BEAUTY

Your Skin Does Not Need a New Routine Every Decade

Here is what deserves a place in your twenties, thirties and forties-and which age-defying extras have yet to earn one.

Step 1: Keep sunscreen at the centre

You turn 30, look at your bathroom shelf and wonder whether the products that carried you through your twenties have quietly expired as an idea. By 40, the pressure rises: surely responsible skin care now requires more bottles, more actives and a routine with its own spreadsheet. The evidence offers a calmer answer. Your age changes. The most important target does not.

Sunlight is a major cause of skin aging. A 2022 systematic review identified sun exposure among seven notable risk factors for visible forms of aging, alongside age itself, smoking, air pollution, nutrition, gender and ethnicity. That makes sun protection relevant in your twenties, thirties and forties-not a corrective measure that suddenly becomes urgent once you notice a line.

The practical core is sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher. Protective clothing, avoiding tanning beds and sunlamps, and staying out of the sun when it is strongest also reduce exposure. Those measures may sound less exciting than a serum promising renewal, but they address one of the clearest environmental contributors in the evidence supplied here.

In your twenties, this is the habit worth establishing before shopping for products marketed as "preventive." In your thirties, it remains the anchor even if you begin noticing changes. In your forties, it still matters because skin continues to be exposed; there is no decade in which an elaborate night routine makes daytime protection irrelevant.

Smoking belongs in the same conversation. It contributes to wrinkles, and wrinkling increases with both the number of cigarettes smoked and the number of years a person has smoked. Skin care cannot cancel that exposure. Healthy aging begins before older age, but the reverse is useful too: it is never too late to adopt healthier habits.

Step 2: Add a moisturiser when dryness asks

Skin changes with age, but it does not obey a birthday alarm. Over time, it can become drier, thinner and less plump and smooth as it loses fat. Healing may take longer. Wrinkles and age spots can also become more noticeable. None of this means everyone needs the same "30-plus" jar on the morning they leave their twenties.

A moisturiser is the straightforward addition when dryness becomes part of your skin's story. Treatments that soothe dry skin can make it feel more comfortable, but that is a narrower and more honest job than "reversing age." A product can be useful without turning back chronological change. Your routine should answer what your skin is doing, not what a marketing category says people your age ought to fear.

That distinction matters across the decades. You may want moisturiser in your twenties and not feel dry in your thirties. You may find it more useful in your forties as dryness becomes noticeable. The available evidence describes common age-related changes; it does not establish three mandatory routines divided neatly at 30 and 40.

Many products claim to revitalise aging skin or reduce wrinkles, yet only a few have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration for aging or sun-damaged skin. A crowded shelf is therefore not evidence of a well-supported routine. Sunscreen addresses a major source of aging, while moisturiser has a clear comfort-focused purpose. Everything else should have to explain what it adds.

Normal aging changes and medical problems are not always the same thing. If a skin change worries you, raise it with a healthcare professional rather than assuming it is an inevitable new feature of your decade-or trying to cover it with another cosmetic.

Keep the routine that has a job. Question the product that has only a decade attached to it.

Step 3: Treat extras as optional

Once sunscreen and moisturiser are in place, the beauty aisle becomes a negotiation rather than an emergency. Botanicals, peptides and hydroquinone are among the topical ingredients used for photodamaged skin. A 2024 systematic review concluded that these categories can be effective, with the strongest evidence in that review supporting peptides.

That does not make every peptide cream essential, or every botanical interchangeable. The review examined categories including green tea, soy, aloe vera, liquorice root, resveratrol and others, but the source material does not provide a simple routine, comparative ranking or instruction for combining them. It supports the possibility of benefit for photodamage, not a demand that everyone begin several actives at a particular age.

This is where decade-based shopping can mislead you. In your twenties, an optional cosmetic

may appeal because you want to act early. In your thirties, it may be sold as a defence against the first visible changes. In your forties, the same category may be repackaged as repair. The label around the concern changes faster than the underlying priorities: sun protection first, relief of dryness when needed, then an evidence-aware choice about extras.

The honest standard is not whether an ingredient sounds scientific. Ask what concern it is meant to address and what kind of evidence supports it. If the answer is merely "anti-aging," the promise is too broad to help you decide. Aging includes intrinsic change as well as environmental influences, and one cosmetic cannot erase that distinction.

Optional means exactly that. You can explore a topical ingredient supported for photodamage without pretending it is the foundation of skin health. You can also decline it. Tonnes of novelty can sit on top of a routine without improving its logic.

Step 4: Audit the shelf with a notepad

Collagen supplements are a useful test of how quickly an appealing extra can become a supposed necessity. A 2021 meta-analysis of 19 controlled trials, involving 1,125 participants aged 20 to 70, reported improvements in hydration, elasticity and wrinkles. Ninety-five per cent of participants were women, which also narrows how confidently the findings apply to everyone.

A larger 2025 review changed the picture by examining funding and study quality. Across 23 randomised controlled trials (RCTs) with 1,474 participants, the pooled results appeared favourable. But studies without pharmaceutical-company funding found no effect on hydration, elasticity or wrinkles. High-quality studies also found no significant effect in any of those categories. The review concluded that clinical evidence does not currently support collagen supplements for preventing or treating skin aging.

That disagreement is not a reason to split the difference and call collagen "possibly essential." It is a reason to give greater weight to the newer analysis of study quality and funding. The most flattering headline came from the combined results; the confidence weakened when the trials were separated according to factors that can distort those results.

Your practical step for the coming week is a shelf audit. It takes a notepad, a pen, your sunscreen, your moisturiser and any optional skin products or supplements you already use. Make three groups: protection from sunlight, relief of dryness, and optional extras. For each extra, write down the specific job you believe it performs. If you cannot name one beyond "anti-aging," that uncertainty is useful information.

Keep the routine that has a job. Question the product that has only a decade attached to it.

Your twenties do not require a pre-emptive cabinet, your thirties do not trigger an automatic upgrade, and your forties are not a deadline for repair. On Monday, put sunscreen where you will reach it, keep moisturiser if dryness makes it useful, and let every extra earn its space.

Where this comes from

- Skin Aging

  MedlinePlus, U.S. National Library of Medicine · https://medlineplus.gov/skinaging.html
- Older Adult Health

  MedlinePlus, U.S. National Library of Medicine · https://medlineplus.gov/olderadulthealth.html
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  Scientific reports, 2022 · https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34764376/