

ROSE INC

The Pro's Guide to Exfoliating Acne-Prone Skin

EDUCATION

Every skincare routine can benefit from some gentle exfoliation, which entails sloughing away dead skin cells from the outermost layer of the skin to reveal the new, radiant cells underneath. And when it comes to oily and acne-prone skin, exfoliation becomes even more key in maintaining a glowing complexion. “Oilier skin types are also usually more acne-prone because of the congestion created by clogged pores and cellular debris,” says board-certified dermatologist Lian A. Mack, MD. In other words, exfoliation keeps those pores unclogged and, in turn, helps prevent breakouts.

That said, there is a secret to exfoliating acne-prone skin for best results, and it comes down to two key factors: using the best exfoliator for oily skin and exfoliating frequency.

Ahead, Dr. Mack and Neda Mehr, MD, a board-certified dermatologist and medical director at Pure Dermatology Cosmetic & Hair Center, break it all down. Keep scrolling to learn about the best exfoliators for oily skin and acne and how often you should exfoliate.

THE BEST EXFOLIATORS FOR OILY SKIN + ACNE

Alpha & Beta Hydroxy Acids

For those with oily skin, Dr. Mehr recommends using chemical exfoliators that contain beta-hydroxy acid. Here's why: “The issue with excess oil is that it causes the top layer of the skin cells to stick together,” she says, adding that this can clog pores and lead to cystic acne and acne scarring. “Beta-hydroxy acids such as salicylic acid are great at dissolving the oil between the skin cells.”

TAKEAWAY: EXFOLIATE 3-4 TIMES PER WEEK

Since people with acne skin deal with excessive oil production, Dr. Mehr notes it's important to increase the amount of exfoliation. This, she says, "prevents excessive oil from causing the top layer of skin cells – or epidermis – from sticking together, clogging the pores, and leading to cystic acne and acne scarring."

For oily skin, Dr. Mack prescribes exfoliating up to three times per week. If your skin is oily *and* acne-prone, she suggests upping it to four times per week. And, if your skin responds well to the exfoliation, meaning there's no sign of irritation, Dr. Mehr says it's safe to exfoliate as often as once to twice daily. However, if you're new to exfoliation, remember to start off slow and increase the frequency gradually as your skin tolerates it.

Signs that you may be over-exfoliating, Dr. Mack and Dr. Mehr say include having pink, dry, tight, or irritated skin or even eczema-like rashes. If you're not exfoliating enough, Dr. Mehr says your skin may appear dull and clogged, so upping the frequency of exfoliation is a good idea.

As for where exfoliation fits into your skincare routine, Dr. Mack recommends cleansing your skin first to remove all the debris, makeup, and oil, which then allows the exfoliator to more effectively remove the dead skin cells. Then, Dr. Mehr says you can apply your topicals like serums and creams which can better penetrate the skin once the dead skin is out of the way.