

## Skin Care Arsenal: Exfoliants and Masks

Written by Berry McWhorter  
Monday, May 02, 2011

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Wet shavers are familiar with toner and astringent because they are similar to a good aftershave. They are an excellent follow-up to a good face wash, and they simultaneously try to soothe, close pores, disinfect, nourish, control oil, and mildly exfoliate dead skin cells. While you use a toner or aftershave every time you cleanse your skin, you can use an exfoliant or mask from time to time when you need the heavy-duty tools in your skin care arsenal. These are the products that are used less frequently, but yield fantastic results when used consistently.

### Exfoliants



Exfoliation is the process of removing the first layer of dead cells from your skin. This process reveals the newer, younger skin underneath and helps keep your skin from appearing dull. Removing dead skin cells also helps to reduce the appearance of wrinkles to some degree, and has also been shown to reduce pore size in some people. Toners and astringents are mildly exfoliating, and your razor blade and [shaving brush](#) are, too, so if you do a traditional shave regularly and use a toner, you may not need to use an exfoliant very often, or maybe even at all. If you don't use a toner or choose to incorporate an exfoliating product, only use them up to a few times a week.

A facial scrub is a great tool to remove those dead skin cells and is the most controllable method of exfoliation. These products usually contain some kind of slightly rough, abrasive substance, like natural loofa or pumice stone. Scrubs usually have a very grainy texture, and literally rub the dead cells off of your face. To use, wet your face with warm water and rub a

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small amount of product over your entire face (except for the eye area) using your fingertips. Using just the slightest pressure, scrub in gentle, circular motions until your whole face has been treated, and then rinse off. Since scrubs are coarse by nature, it is wise to cleanse your face first in order to avoid spreading germs or scrubbing dirt into your skin. Scrubs should also not be used when active acne lesions are present, as the rough texture can spread bacteria to other areas of your face not affected by the breakout.

Other exfoliating products are more chemically based, and contain slightly acidic substances like fruit extracts and naturally occurring hydroxyl acids. These products are ideal if you have acne or don't like the texture of a scrub. Ingredients like citric acid, lactic acid, glycolic acid, and salicylic acid are substances that penetrate the epidermis and work to slough off dead skin cells chemically. Some of these acids have also been shown to stimulate collagen production, heal sun-damaged skin, significantly reduce the severity of acne, and reduce signs of aging. These ingredients can be found individually, in certain face washes and toners, or concentrated into chemical peels. Products simply need to be applied using a cotton pad or with the pre-soaked pad that is usually provided, and, depending on the directions, left to be absorbed into the skin or rinsed off.

Scrubs should be used no more often than every other day, and depending on the intensity of their grit, can be used as seldom as once a week. More chemically based peels should only be used about once a week, unless otherwise stated on the directions. Be forewarned that attempting to use several of these products at once or using them too often will actually cause the skin to be over exfoliated; a condition where new, living tissue is beginning to be removed. Over exfoliation is closely related to razor burn: the skin is raw, red, sensitive, and noticeably irritated. A balance needs to be struck between the number, frequency, and aggressiveness of all of your products in order to avoid this issue.

### **Masks**

