

So, exactly what is “natural” skincare and does it work?

Experts weigh in on what dermatologists need to know about the state of natural skincare



Q&A
Dermatologist Joshua Zeichner, M.D., director of cosmetic and clinical research in dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital, and Hemali Gunt, Ph.D., head of clinical and scientific affairs at Burt's Bees <https://www.burtsbeesdermatology.com/>, a leader in evidence-based natural skincare, help sort through the natural skincare clutter in this expert Q&A.

NATURAL SKINCARE is in. But it isn't always clear what natural skincare is.

Natural skincare accounted for more than a quarter of the \$5.6 billion in annual skincare sales in 2018. Consumer demand for natural skincare brands grew 23% to \$1.6 billion from 2017 to 2018, authors reported in an editorial published last year in *JAMA Dermatology* <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamadermatology/fullarticle/2751513>.

Big data and predictive analytics provider IRI <https://www.iriworldwide.com/en-GB/Insights/news/IRI-Health-Beauty-trends-2019> reported in 2018 that the natural health and beauty category was expected to continue to grow about 10% annually through 2021.

The challenge for dermatologists who answer patients' questions about natural skincare products is to separate the claims from actual data. With no formal FDA definition for “natural” skincare, the market remains masked by a cloud of uncertainty for consumers and even dermatologists.

AA: How do you define natural skincare?

Dr. Zeichner: Most experts would agree that natural skincare products are products that are free of synthetic fragrances, dyes, parabens, sulfates and phthalates. Many of these products also use ingredients that are naturally sourced, or botanical ingredients that have therapeutic effects on skin.

Dr. Gunt: To get clarity on what is truly a natural skincare product, Burt's Bees scientists have worked proactively with and adopted the international consensus based on guidelines for natural and organic cosmetic products by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) (ISO 16128).

In a nutshell, natural skincare has ingredients that are found in and derived from nature and there is a huge piece to this, which relates to responsible sourcing practices. We do not test products on animals. We formulate all our products without any phthalates, parabens, petrolatum. Petrochemical feedstocks are strictly prohibited.

AA: What's fueling the natural trend in skincare?

Dr. Zeichner: Consumers are much more aware of what they're putting into their bodies and what they're putting onto their skin, so they're paying more attention to ingredients.

Now that I've been seeing patients through video visits due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I've received an influx

of patients requesting skincare consultations. Many people are wearing facemasks on a regular basis and these facemasks are causing significant harm to the skin, causing friction and indirectly trapping moisture and increasing levels of bacteria and other micro-organisms on the skin. This is resulting in conditions like acne, rosacea and skin sensitivity.

This is a great time for dermatologists to have natural, non-irritating products that we can recommend that will continue to give patients anti-aging benefits that they're looking for without creating more irritation.

With natural skincare's increasing popularity, it's becoming more important for physicians to better understand which products are safe and effective for their patients, and we're looking to make sure there is sound science to back them up.

AA: What are today's hero or trending natural skincare ingredients?

Dr. Zeichner: I think bakuchiol is perhaps the hottest natural ingredient on the market. Bakuchiol is a natural extract pressed from the seed of the bakuchiol plant. It is thought to work in the same pathway as retinol. However, bakuchiol has the advantage of not causing skin irritation and not making the skin sensitive to sunlight. Bakuchiol is well studied in the skin and has been shown to be effective in strengthening skin and stimulating collagen.

Dr. Gunt: In addition to bakuchiol, our skincare regimens include well-studied natural ingredients such as aloe, honey and rice extract. Rice extract is used a lot in Asian cultures. Asian farmers working in rice paddies are known to cleanse their faces and hands with rice water. Despite the sun exposure, their skin doesn't seem to

sunburn as easily and retains its elasticity. In vitro studies have shown that rice extract upregulates the SIRT1 expression which is associated with increased cellular longevity. Our research on its powerful anti-inflammatory activity has shown it reduces skin sensitivity and protects skin from environmental damage.

But I have to admit, I struggled with this question a bit because calling something a hero ingredient means there is one active that is doing all the heavy lifting. It's implying that one ingredient is responsible for all the benefits in the product.

Our product matrices, which contain waxes, oils and butters, are inherently powerful ingredients. These have their own inherent functionality. We make sure that each ingredient that goes into our products serves a specific purpose. For example, everybody knows about shea butter, a matrix of several different bioactive components. Shea butter doesn't just moisturize the skin but also provides anti-inflammatory and antioxidant components. Recent research suggests shea butter might be a natural alternative to ceramide-precursor product for people with atopic dermatitis.

The key message here is that effective natural skincare is not necessarily one ingredient but a combination of ingredients that work well together and in synergy to provide skin health.

AA: How do dermatologists decide what to recommend to patients in the way of natural skincare products?

Dr. Zeichner: As with any other products, I look for companies that provide data to show that the ingredients are effective. I usually refer patients to brands that have a long heritage of creating a quality product. <