

BEAUTY SPOT

Skin's magic potion is serum, not lotion

It digs deep into dermis, turning grey skin pink, but it won't come cheap

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

The bad news is it seems we all need a new 100-buck miracle product to ward off the creeping crepe.

The good news is for once, these pricey goops actually work.

The skincare buzzword of the year is serum. "It is definitely having a moment," says Natalie Gee, co-founder of Gee Beauty in Rosedale and, as of this fall, of Bal Harbour, Fla. "When you want to turn grey skin to pink, the only answer is a serum. They are about efficiency: a way to deliver the highest concentration of active ingredients."

In medicine, a serum is the clear liquid that is separated out by centrifuge from clotted blood. In the beauty world, a

serum is a transparent liquid base that has an acidic pH, such as glycolic, hyaluronic or citric acids to suspend and preserve large doses of antioxidant vitamins, the chief being C, and sometimes includes E and A as well as some of the B family. Peptides are also a commonly found ingredient.

Serums have been around since the 1950s, but recent technological advances (and the advent of small, doctor-driven boutique med-spa lines) have given the word new meaning.

In the fancy versions sold at medical spas, the active ingredients are concentrated (up to 15 per cent) to penetrate deep into the dermis and exfoliate for an instant glow and plumping effect. By contrast, no cream, no matter how special, can sustain the level of PH acidity necessary for high concentrations of antioxidants and thus cannot do more than sit on the skin's surface.

SERUMS continued on L2

'With daily use, you look glowing in a week'

SERUMS from LI

This goes especially for Vitamin C; med-spa serums use the pure form, which is hard to stabilize. (Over-the-counter versions generally depend on the more stable but less effective "derivative" forms of the vitamin.)

Medical-grade serums really are heavy artillery.

"You take vitamins on the inside," says Gee. "Using these products — the high-end ones where the concentration is between 10 to 15 per cent, which you cannot find in over-the-counter lotions and potions — your skin looks better immediately. And with daily use, you look glowing in a week."

Serums are often referred to as "boosters" with the idea that they supercharge your regime. They are always packaged in a nifty haute-laboratory way. Since you're supposed to use only a few drops a day, they come in either pump or dropper format.

Because the active ingredients (L-Ascorbic acid or vitamin C) degrade in the sunlight, the packaging is dark or photo-protective.

"Some people use the serums on their own," says Gee of her young clients, "but really the point is layering. And there is really no cutting corners in skincare. If you don't cleanse, you can't get the product to penetrate. And if you don't use sun protection, there is no point in really bothering."

Then there's the pleasure principle at work. These serums provide an immediate glow and they feel like silk on your fingertips.

"This is especially important for men," Gee continues, "as they simply won't tolerate the greasy feel of a heavy cream on their face."

If the steep price of serum doesn't make you feel like you are dispensing liquid gold, remember there is no point in using more than the three drops a day. Do this in the morning and be sure to use sun protection afterward.

THE MED SPA BRANDS

SkinCeuticals C E Ferulic

The star ingredient is CE Ferulic, which combines a 15 per cent dose of C (ascorbic acid) with E (alpha-tocopherol) and ferulic acid, goes after sun damage and provides some photo-protection, neutralizing free radicals (with antioxidants), and promotes collagen production with the ferulic acid thrown in as an anti-inflammatory. There are three serums ranging from \$95 to \$160. SkinCeuticals is available through dispensing doctors, medical spas and high-end spas across Canada. At skinceuticals.com.



Miracle 10 Light Serum

This serum is part of a line developed by Dr. Frank Lista, the founder and medical director of The Plastic Surgery Clinic in Mississauga. Miracle 10 Light Serum works for all skin types to instantly tone, hydrate and produce a glow. It is enriched with vitamins A, B, D3, E and K. The serum is \$65 for 50 mL. At miracle10.com.

Dermalogica AGE Smart Overnight Repair Serum

It smells great (thanks to botanical oils such as jasmine, rose and ylang-ylang). It also contains one of the year's big buzz natural ingredients, argan oil, which helps stop the production of enzymes that break down our natural collagen and gives youthful skin its remarkable elasticity. The antioxidant in this formulation is brown seaweed. \$88 for 15 mL. At select skincare centres, salons and spas across Canada dermalogica.ca



TARA WALTON PHOTOS/TORONTO STAR

OVER-THE-COUNTER

Vichy LiftActiv Serum 10 Youth Enhancing Serum

This brand capitalizes on the healing powers of Vichy waters. It has been a high-end drugstore import for generations. The active ingredient is rhamnose, "which can only be formulated in a serum because of its high concentration, at 10 per cent," says Stephanie Entraygues, Vichy Canada's marketing director. \$55 for 30 mL. At drugstores and pharmacies across Canada, liftactiv.ca

