HEALTH BASICS

Skin & beauty

An overview of how skin care, beauty products, and cosmetic procedures can affect skin health.

WHAT IT IS
Everyday care and cosmetic choices involving skin, hair, and nails

WHERE IT COMES UP
Skin-care products, beauty treatments, salons, and cosmetic procedures

WHY IT MATTERS
Choices can affect irritation, infection risk, and sun damage

WHAT IT IS NOT
Not a disease or diagnosis

WHO TO ASK
Primary care clinician, dermatologist, pharmacist, or qualified procedure provider

HOW IT IS CHECKED
Skin examination when a change or reaction needs assessment

Overview

Skin and beauty covers the products, routines, and procedures people use to change or care for their appearance. It includes cleansers, moisturizers, makeup, hair products, nail treatments, tanning products, injections, lasers, peels, tattoos, and piercings.

It is not a disease or diagnosis. There is no medical standard for beauty, and healthy skin does not need to look flawless. Normal skin has pores, lines, uneven colour, scars, hair, and changes related to age.

Skin care can support comfort and protect the skin barrier. Beauty treatments can also cause irritation, allergic reactions, burns, infection, or injury. Risk depends on the product, procedure, your skin, and how the treatment is performed.

A product described as "natural," "clean," "dermatologist tested," or "hypoallergenic" is not guaranteed to suit your skin. Marketing terms do not replace a full ingredient list or evidence about safety and effectiveness.

How it works

Your skin has several layers. The outer layer forms a barrier that limits water loss and helps keep out irritants and germs. Oil made by small glands helps reduce dryness. Melanin, the pigment that gives skin much of its colour, provides some protection from ultraviolet radiation but does not prevent sun damage.

Hair grows from follicles in the skin. Nails are made mainly from keratin, a strong protein also found in hair and the outer skin layer. Changes to hair or nails can be cosmetic, but they can sometimes reflect irritation, infection, injury, or another health condition.

Cleansers remove oil, dirt, sweat, and products. Strong soaps, scrubs, and frequent washing can remove too much oil and damage the skin barrier. Moisturizers add water or help hold it in. Sunscreen reduces exposure to ultraviolet radiation when used correctly, but it does not block all radiation.

Cosmetics mainly change appearance or scent. In some countries, a product may be regulated differently if it claims to treat a condition or change how the body works. For example, an acne treatment is not regulated in the same way as ordinary face makeup in the United States. Rules and product categories differ between countries.

Procedures work in different ways. Peels and some lasers remove or heat parts of the skin. Microneedling makes controlled punctures. Fillers add material beneath the skin, while botulinum toxin products temporarily reduce selected muscle movement. These procedures have medical risks even when their purpose is cosmetic.

Why it matters for your health

A simple routine may help maintain the skin barrier and reduce dryness or irritation. Sun protection also lowers exposure associated with sunburn, early skin ageing, and skin cancer.

More products do not necessarily produce healthier skin. Combining exfoliating acids, retinoids, fragranced products, scrubs, or acne treatments may increase irritation. The effects can be harder to trace when several new products are started together.

Skin tone can affect how redness or inflammation looks. On darker skin, irritation may appear brown, purple, grey, or darker than nearby skin rather than bright red. Inflammation can also leave lighter or darker marks after the original problem settles.

Cosmetic procedures can affect more than appearance. Results may be temporary, incomplete, or different from what you expected. Some treatments require recovery time and follow-up care. Your medicines, allergies, tendency to scar, previous procedures, and health conditions may alter the risks.

Appearance concerns can also affect wellbeing. If skin, hair, or body concerns take up much of

your day, cause repeated checking or concealment, or stop you from doing usual activities, you can discuss this with a primary care clinician or mental health professional.

What can go wrong

Products and procedures are related to several specific conditions and situations:

Arrange a routine appointment if a rash, nail change, hair problem, wound, or product reaction persists or keeps returning. A new or changing mole, an unusual dark mark, or a sore that does not heal should be assessed promptly rather than covered with a cosmetic product.

Seek urgent medical advice for severe pain, blistering, spreading redness, pus, fever, or worsening swelling after a treatment. These can indicate a burn, infection, or significant reaction.

Call emergency services for trouble breathing, swelling of the tongue or throat, fainting, stroke-like symptoms, or sudden eye pain or vision change after a cosmetic injection. These are emergency symptoms, not routine side effects.

- Irritant contact dermatitis: burning, dryness, cracking, or inflammation caused by direct damage from a product
- Allergic contact dermatitis: an immune reaction to an ingredient, often causing an itchy rash
- Acne or folliculitis: blocked or inflamed hair follicles, sometimes linked to oily products, friction, shaving, or contaminated equipment
- Infection: bacteria, fungi, or viruses entering through damaged skin, especially after tattoos, piercings, nail work, or invasive procedures
- Burns and pigment changes: possible after chemical peels, heat, lasers, waxing, or incorrect product use
- Scarring or keloids: raised scar tissue that can follow skin injury, particularly in people prone to this type of scarring
- Sun damage and skin cancer: associated with ultraviolet exposure from sunlight and tanning devices
- Blood-vessel blockage after filler: a rare but serious complication that can damage skin or eyesight

What you can do

There is no single test or score for "skin and beauty." If you have no concerning change and are not considering a procedure, you may not need any medical assessment.

For everyday care, focus on what your skin needs rather than the number or price of products. A gentle cleanser, moisturizer, and broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher are common foundations. Shade, clothing, and avoiding tanning beds add protection that sunscreen alone cannot provide.

Introduce one new leave-on product at a time. Test a small area as directed before wider use, particularly if you have sensitive skin or previous reactions. Stop using a product if it causes significant burning, swelling, blistering, or a persistent rash.

Keep useful information if a reaction occurs:

Before an invasive cosmetic procedure, ask what training and licensing the provider has, what product or device will be used, and what complications are possible. Ask who will manage a problem outside normal hours. Check whether follow-up is included and whether the result can be reversed or corrected.

Tell the provider about allergies, medicines, pregnancy, immune system problems, bleeding problems, previous cold sores, and any history of unusual scarring. Do not assume that a salon or non-surgical setting makes a procedure risk-free.

- Product name, ingredient list, and batch number
- Date and time you used it
- Where and how much you applied
- Photographs showing how the area changed
- Details of other products or procedures used nearby

Common questions

Do expensive products work better?

Price does not reliably show whether a product will be effective or gentle. Ingredients, formulation, packaging, and how consistently you use it matter more. Claims such as "clinical" or "medical grade" may be marketing terms rather than standard regulatory categories.

Does tingling mean a product is working?

Not necessarily. Tingling can be a temporary effect of an ingredient, but burning, persistent stinging, redness, swelling, or peeling may indicate irritation. Do not assume discomfort is required for a product to work.

Are natural products safer?

Not automatically. Plant extracts, essential oils, fragrances, and preservatives can cause irritation or allergy. Synthetic ingredients can also cause reactions. Safety depends on the specific ingredient, concentration, formulation, and your response.

What does "purging" mean?

"Purging" is an informal term for a temporary acne flare sometimes reported after starting products that increase skin-cell turnover. It should not be used to dismiss severe irritation, swelling, widespread rash, or symptoms in areas where you do not usually develop spots.

Can I rely on makeup with SPF?

Makeup with sun protection may contribute to coverage, but people often apply too little to reach the labelled SPF. A separate broad-spectrum sunscreen, used as directed, is more dependable. Reapplication and protective clothing still matter.

Who should assess a skin concern?

A pharmacist may help with mild product irritation or over-the-counter choices. A primary care clinician can assess persistent changes and arrange referral if needed. A dermatologist is a doctor specializing in skin, hair, and nail conditions.

Sources

- American Academy of Dermatology Association - Skin care on a budget
- American Academy of Dermatology Association - How to test skin care products
- US Food and Drug Administration - Is It a Cosmetic, a Drug, or Both? Or Is It Soap?
- US Food and Drug Administration - Sunscreen: How to Help Protect Your Skin from the Sun
- US Food and Drug Administration - Dermal Fillers (Soft Tissue Fillers)
- NHS - Moles