

Resources

Exfoliation: From Ancient Times to Modern Day Aesthetics

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As skin care professionals, we know the importance of skin exfoliation for healthy cell turnover, a refreshed and clear complexion, and better product absorption, but what about the methods of exfoliation? No one way of exfoliation is perfect for all skin types, but there are many possible alternatives that make it easy to find a method for every client! To make things as simple as possible – there are two types of exfoliators – physical and chemical.

Physical Exfoliation

Everything that is used to mechanically slough off the dead skin is referred to as physical exfoliation. This includes methods such as a scrub, microdermabrasion, and a rotating sonic brush to scrape off dead skin cells with friction. This is a very easy way to refresh the skin and it appeals to both men and women.

The easiest and most affordable exfoliating products to use at home are scrubs and since the skin care market is highly abundant, clients are guaranteed to find a natural product to their liking! Natural ingredients can be preferred and clients should be strongly advised to not use scrubs with microbeads. Microbeads are tiny, round plastic beads that are found in some exfoliating products and they are causing quite a stir in the environmental world. The plastic waste caused by these microbeads, which are not filtered out during sewage treatment, is damaging water ecosystems and killing marine life. A

2013 research at the University of Wisconsin-Superior showed that there were 1,500 to 1.7 million plastic particles per square mile in the Great Lakes! Not only are the beads damaging to fish, but they are also bad for the face – microbeads can cause eye irritation and promote rosacea and couperose. It is no wonder that Illinois was the first state to ban the use of microbeads in June 2014.

Instead of using plastic beads, skin care professionals should consider other natural options like scrubs with ground up seeds and stone pits from apricots or peaches, crushed walnut husks, oats, coffee grinds, salt, or sugar. Sugar is recommended for clients dealing with eczema, since it is non-irritating on broken skin, and sea salt for psoriasis sufferers, but not more than once a week. All other scrubs can be used three times a week, but no more – the skin needs adequate time to amass dry dead cells, so over-exfoliating needs to be avoided!

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These are just some examples of biodegradable ingredients that will not damage the environment and will polish and refresh the client's face. Scrubs are affordable, since the ingredients are typically not too complex, and can range from larger ground formulas (for the body) to finely ground (for the face). A scrub offers simplicity, especially for teenagers and male clientele, but not everyone will benefit from them. Clients with acne/cystic acne, couperose, rosacea, and elderly skin should avoid scrubs.

The main reason acne clients should be discouraged from using a scrub is because the rough particles in the scrub will not only damage and irritate the skin, causing redness, but they will spread bacteria on the face, worsening the situation. For this same reason, it is not recommended to perform a microdermabrasion treatment or use a rotating sonic brush on clients who have acne, couperose, or rosacea. These types of treatments are too rough and should be avoided. Older

clients tend to have thinner skin that bruises and breaks easily and using a harsh scrub, or any other mechanical mode of exfoliation can cause damage and pain. Enzymatic exfoliation is recommended, or, if necessary, a light oatmeal scrub.

Chemical Exfoliation

Did you know that scrubbing, peeling, and chemical exfoliation all have roots in ancient Egypt? Egyptians used specks of alabaster combined with milk and honey. The earliest chemical exfoliant was lactic acid, an active ingredient of sour milk that was used by the nobles as part of a skin rejuvenation regimen. In the Middle Ages, old wine with tartaric acid as its active ingredient was used for achieving the same results. Both of these exfoliants are known to contain alpha hydroxy acids, which are the active ingredients responsible for the skin exfoliation. Alpha hydroxy acids are naturally-occurring, organic carboxylic acids with a hydroxyl group in a carbon

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position. Lactic, glycolic, citric, and tartaric acids are naturally found in sugar cane, fruits, wine, and milk.

German dermatologist Paul Gerson Unna first described the properties of salicylic acid, resorcinol, phenol, and trichloroacetic acid in 1882, and the development of other peeling agents for varying depths of penetration followed. In the 1960s, the Baker-Gordon phenol peel peaked in popularity, but by the 1990s, it was falling out of favor with practitioners because of complications and serious systemic renal, cardiac, and hepatic toxicity to melanocytes causing hypopigmentation. After this issue was discovered, only fair-skinned clients were allowed to use phenol peels and had to go through the process slowly and cautiously.

Enzymes are a wonderful way to safely exfoliate the skin! An enzymatic exfoliation is a natural way to clean the pores, rid excess oils, and slough off dry and dead skin for a healthy cell turnover. Fruit enzymes, such as bromelain (from pineapple) and papain (from papaya) eat away at the oils and dry skin

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to expose a refreshed, clear complexion. A natural enzyme mask brightens the skin, activates cellular function, increases circulation, fades discoloration, and leaves the skin feeling and looking fresh, smooth, and healthy.

Dry enzyme masks that are activated moments before application are more potent and have a longer shelf-life than pre-activated, gel-like masks. This type of facial exfoliant usually comes in the form of a mask based with marine clay, bentonite, or oats. It is gentler than an enzyme peel, which generally contains 10 to 30 percent alpha hydroxy acid and is not suited for all clients. An example of such a product would be a pumpkin peel. It is quite strong, so skin care professionals should refer to the guidelines before administering it. Just like

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a chemical peel, an enzyme peel needs to be administered with caution to make sure the client is a good candidate for the product. Clients with these conditions should avoid peels: acne/cystic acne, couperose, rosacea, elderly skin, tan or sunburned/clients who frequently use tanning beds, hypopigmentation sufferers, and clients with Fitzpatrick types V and VI.

The rule of thumb is that clients should always come out of the treatment room looking better than when they entered, so harsh peels that cause redness, irritation, or scabbing should always be avoided. Skin care professionals can take their peace of mind into consideration and assume that every client has sensitive skin when starting a treatment – it is an approach I have been using for years and it has not failed me yet!

I sincerely hope this information is helpful in navigating skin care professionals through the different types of exfoliants available on the market today! Of course, the best way

to learn about a new product is by examining the label, so I encourage professionals to make this a habit. They will easily be able to select the best products for clients and clients will forever appreciate the knowledge and care!



Dasha Saian is the co-founder and marketing director of SAIAN® Natural Clinical Skin Care and has over 15 years of experience in the spa industry. In addition to her Business/Marketing degree, she is a licensed aesthetican, certified nutrition and wellness consultant, and certified family herbalist. Saian gives lectures and classes internationally and regularly contributes to global trade publications. She is an expert adviser on natural living, alkaline diet, alternative oncology protocols, and positive body image.



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