Beauty

Prominent dermatologist Dr. Leslie Baumann reports that up to 50 percent of her patients have sensitive skin. Whether the cause of our stress is internal (emotions and hormones) or environmental (chemicals and plants), our formerly hard core skin has gone emo.

One reason for the uptick in self-reported sufferers is that “sensitive” has become a catchall term for four distinct types of skin problems: rosacea, contact dermatitis, and skin that burns and stings. The common denominator here is inflammation, which is exacerbated by chemicals—and bad, are we familiar with those. The Environmental Working Group, a public-health organization that aims to raise awareness of toxins, reports that the average American woman is exposed to 150 chemicals through her daily cosmetic routine—which, thanks to an explosion of beauty products on the market, has become increasingly complicated—and that’s just what she consciously puts on her skin. Now consider the chemicals in our cleaning supplies and sprays on the food we eat; not to mention skyrocketing pollution levels. It’s no wonder we’re collectively irritated.

My problem is that my skin is uneasy and moody. It’s working! I decided to consult NYC dermatologist Dr. Amy Wechsler to see if my cream was hopeless. After all, I don’t want to do anything to irritate it, but it’s hard to stop the redness and itching of my skin. I’m not sure if my skin is actually healthy or if it’s just coping with all the stress and pollution.

“Many factors contribute to skin irritation, including exposure to environmental irritants, such as sun, wind, and cold. It’s important to keep your skin moisturized and protected from the elements.”

Another issue is our tendency to overdue it, exfoliation-wise. There’s no reason to scrub away the shame with a motorized brush or gritty cleanser. Wechsler reminds me. Using your hands to wash your face most days is all most of us need.

But does that mean the sensitive must be forced to forgo products, or the help of serious antiaging treatments? “Laser is well tolerated—it just depends on the setting and the doctor administering them,” Wechsler says, explaining that all works best on pigmented skin, such as Duxus and Axiom, and that’s his call, and you may have more to offer!

Turn the page, and notorious aggerationist prescription Retin-A—and over-the-counter alternatives—can be used by us all babies. The secret is that there’s really no more. Wechsler advises patients to try a little dab on the side of their cheek for three to four times before turning themselves over to a new treatment, and to start with the lowest concentration amount (0.025 percent) once a week. “You can gradually increase the frequency of application over time.”

Wechsler says, “With Retin-A, it’s kind of like a drug, and you need to build up tolerance. We call it ‘becoming tamed.’”

Armed with this knowledge, I abstain from exfoliating altogether, and decide to give Retin-A a try. It’s tempting to use more, but I know that too much can cause dryness and irritation. I practice restraint with my mask. I dab it on my face, and wait a week to see a difference. I slowly build up to three applications per week, for now, that’s where I’m holding steady. Unbeknownst to me, the0.025% concentration of Retin-A has treated my skin.

Emboldened, I decide to experiment with some of the new products geared toward the sensitive, all of which perfectly grow up sounding. Acneactive, moisturizing, paraben-free cleanser melts away makeup but doesn’t cause breakouts. Purcellin MD has treated a hyperpigmented collection that’s most for sensitive skin while keeping the face looking fresh. Purcellin, phthalates, perfumes, and sulfates are the number one culprit of irritation.

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