

Get fresh

Brighten, polish and perk up tired skin for spring with these comforting treats.

BY NEWBY HANDS

I don't have to be psychic to know that, around about now, your skin won't be looking its best, with months of cold weather and central heating (and the constant changing between the two) leaving it looking dull, clogged and in need of a serious overhaul. The temptation is to just go for a richer, heavier face cream, but instead it should be about buffing up and peeling off the old to (gently) reveal the new. So for the best skin polishers and brighteners, plus insider pro beauty tips, here's our guide to your ultimate skin spring-clean.

THE POLISHERS

'It's the build-up of dead cells that makes skin look dull, so even sensitive skin benefits from the right exfoliation,' says Marcia Kilgore, founder of Bliss, and the woman who helped bring the American obsession with polished skin to Britain.

Selecting that perfect exfoliator from the huge range out there can be tricky – but it's a choice that should ultimately be dictated by your skin type. First, there are the grainy scrubs, which just work superficially, buffing off flaky, rough skin. 'Fine scrubs are good for smoothing the surface, but anything with big, chunky grains is old-fashioned now,' says Colette Haydon, doctor of dermocosmetology, and the chemist behind many skincare brands.

Then there are enzyme peels (usually made from papaya, pumpkin or pineapple), which work a little deeper. 'But they're still gentle, as they only break down dead skin cells, so are good for sensitive or flaky skin,' says Haydon. 'Acid peels (including those containing glycolic and lactic acid), on the other hand, break down the "glue" between cells, removing dead cells and

the live cells underneath – and are the best option for clogged and older skin.'

For skin in need of a serious overhaul (but which is pretty hardy), try layering up all three, Hollywood-style. Start with a grainy scrub (Crème de la Mer's the Refining Facial, £60, is my favourite); next, massage on an enzyme peel (Elemis' Papaya Enzyme Peel, £26, is very good); rinse, and finish with an AHA mask (Dr Sebagh's Deep Exfoliating Mask, £52, and Clinique's new Turnaround Instant Facial Mask, £30, are two I absolutely love).

'For oily skin, using an AHA cream or serum at night and a scrub the following morning works really well,' says Kilgore. 'Or, if you have sensitive skin, mix a bit of a creamy scrub in with your cleanser – it won't strip the skin, but will still smooth it.'

THE BRIGHTENERS

Vitamin C is a multi-tasking skin essential, evening out pigmentation and skin tone, while boosting collagen. But, being highly unstable, it has to be kept active so that it actually does something. Mixing a powder (Dr Sebagh's Pure Vitamin C Powder Cream, £72, and Philosophy's Vitamin C Booster Serum, £52, are both great) into your favourite face cream is the best way. Alternatively, for a short skin-brightening course, Kéraskin's Sérums-3C, £95 (0800 012 1785), provides both the serum and the powdered vitamin C for you to mix, and Environ's excellent Masque Citrique, £47.95 (020 8450 2020), peels skin and boosts radiance in one.

INTENSIVE PEELS

A mini-course of peels will work deep, but not leave the redness associated with the old-fashioned hardcore masks. Murad's four-week Intensive Resurfacing Peel, £120 (0800 035 2682), Clinique's eight-week Turnaround Radiance Peel kit, £35, and Dr Lewinn's three-week Peel & Renew Skin Resurfacing Kit, £60, are perfect for the dedicated.

THE TRANSFORMERS

THE FACIAL Most facials plump the skin, but Estée Lauder's Recreation Luxury Facial, £50, exclusively at Harrods (020 7730 1234), totally transformed mine from parched to thick and velvety.

THE OVERNIGHT TIP Nothing has yet beaten La Roche-Posay's Effaclar K, £10 (0800 055 6822), for clearing lumpy skin and leaving it looking virtually poreless. Alternatively, catwalk make-up artist Pat McGrath builds up natural oils under the thinnest layer of Vaseline (to keep the moisturising goodness sealed in) on models' dry skin. Do the same using Sarah Chapman's Overnight Facial oil, £42 (at Space NK), or Dior's Capture Totale Nurturing Oil, £102, for dry skin; or Chanel's Hydramax + Serum, £43, for dehydrated skin, massaged in and again 'sealed' with Vaseline.

THE MASK Guinot's lavender-packed Masque Essentiel, £24 (0800 590094), is a joy to use, giving pasty skin a true rosy glow.

THE NATURAL SMOOTHER One of the few natural but visibly effective products, Nude's Advanced Smoothing Complex, £48 (at Space NK), is a personal favourite. Expect silky skin within days.

THE SOOTHER Don't be put off by the aggressive-sounding name, as Dr Brandt's Laser in a Bottle, £81 (at Space NK), works like a dream on calming redness.

THE EXPERTS' ADVICE

YVONNE MARTIN, FACIALIST: 'Using thumb, index and middle finger, lightly pinch the skin all over your face and neck. It's a French massage technique from the 1930s – Coco Chanel always used it – that's amazing for balancing any skin, even sensitive.'

PATRICK BOWLER, COSMETIC DOCTOR: 'Red Light treatment is a great instant skin brightener – clients come in for a session the day before a big event (you lie under the red LED light for 30 to 40 minutes), as the effects are instant, there's no downtime, and it lasts up to a week.' Try Omnilux Red Light therapy, £55, at Court House Clinics (0845 555 5050).

SARAH CHAPMAN, FACIALIST: 'Lactic acid is my favourite skin peel, as it's hydrating and exfoliating – or use live goat's-milk yoghurt as a 10-minute mask. A big dose of omega oils is great to balance the skin: omega-3 for dull, dry or flaky skin, and the anti-inflammatory omega-6 for sensitive skin. Or, for a nourishing overnight treatment, mix a clay face mask with a face oil and sleep in it – it's a great skin brightener.' □