Westbay. Dr. Hartman adds, "You don't really need to start using those until you are in your 20s."

There are some pretty serious reasons for this advice. Starting use too early can put you at risk of various skin conditions. "Preteens using products that are too harsh or otherwise inappropriate for their skin because they are intended to be for older skin can be detrimental," Dr. Westbay says. "I do firmly believe this at least partially underscores why more of my young patients are coming in with irritation, allergic contact dermatitis, general dryness, sensitivity, and even increased acne relative to what I saw when I was in training."

Dr. Jeffy emphasizes this, adding, "These products are likely to cause irritation to the skin barrier," which is crucial to overall skin health. "The other concern is that constant inflammation in the skin can actually negatively affect collagen down the line."

Outside of those physical risks to the skin barrier, there's also a matter of mental health. As it currently stands, many adults are struggling to cope with the unrealistic beauty standards set forth by the industry and social media. With so many kids tuning in to these beliefs at an earlier age, it's very possible it will have long-term effects on self-esteem. "This generation, particularly, [has] a kind of body dysmorphia and general obsession with skin and skin care to a point that I have become genuinely concerned about a handful of my patients," Dr. Westbay says. "This is exacerbated by the pervasive use of filters on photos."

The intention behind the interest matters and should be weighed almost as heavily as the routine itself. "It's great that younger kids are taking an interest in their skin, but I want them to do it for their overall health - not because they feel like they need to look like their favorite influencer or celebrity," says Dr. Hartman.

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