



beauty
NOW



LIQUID ASSETS

Your skin changes every day, so why shouldn't your skincare? April Long explores how tweaking one key part of your routine can nip breakouts in the bud, banish redness and bestow glow on demand

IF THERE WAS ONE MVP OF BEAUTY – the single most powerful, complexion-changing, versatile product in any skincare arsenal – it would be the serum. By virtue of its liquidy (usually water- or oil-based) formulation, serum can deliver extremely small molecules of concentrated active ingredients much more deeply into skin than any moisturiser can. "Some people think it sounds complicated, but a serum only takes seconds to use," says Manhattan dermatologist Dr Whitney Bowe. "And it's the one step I say to never skip, because it makes the most meaningful changes in the skin." While most of us, barring the odd K-Beauty enthusiast, probably own only one of these watery wonders, amplified benefits can be derived from a broader selection – that is, a sort of serum wardrobe, with options

to rotate in and out depending on what your skin needs on any given day.

"The skin is very responsive to lifestyle changes, as well as to what's happening in the body," says dermatologist Dr Misbah Khan. "You might wake up with redness or puffiness after a salty meal or too many glasses of wine the night before, or your pores might appear a little bigger at certain times of the month. Using a targeted serum can help address, or even prevent, these changes." So if you know you're prone to breakouts a few days before your period, for example, you can strategically switch to an acne-battling serum; or if you're travelling to a dry climate, introduce a hydrating serum to help your skin from manifesting any ill (flaky, dull) effects.

Now that serums are increasingly being formulated to tackle specific issues rather than just universal signs-of-ageing woes, building an à la carte menu has never been easier. And there's no need to make adjustments anywhere else in your routine. "A cleanser is in contact with your face for only moments," says Bowe, "and your moisturisers just sit on the surface rather than really diving into skin, so you can get targeted results just by tweaking your serum – which is the real workhorse – and leaving everything else alone." Should you be tempted to cut corners, though, know that a serum alone doesn't make for an effective skincare regimen. "Cleansing is key, because if you don't have a clean face, nothing you put on afterwards will penetrate," says London-based facialist and Instagram sensation Caroline Hiron. "And you need to top everything off with a moisturiser for best results. Your serum is your underwear and outfit, but your moisturiser is the coat. It seals the deal."

THE ZIT ZAPPERS

Nixing a breakout doesn't mean drying out your whole face. The most effective serums nourish the skin's barrier while also eradicating clogged pores and blackheads. CLINIQUE's Anti-Blemish Solutions Blemish + Line Correcting Serum was created for adults looking to prevent not just acne, but also fine lines, combining gentle hydrators with salicylic acid in a fragrance-free formula. BAREMINERALS Blemish Remedy Anti-Imperfection Serum contains zinc to combat excess oil production, as well as meadowsweet extract to quell irritation.

THE SKIN SOOTHERS

Any number of offenders can cause sensitive skin to act up – allergies, lack of sleep, cosmetic procedures – but thankfully, soothing serums are some of the fastest-working in the category. TAMMY FENDER Quintessential Serum – with skin-barrier-protecting avocado oil and anti-inflammatory extracts of rose, and frankincense – is a long

Photography: Svetl Babatkoim [art144]



time ELLE-editor favourite for calming virtually any complexion freak-out. MURAD Sensitive Skin Soothing Serum fights that tight feeling of stressed skin with moisturising, elasticity-fostering glycolipids, nourishing lecithin and chill-out ingredients such as chamomile and arnica. DIOR has created a set of five serums, targeting everything from dehydration to overactive oil production, that are meant to be mixed and matched as needed. The brand's Capture Youth Redness Soother serum is formulated with cotton peptides to alleviate irritation and protect against environmental aggressors.

THE HYDRATORS

To give thirsty skin – culprits include airplane travel, cold weather and boozey nights – a deep drink, seek out serums containing the gold-standard moisture-locking ingredient hyaluronic acid (HA). But take note: because HA molecules draw water from the environment, these products should be applied to damp skin and followed with moisturiser to provide lasting

hydration. (Most can also be layered on top of another serum.) LA MER The Revitalizing Hydrating Serum endows skin with a dewy sheen via the brand's signature fermented algae brew. CAUDALIE Premier Cru The Elixir delivers a dose of polyphenol-dense resveratrol, along with two types of HA: one plumps fine lines on the surface, the other helps skin cells deep in the dermis retain moisture over time.

THE GLOW-TOS

According to Pinterest stats, searches for luminosity boosting "vitamin C serum" increased by 3,379 per cent in 2017. But there are many more ways to glow: L'OREAL PARIS Age Perfect Cell Renewal Advanced Regenerating Serum stimulates surface skin-cell renewal to keep complexions soft and reflective. SKINCEUTICALS C E Ferulic is beloved by dermatologists for its ability to even out skin tone and speed healing and collagen production after laser treatments. With two separate formulas designed to combine in every pump, CLARINS

Double Serum brings together skin-loving plant extracts, including the of-the-moment turmeric, to amplify that coveted lit-from-within effect. "If you're worried about tackling dullness that comes from pigmentation, look for products containing niacinamide," says Hiron. And for a pre-party (or post-flight) SOS to enliven drab skin? "Just get a serum/oil hybrid and massage the bejesus out of your face." For a gentle exfoliation, try FREEZEFRAME Hyper White, which employs a blend of papaya enzymes and amino acids to gently fade brown spots.

THE HEAVY LIFTERS

"Firming is the hardest thing to achieve once you've gone slack," says Hiron. But don't abandon hope; the latest high-tech serums provide serious lift. JURLIQUE Firming and Tightening Serum harnesses the power of beech tree-derived peptides and tapioca starch to smooth and tighten. TRILOGY Age Proof Nutrient Plus Firming Serum increases long-term suppleness with potent

1. Anti-Blemish Solutions Blemish + Line Correcting Serum, \$60, CLINIQUE, clinique.com.au 2. Blemish Remedy Anti-Imperfection Serum, \$61, BAREMINERALS, mecca.com.au 3. Quintessential Serum, \$256, TAMMY FENDER, mecca.com.au 4. Sensitive Skin Soothing Serum, \$75, MURAD, murad.com.au 5. Capture Youth Redness Soother, DIOR, \$162, davidjones.com 6. The Revitalizing Hydrating Serum, \$340, LA MER, davidjones.com 7. Premier Cru The Elixir, \$127, CAUDALIE, sephora.com.au 8. Age Perfect Cell Renewal Advanced Regenerating Serum, \$49.95, L'OREAL PARIS, 1300 659 359 9. C E Ferulic, \$188.30, SKINCEUTICALS, adorebeauty.com.au 10. Double Serum, \$135, CLARINS, davidjones.com 11. Hyper White, \$69, FREEZEFRAME, priceline.com.au 12. Firming and Tightening Serum, \$95, JURLIQUE, jurlique.com.au 13. Age-Proof Nutrient Plus Firming Serum, \$44.95, TRILOGY, myer.com.au 14. Age Defiance Day Serum, \$109.95, MUKTI ORGANICS, muktiorganics.com

botanicals like avocado, evening primrose and marula oils, while antioxidant-packed mulberry gives skin extra smoothing. MUKTI Age Defiance Day Serum comes equipped with all-natural, native extracts like kakadu plum, and vitamins to boost moisture and relax muscle contraction. For a fast fix, Hiron suggests a good cleanse and a light acid peel, followed by an oil. "Oil-based serums tend to give a more immediate forming effect than water-based serums do," she says.