BEAUTY

Does Cica Really Calm Your Skin?

Centella asiatica has promising biology and a persuasive nickname, but the evidence behind a soothing face cream is thinner than the marketing suggests.

The jar promises peace

Your skin feels tight, hot or newly temperamental, and the cream marked "cica" seems to offer exactly what you want: calm. It is an appealingly simple story. Centella asiatica is the plant ingredient; cica is the familiar shorthand that has spread across cosmetic labels. Put it on unhappy skin, the claim goes, and everything should settle down.

That promise lands because skin is not merely a surface to polish. It helps retain fluid, regulate internal temperature and keep harmful microbes out. When it looks red or feels irritated, reaching for something described as restorative can seem more sensible than adding another aggressive active. But "calming" is an elastic cosmetic word. It might mean less visible redness, less discomfort, improved dryness or simply a cream that feels gentle.

The label itself cannot settle the question. Cosmetics can cause allergic reactions, and red, irritated skin is often the first sign. Fragrances and preservatives are among the most common causes of cosmetic-related skin problems, so a centella product may contain an ingredient promoted as soothing alongside other ingredients that do not suit you. The plant on the front is only part of the formula on the back.

Wound healing changed the story

Much of centella's scientific appeal comes from wound-healing research rather than trials of ordinary facial sensitivity. A 2022 systematic review found just four clinical trials that met its criteria. They examined measures including wound contraction, healing or bleeding time, new surface skin formation, redness, pain scores and wound appearance. The authors concluded that centella might enhance wound healing, but said more studies were needed before its effects could be established through a meta-analysis.

The review also described plausible biological routes. Centella may support the formation of new blood vessels and influence collagen I, fibroblast growth factor and vascular endothelial growth factor production. Anti-inflammatory effects were linked to reductions in several inflammatory signals and enzyme activities. Those findings help explain why the ingredient

attracts "repair" and "calm" language. They do not prove that every cica moisturiser will visibly quiet irritated facial skin.

A healing wound is not interchangeable with dry cheeks, a reaction to a cosmetic or a chronic skin condition. Nor does evidence concerning an ingredient automatically establish the performance of every formulation containing it. The review even noted that specialised delivery systems might increase centella's availability, which underlines a basic point: how an ingredient is formulated can matter. Seeing centella in an ingredient list tells you it is present, not what outcome the finished cream will deliver.

The front sells you calm; the ingredient list tells you what you are actually considering.

The strongest claim is still conditional

A 2024 systematic review considered centella alongside a long list of botanicals, peptides and other topical ingredients used for skin damaged by ultraviolet radiation. It judged much of the overall cosmeceutical evidence to be high quality and concluded that these categories can treat photodamaged skin. Yet that broad conclusion does not tell you how much of the support belongs specifically to centella, or whether it demonstrates the everyday calming effect implied by cica marketing.

This distinction matters because sunlight is a major cause of skin ageing, and ageing skin may become thinner, drier and slower to heal. Evidence that a group of topical ingredients may help photodamaged skin is relevant, but it is not the same as proof that centella rapidly reduces stinging, redness or sensitivity. The source does not provide a centella-only effect size or establish that a product labelled cica will perform better than a basic moisturiser.

The honest reading is neither that centella is empty hype nor that the calming claim has been confirmed. There is a biological rationale, a small wound-healing evidence base and inclusion in a favourable review of cosmeceuticals for photodamage. There is not enough detail here to promise that a cica cream will calm your particular skin. "Promising" is doing important work in that sentence.

The supporting formula may do the soothing

A cica cream is rarely centella alone. Other parts of the formula may be responsible for much of what you notice, particularly if dryness is the problem. A 2020 systematic review of skin care in older adults included 63 articles. It found that low-irritating cleansers and oil-rich leave-on products containing moisture-attracting ingredients were helpful for dry skin and skin-barrier

function, although the studies varied substantially in their designs, products and measured outcomes.

That review also found that formulations containing glycerin and petrolatum reduced skin tears, while lower-pH leave-on products improved the skin barrier. This does not make all moisturisers identical. It does mean that familiar supporting ingredients may have more directly applicable evidence for dryness and barrier care than the word cica alone. A formula containing centella, glycerin and petrolatum cannot credit every possible benefit to its headline botanical.

This is why the ingredient list is more useful than the calming language. Manufacturers must list all ingredients on the container. Terms such as "natural" and "hypoallergenic" have no official meaning, so they cannot guarantee that a formula will be gentle. A botanical ingredient is not automatically harmless, and a product's quiet-looking design cannot tell you whether it contains fragrance or preservatives that may trouble your skin.

Monday takes the container

On Monday, take the product container into good light and read its complete ingredient list. Confirm that Centella asiatica is actually listed. Then look at the entire formula rather than treating "cica" as the active answer to every kind of irritation. If dryness is what you are trying to address, note whether the product also contains evidence-supported moisturising ingredients such as glycerin or petrolatum.

Keep the claim proportionate. Centella has enough evidence to be interesting, especially around wound healing and photodamaged skin, but not enough in these sources to guarantee calm. Fragrance and preservatives can cause skin problems, and the first sign of an allergic reaction may be red, irritated skin. If your skin worsens or does not improve, this stops being a cosmetic shopping question and becomes something to discuss with a health care professional.

Do not let a soothing cream carry a job it was never shown to do. Sunlight is a major driver of skin ageing, so protection still matters: limiting exposure when sunlight is strongest, wearing protective clothing and using sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15. The useful next step is small and physical: turn over the container. The front sells you calm; the ingredient list tells you what you are actually considering.

Where this comes from

- Skin Aging

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

  MedlinePlus, U.S. National Library of Medicine · https://medlineplus.gov/cosmetics.html
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