

An advertisement for SKINCEUTICALS Cell Cycle Catalyst. The background is dark with a blurred image of laboratory glassware, including a pipette and several beakers. The SKINCEUTICALS logo is in the top left. The text 'NEW Cell Cycle Catalyst' is prominent, followed by the tagline 'Gently peels + activates cell turnover for boosted anti-aging results'. A 'SHOP NOW' button is located in the lower left of the ad area.

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# What Do Adaptogens in Skin Care Really Do?

By [Iman Balagam](#)

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When shopping for skin care, you may notice that many of the ingredients are referred to as adaptogens. But what exactly does that mean? While it may sound a bit snake oil-y, especially with all the adaptogen serums, moisturizers, and even teas and supplements on the market, it's simply a term coined by a pharmacologist back in the 1940s. However, they have been used in Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine for generations.

Essentially, adaptogens help protect the skin against environmental stressors and "adapt" when the skin is triggered. To dive deeper into this topic, we consulted two board-certified dermatologists and asked them a few questions about adaptogen benefits, the various types, and how they work. Keep reading to learn more.

## What Are Adaptogens?

"Adaptogens are plant-based ingredients that help the cells adapt and regulate cellular responses, reactions to stress, hormonal triggers, and adrenal function," board-certified dermatologist [Ava Shamban](#), MD, tells POPSUGAR. Initially, adaptogens were not specifically targeted to the skin's response but rather focused on regulating the overall body's response to stress. As experts have learned more about the skin's circadian rhythms and opsins, there's a better understanding of the importance of adaptogens in helping to regulate dermal response and visible signs of aging. "We now know they are able to communicate and direct cells to increase attention to reduce stress-induced impairments and mitigate hormonal response – for the health, wellness, and antiaging of our skin," says Dr. Shamban.

## Types of Adaptogens

There are many different types of adaptogens. According to board-certified dermatologist [Ellen Marmur, MD](#), some of the most common ones found in skin care are wild indigo and baobab extracts, pre-probiotics, photodynamic seaweed and plankton, ginseng, elderberry, ashwagandha, and Moringa.

## How Do Adaptogens Work?

"When the skin [and] body is under stress or exposed to environmental pollutants, adaptogens work to protect the skin and block these stressors from damaging the skin," Dr. Marmur says. The skin is full of these adaptive mechanisms as part of its key functions, some of which are to regulate heat, prevent infection, and protect against water loss. Adaptogens possess anti-inflammatory properties that soothe redness, sensitivity, and inflammation triggered by environmental stressors or skin issues like acne or eczema. Depending on the adaptogen, some are adept at boosting the skin barrier, enhancing skin tone, and reducing dark spots and pigmentation.

## Adaptogen Benefits For Skin

Dr. Shamban explains that when the skin is challenged or triggered, a series of adaptogens work to neutralize specific stressors. They help return the cells to baseline, fighting off damages or changes, influencing the inflammatory response, and restoring homeostasis and balance in the cells.

"Adaptogens are typically packed with antioxidants and natural compounds that balance stressed skin and improve dull skin [and] uneven skin tone," Dr. Marmur says. In addition, they strengthen the skin barrier, reduce redness and melasma, and work on antibacterial, antifungal, and anti-inflammatory responses in the skin. Some function as brighteners and help firm or tone the skin. "[Mushrooms](#) like reishi, chaga, maitake, açai, eleuthero, ginseng, tulsi, gooseberries, ashwagandha, goji, licorice, turmeric, and prickly pear are all great adaptogens for the skin," says Dr. Shamban.

## How to Use Adaptogens For Skin

There are so many products on the market today, such as serums and moisturizers, incorporating adaptogens. While it may seem confusing, it's easy to add them to your daily

[skin-care routine](#), as they can be used both morning and night. When shopping for new adaptogen-packed skin care, make sure to read ingredient labels carefully and choose what typically works best for your [skin type](#). As always, we recommend consulting with your dermatologist before trying new products, as well as patch-testing on a small area of skin before applying them to the face.

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