

The Ultimate At-Home Skincare Routine Cheat Sheet

Morning & Evening Routines, Ingredient Compatibility,
Device Schedules & Quick Reference

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Your Morning Routine (AM)

Follow these steps every morning in order. The entire routine takes 3-5 minutes once you get the hang of it.

Step	Product Type	Why	Pro Tip
1. Cleanse	Gentle gel or micellar water	Remove overnight oils without stripping	Skip if skin feels balanced — water rinse is fine for dry skin types
2. Toner (optional)	Hydrating toner (no alcohol)	Balance pH, prep for serums	Apply to damp skin with hands — skip cotton pads to avoid waste
3. Vitamin C Serum	15-20% L-ascorbic acid	Antioxidant protection + brightening	Store in a dark, cool place. Discard if it turns brown/orange
4. Moisturizer	Gel (oily) / Cream (dry)	Lock in hydration, protect barrier	Apply within 60 seconds of serum for best absorption
5. Sunscreen	SPF 30-50 broad spectrum	Prevent UV damage (the #1 anti-aging step)	Use 2 finger-lengths for face. Reapply every 2 hrs outdoors

Tip: Vitamin C goes before moisturizer because it is water-based and needs direct skin contact to be effective. SPF is always the last step.

Your Evening Routine (PM)

The PM routine is where the heavy lifting happens — actives like retinol work best overnight when skin is in repair mode.

Step	Product Type	Why	Pro Tip
1. Oil Cleanse	Cleansing oil or balm	Dissolve sunscreen, makeup, sebum	Massage 60 sec on dry skin, then emulsify with water
2. Water Cleanse	Gentle gel / foam cleanser	Remove remaining residue	Keep pH below 6. CeraVe and La Roche-Posay are solid picks
3. Exfoliant (2-3x/wk)	AHA, BHA, or PHA	Remove dead cells, unclog pores	Do NOT use on retinol nights. Alternate days.

Step	Product Type	Why	Pro Tip
4. Retinol (2-4x/wk)	0.2-1.0% retinol	Collagen stimulation, anti-aging	Start low (0.2%), build up over 2-3 months. Buffer with moisturizer if needed
5. Hydrating Serum	Hyaluronic acid or niacinamide	Deep hydration + barrier repair	Apply to damp skin — HA pulls moisture from the air, not your skin
6. Moisturizer	Rich cream or sleeping mask	Seal everything in overnight	Slugging (Vaseline layer) 1-2x/wk boosts hydration dramatically

Tip: Never combine retinol + AHA/BHA on the same night. Alternate them to avoid irritation.

Ingredient Compatibility Chart

Not all skincare actives play well together. Use this chart to know what to combine and what to keep separate.

Combination	Verdict	Notes
Vitamin C + Niacinamide	Safe together	Old myth said they cancel out — modern research confirms they work great together
Vitamin C + Retinol	Use separately (AM/PM)	Both are potent actives. Vitamin C in the AM, retinol in the PM for best results
Retinol + AHA/BHA	Alternate nights	Using together causes over-exfoliation and irritation. Never combine in one session
Niacinamide + AHA/BHA	Safe together	Niacinamide actually reduces the irritation from chemical exfoliants
Vitamin C + AHA/BHA	Use separately	Low pH of acids can destabilize vitamin C. Use AHA/BHA in PM, vitamin C in AM
Hyaluronic Acid + Everything	Safe with all	HA is a hydrator, not an active. Layer it under any product for a moisture boost
Retinol + Benzoyl Peroxide	Do NOT combine	BP oxidizes and deactivates retinol on contact. Use BP in AM, retinol in PM
Niacinamide + Retinol	Great together	Niacinamide reduces retinol irritation — apply niacinamide first, then retinol
SPF + Everything	Always last step (AM)	Sunscreen goes on top of everything. No exceptions. No mixing with foundation.
Peptides + Retinol	Safe together	Peptides can actually support skin recovery from retinol use
AHA + BHA	Use with caution	Combining two exfoliants increases irritation risk. Better to alternate or use a combo product

Tip: When in doubt, keep actives simple — one active per routine step. You can always layer hydrators (HA, ceramides, squalane) safely with anything.

At-Home Device Schedule

If you use at-home aesthetic devices, timing matters. Here is the recommended weekly schedule to avoid overlap and maximize results.

Device	Frequency	Duration	Best Time	Do NOT Combine With
IPL Hair Removal	Every 2 weeks (first 3 mo), then monthly	15-30 min per area	Anytime	Retinol (stop 3 days before/after), sun exposure
LED Red Light (anti-aging)	3-5x per week	10-20 min	PM, after serums	Nothing — safe with all products
LED Blue Light (acne)	3-5x per week	10-15 min	PM, on clean skin	Nothing — safe with all products
Microneedling Pen	Every 2-4 weeks	10-15 min	PM, dedicated night	All actives for 24-48 hrs. Only HA after treatment
RF Skin Tightening	2-3x per week	10-20 min	PM	Retinol on same night (use next night instead)
Gua Sha / Face Roller	Daily or 3-5x/wk	3-5 min	AM or PM	Active breakouts, sunburned skin
Derma Roller (0.25mm)	2-3x per week	5 min	PM	AHAs/BHAs on same night

Tip: On microneedling days, skip all actives and only apply hyaluronic acid + moisturizer. Resume your normal routine after 24-48 hours.

Sample Weekly Plan

Day	AM Routine	PM Routine	Devices
Monday	Vitamin C + SPF	Retinol night	LED Red (before retinol)
Tuesday	Vitamin C + SPF	Hydration night (HA + ceramides)	LED Red or Blue
Wednesday	Vitamin C + SPF	AHA/BHA exfoliant night	Gua sha (AM)
Thursday	Vitamin C + SPF	Retinol night	LED Red (before retinol)
Friday	Vitamin C + SPF	Hydration night	RF device or LED
Saturday	Vitamin C + SPF	Microneedling (if scheduled)	Microneedling (every 2-4 wks)
Sunday	Vitamin C + SPF	Recovery night — hydration only	Gua sha, face roller

Quick Reference Cards

Fitzpatrick Skin Type Reference

Type	Description	Sun Response	IPL/Laser Safe?
I	Very fair, freckles, red/blond hair	Always burns, never tans	Yes — use lowest setting
II	Fair, light eyes	Burns easily, tans minimally	Yes — low-medium setting
III	Medium, light brown	Sometimes burns, tans gradually	Yes — medium setting
IV	Olive, moderate brown	Rarely burns, tans easily	Caution — only specific devices
V	Brown, dark brown	Very rarely burns	Limited — check device specs
VI	Very dark brown to black	Never burns	Not recommended for most IPL

Retinol Strength Ladder

Level	Concentration	Who Is It For?	How Long to Use Before Moving Up
Beginner	0.2-0.3% retinol	First-time retinol users, sensitive skin	8-12 weeks (2-3x/week, then nightly)
Intermediate	0.5% retinol	Tolerating 0.3% nightly with no irritation	8-12 weeks at nightly use
Advanced	1.0% retinol	Experienced retinol users	Can maintain long-term or step up to Rx
Prescription	0.025-0.1% tretinoin	Serious anti-aging, acne treatment	Use indefinitely with dermatologist oversight

Sunscreen SPF Quick Guide

SPF	UVB Blocked	Best For	Reapply
SPF 15	93%	Indoor days, minimal sun	Every 2 hours if outdoors
SPF 30	97%	Daily wear (recommended minimum)	Every 2 hours if outdoors
SPF 50	98%	Extended outdoor time, fair skin	Every 2 hours if outdoors

SPF	UVB Blocked	Best For	Reapply
SPF 100	99%	High altitude, beach, post-procedure	Every 2 hours if outdoors

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