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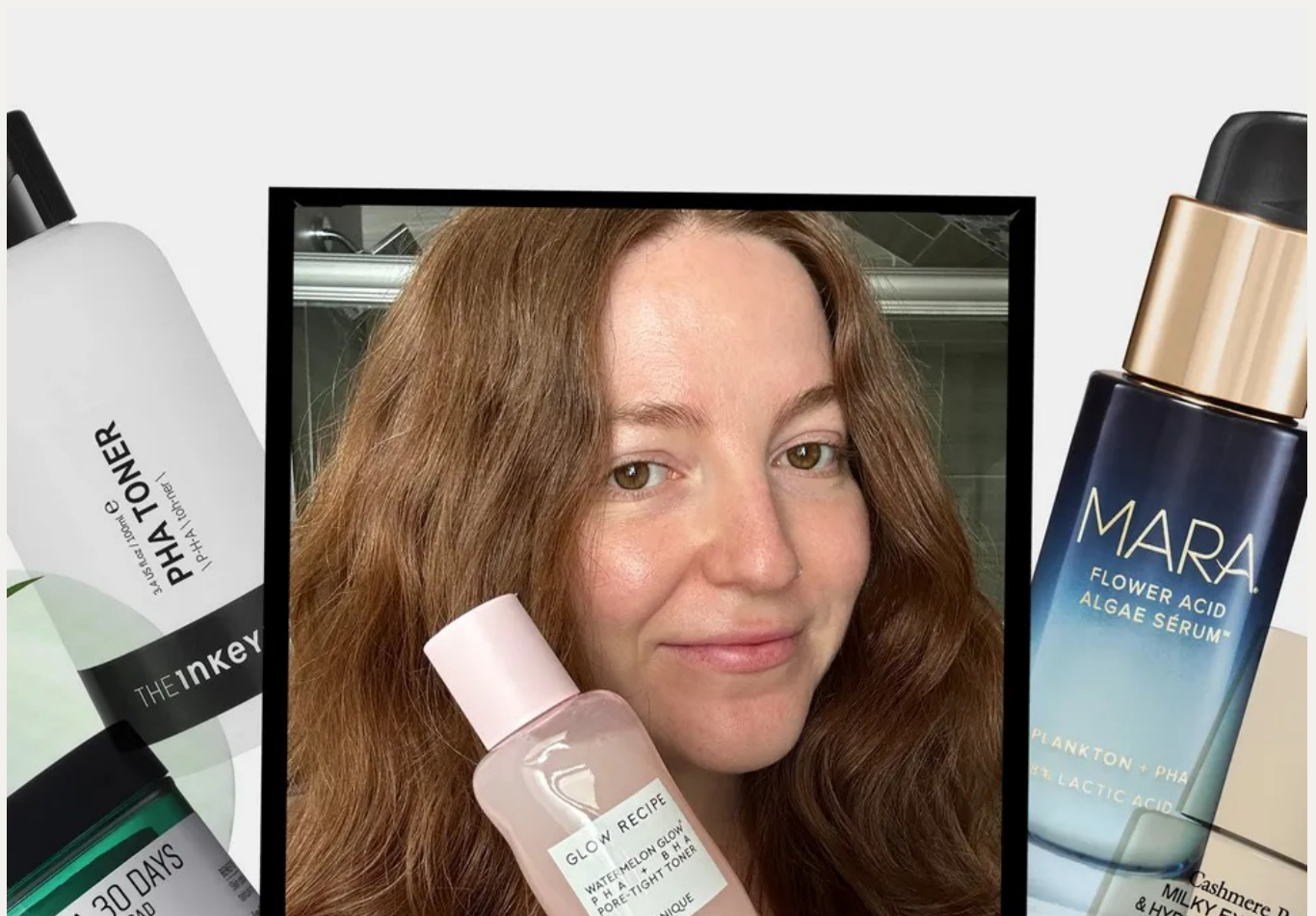
GLOW BIG OR GLOW HOME

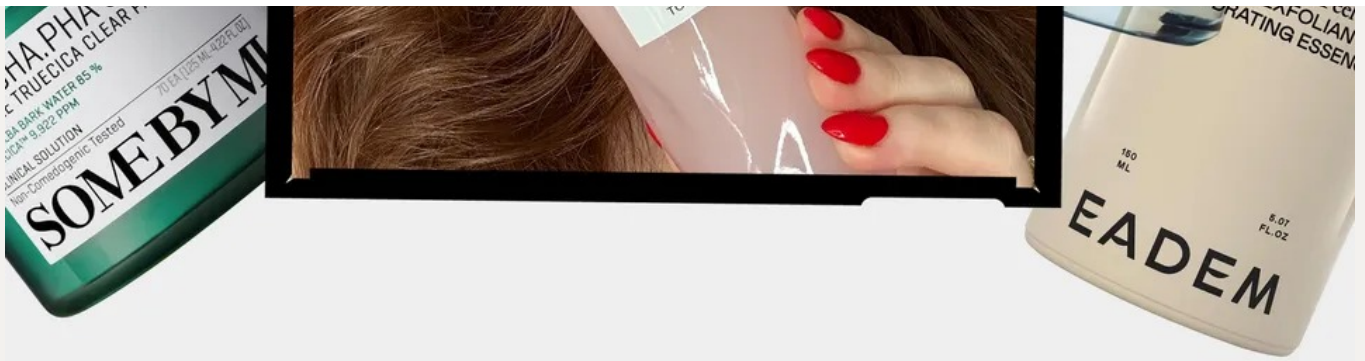
6 Best PHA Products to Gently Exfoliate Sensitive Skin

Thanks to its larger molecular size, it delivers glowing skin without the sting

BY CHRISTA JOANNA LEE

July 8, 2026





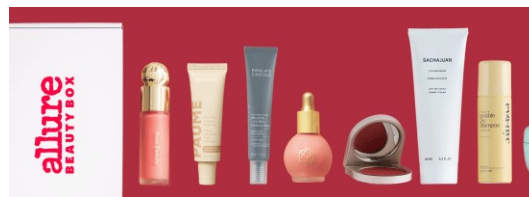
Collage: Paula Balondo; Source images: Courtesy of *Allure* editors and brands



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When it comes to **exfoliants**, you no longer have to choose between brighter skin and a happy skin barrier. The best PHA products deliver both, gently whisking away dead skin cells while helping skin stay comfortable. "PHAs, or polyhydroxy acids, are a type of chemical exfoliant—and what makes them special is that they slough off surface buildup much more gently than other acids," says **Mamina Turegano**, MD, a board-certified dermatologist based in New Orleans. The most common PHAs you'll spot on ingredient labels are gluconolactone, lactobionic acid, and galactose.



Like **alpha hydroxy acids**, PHAs work on the skin's surface to smooth texture and brighten the complexion, but "their larger molecular structures reduce the risk of deep penetration through the epidermis, making them a particularly gentle exfoliating option for dry, sensitive, or easily irritated skin," says **Carlos Vieira**, a board-certified dermatologist based in Philadelphia. Better yet, "they also act as humectants, meaning they attract water to the skin," adds Dr. Turegano, so you get brighter and hydrated skin with less irritation. The only catch is that PHAs aren't a replacement for pore-clearing salicylic acid (**betahydroxy acids** are oil-soluble and dive deeper into pores to dissolve excess oil and congestion, making them a better fit for acne-prone skin).

Our Top PHA Products

- **Best Overall:** Eadam Cashmere Peel Milky Exfoliant & Hydrating Essence, \$42
 - **Best for Large Pores:** Glow Recipe Watermelon Glow PHA + BHA Pore-Tight Toner, \$36
 - **Best for Mature Skin:** SkinCeuticals P-Tiox Serum, \$150
 - **Best for Sensitive Skin:** The Inkey List PHA Toner, \$15
-

Frequently Asked Questions



- Are PHAs good for sensitive skin?
 - Can I use PHAs every day?
 - Do PHAs play well with other actives like retinol or vitamin C?
 - Meet the experts
 - How we test and review products
 - Our staff and testers
-

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Ahead, we've rounded up the *Allure*-approved PHA serums, toners, pads, and exfoliants that leave skin smoother and brighter without compromising your moisture barrier.

Best Overall: Eadam Cashmere Peel Milky Exfoliant & Hydrating Essence



Allure commerce editor Sarah Han applying the Eadam Cashmere Peel Milky Exfoliant & Hydrating Essence Sarah Han



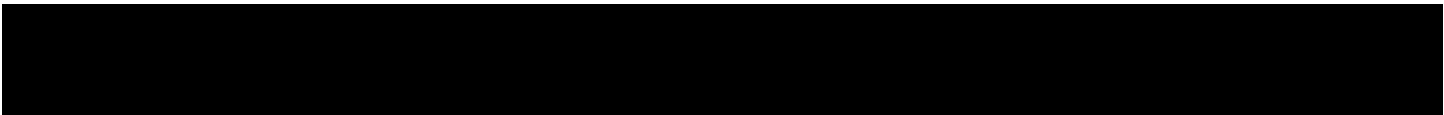
EADAM

Cashmere Peel Milky Exfoliant & Hydrating Essence

\$42
AMAZON

\$42
SEPHORA

Why it's worth it: A winner of our [2024 Best of Beauty Award](#), Eadam’s Cashmere Peel Milky Exfoliating & Hydrating Essence stars the brand's proprietary FastFade Complex, which combines gluconolactone, [lactic acid](#), azelaic acid, tranexamic acid, and citric acid to “visibly even skin tone by gently sweeping away dull, pigment-packed surface cells to reveal brighter skin underneath,” says Dr. Vieira.



“It's the perfect pick for anyone dealing with stubborn post-breakout marks or **melasma** but still wanting that smooth, glowy 'fresh skin' without adding five extra steps to their routine,” he says. “What really makes this formula stand out is how soothing it feels.” Panthenol calms inflammation and supports the skin barrier, while rice water, colloidal oatmeal extract, and **glycerin** add an extra layer of comfort. It simply feels nice too: “The texture is lightweight, milky, and silky on the skin with an elegant finish,” he says.





Han before applying the Eadam Cashmere Peel Milky Exfoliant & Hydrating Essence Sarah Han

Han after applying the Eadam Cashmere Peel Milky Exfoliant & Hydrating Essence Sarah Han

Tester feedback from commerce editor **Sarah Han**



More to know



Best for Large Pores: Glow Recipe Watermelon Glow PHA + BHA Pore-Tight Toner

Allure senior staff writer Elizabeth Gulino applying the Glow Recipe Watermelon Glow PHA + BHA Pore-Tight Toner
Elizabeth Gulino



GLOW RECIPE

Watermelon Glow PHA + BHA Pore-Tight Toner

\$36
AMAZON

\$36
SEPHORA

Why it's worth it: Inspired by the Korean aqua peel facial—a treatment similar to a **HydraFacial** that deeply cleanses, exfoliates, and floods skin with hydrating serums—Glow Recipe's Watermelon Glow PHA + BHA Pore-Tight Toner delivers a gentler at-home alternative. It won't replicate the dramatic results of an in-office treatment, but it does nudge skin toward that same hydrated, glassy glow with minimal irritation. The formula “combines gentle 3% gluconolactone paired with betaine salicylate (a naturally derived BHA) to clear congested pores,” says Dr. Turegano. (BHA, which you might know as salicylic acid, is oil-soluble, so it can penetrate and clear out clogged pores from within.) A 62% “blend of watermelon extract and cactus water, along with glycerin, **hyaluronic acid**, and polyglutamic acid, keeps skin feeling soothed, hydrated, and balanced,” she adds.

Gulino before applying the Glow Recipe Watermelon Glow PHA + BHA Pore-Tight Toner Elizabeth Gulino

Gulino after applying the Glow Recipe Watermelon Glow PHA + BHA Pore-Tight Toner Elizabeth Gulino

Tester feedback from senior staff writer **Elizabeth Gulino**



More to know



Best for Mature Skin: SkinCeuticals P-Tiox Serum



SKINCEUTICALS

P-Tiox Serum



\$150
SKINCEUTICALS

\$150
DERMSTORE

\$150
BLUEMERCURY

Why it's worth it: The **peptides** in this **2025 Best of Beauty Award** winner may get lots of love, but they don't deserve *all* the credit for the formula's smoothing abilities. The **SkinCeuticals** P-Tiox Serum also packs 5% gluconolactone, along with 5% **niacinamide** to even out hyperpigmentation and support the skin barrier and 1% laminaria digitata extract ("derived from sea kelp extract, which delivers antioxidant protection," **Rachel Westbay**, MD, a board-certified dermatologist in New York City, **previously told Allure**). Together, they target aging skin from multiple angles, improving texture and luminosity while "softening the appearance of expression lines and wrinkles," says Dr. Turegano.

Allure editor in chief Jessica Cruel applying the SkinCeuticals P-Tiox Jessica Cruel

Cruel after applying the SkinCeuticals P-Tiox Jessica Cruel

Tester feedback from editor in chief **Jessica Cruel**



More to know



Best for Acne: Some by Mi AHA BHA PHDA 30 Days Miracle Truecica Clear Pad



SOME BY MI



AHA BHA PHDA 30 Days Miracle Truecica Clear Pad

\$18
AMAZON

\$25
ULTA BEAUTY

Why it's worth it: Ask an *Allure* editor where they first fell for PHAs, and don't be surprised if the answer starts with **K-beauty**, as Korean skincare has long prioritized gentle, barrier-conscious formulas that don't skimp on results. Some By Mi's AHA BHA PHA 30 Days Miracle Truecica Clear Pads are a bit stronger than your average PHA formula, so we'd stick to using them once or twice a week. That's because lactobionic acid works in tandem with 0.5% betaine salicylate (a gentler BHA derived from beets), citric acid, and 85% willow bark water to smooth rough texture, clear clogged pores, and rein in excess oil. While the PHA provides gentle resurfacing and hydration, tea tree and the brand's soothing Truecica complex, spotlighting *Centella asiatica*, calm and balance acne-prone and oily skin.

Allure commerce market editor Sarah Hoffmann using the Some by Mi AHA BHA PHA 30 Days Miracle Truecica Clear Pad
Sarah Hoffmann

Hoffmann after using the Some by Mi AHA BHA PHA 30 Days Miracle Truecica Clear Pad Sarah Hoffmann

Tester feedback from commerce producer **Sarah Hoffmann**



More to know



Best for Sensitive Skin: The Inkey List PHA Toner

Allure contributing commerce writer Christa Joanna Lee
applying The Inkey List PHA Toner Christa Joanna Lee



THE INKEY LIST

PHA Toner

\$18
AMAZON

\$15
SEPHORA

Why it's worth it: Known for its less-is-more approach to skin care, The Inkey List has built its reputation on making active ingredients easy to understand—and The Inkey List PHA Toner, aptly named for its hero ingredient, is a prime example. The straightforward formula doesn't try to do too much beyond its core ingredients, which include “a lower concentration of 3% gluconolactone to gently smooth rough skin texture,” says Dr. Vieira. It's paired with 3% niacinamide to brighten and support the skin barrier, while **aloe vera** and glycerin replenish moisture so skin never feels stripped. Sensitive skin types will especially appreciate the gentle approach, as will anyone dealing with redness or rosacea, according to Dr. Turegano.

Lee before applying The Inkey List PHA Toner Christa Joanna Lee

Lee after applying The Inkey List PHA Toner Christa Joanna Lee

Tester feedback from contributing commerce writer **Christa Joanna Lee** 

More to know 

Best for Uneven Texture: Mara Flower Acid Algae Serum

Allure beauty director Sarah Kinonen applying the Mara Flower Acid Algae Serum Sarah Kinonen



MARA
Flower Acid Algae Serum

\$74 AMAZON
\$74 SEPHORA
\$74 BLUEMERCURY

Why it's worth it: If you already have dry skin, the last thing you want is an exfoliant that leaves it feeling even more parched. Mara’s Flower Acid Algae Serum proves that gentle exfoliation and deep hydration can coexist. Alongside gluconolactone and 11% lactic acid to smooth rough texture and lift away dull skin, the formula is packed with moisturizing **squalane**, hydrating glycerin, and a blend of nourishing botanical oils (including milk thistle seed, black currant, and evening primrose) to replenish lipids as it exfoliates. Marine algae and plankton extracts support the skin barrier and boost hydration, while antioxidant-rich flower extracts, such as daisy and hibiscus, brighten the complexion. Plus, it won a **Best of Beauty Award in our clean category**, meaning it's formulated without the 14 ingredient classes outlined in our Clean Standard.

Kinonen before applying the Mara Flower Acid Algae Serum Sarah Kinonen

Kinonen after applying the Mara Flower Acid Algae Serum Sarah Kinonen

Tester feedback from beauty director **Sarah Kinonen** ▼

More to know ▼

Frequently Asked Questions

Are PHAs good for sensitive skin?

PHAs are widely considered one of the best exfoliating acids for sensitive skin. "Because they have a larger molecular size than AHAs like glycolic acid, they penetrate more slowly and tend to cause less stinging, redness, and irritation while still helping to smooth texture and brighten the skin," says Dr. Turegano. Another bonus: "PHAs have humectant properties, so they attract water to the skin while they exfoliate," she says. That means you get the smoothing and brightening benefits of chemical exfoliation without the tight, stripped feeling that can sometimes accompany stronger acids. If your skin is dry, reactive, or easily irritated, PHAs are an excellent place to start. "If you're experiencing any irritation with a PHA though, it's your body's way of telling you it's time to dial back frequency," adds Dr. Vieira.

Can I use PHAs every day?

For many people, yes. "PHAs are gentle enough to be used daily," says Dr. Turegano. But how often you should reach for them "depends on your skin type, the strength of the formula, and what other active ingredients are already in your routine," she says. If you're new to exfoliating acids or have sensitive skin, she recommends easing in by using a PHA product "a few times a week, then gradually increasing to daily use as your skin tolerates it," she says. As with any exfoliant, pay attention to signs of overdoing it—like persistent redness, dryness, or stinging—and scale back if needed.

Do PHAs play well with other actives like retinol or vitamin C?

"PHAs generally play very well with other skin-care ingredients, including **retinoids** and **vitamin C**," says Dr. Turegano. Because they're gentler than stronger exfoliating acids, they're less likely to compound irritation. That said, if you have sensitive skin or are layering multiple actives, Dr. Turegano recommends "introducing new products gradually and paying close attention to how your skin responds before increasing frequency."

Meet the experts

- **Mamina Turegano**, MD, a board-certified dermatologist, internist, and dermatopathologist based in New Orleans
- **Carlos Vieira**, a board-certified dermatologist at The Dermatology Specialists based in Philadelphia

How we test and review products

When *Allure* **tests a product**, our editors look at it from every angle in an effort to best serve you. We review ingredients, scrutinize brand claims, and, when necessary, examine peer-reviewed scientific and medical studies. In addition to testing each and every product that's included in each and every review, we rely on experts who shape their fields, including dermatology, cosmetic chemistry, and medicine, to help us **vet the ingredients** and formulas.

For our list of the best PHA products, we considered each product's performance across five primary categories: product ingredients and efficacy, packaging, fragrance, texture, and product wear. Every product was determined to have excelled in each category by our editorial team, which is composed of in-house writers and editors as well as contributors—along with special consideration from makeup artists. To learn more information on our reporting and testing processes, read our complete **reviews process and methodology page**.

Our staff and testers

A beauty product is a personal purchase. You might be searching for a face cream to address persistent dryness or a new nail product to add to your Sunday self-care routine; you may simply be browsing around for the latest launches to hit the hair market. No matter what you seek or your individual needs and concerns, *Allure* wants to ensure that you love anything we recommend in our stories. We believe that having a diverse team of writers and editors—in addition to the wide range of outside testers and industry experts we regularly call upon—is essential to reaching that goal.

After all, can we *really* say a skin-care product is the "best" for people over 50 if the only testers we've solicited opinions from folks who have yet to hit 30? Can we honestly deem a high-end diffuser worthy of your hard-earned cash if it's never been tested on curls? We're proud that **our staff** spans a wide range of ages, skin tones, hair textures, genders, and backgrounds, which means that we are able to fairly assess any beauty product that comes into the beauty closet.

Read on for more ways to rediscover your glow:

- **9 Best Serums for Aging Skin That Help Bring Back Bounce**
 - **10 Best Toners for Mature Skin to Bring Back Balance**
 - **6 Best Kojic Acid Serums That Brighten With Little to No Irritation**
-

Watch how Tate McRae's 10-minute routine is all about glowing skin and glittery eyes:

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Christa Joanna Lee is a writer, editor, and copywriter specializing in beauty and wellness, parenting, and lifestyle. With deep roots in the magazine world, she's developed editorial and branded content for print and digital outlets such as *Lucky*, *Bustle*, *Teen Vogue*, *SELF*, *Woman's Day*, *New York Magazine*, and *InStyle*. Before ... [Read More](#)

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