



You don't
need a mask
to protect
sensitive skin

By Georgie Binks

When Your Skin's on the Defensive

More than half of Canadians report having sensitive skin, and while at some point we've all used a product or two that's caused some irritation or made us prone to a breakout, it doesn't necessarily mean you have sensitive skin. In fact, many skin irritations are considered self-inflicted. (Think micro-dermabrasions, chemical peels, exfoliating facials, and even wearing too much makeup.) For others, though, sensitive skin is a way of life.

Generally, if your skin is prone to redness, itchiness, or irritates easily, then it's likely you have sensitive skin, and it can be caused by a

number of dermatologic conditions (for example, eczema, acne, and rosacea), genetics, too much sun exposure, and environmental factors, such as pollution.

Although sensitive skin can be a challenge to deal with, there are ways to tame irritated skin and keep reactions down.

Cleansing

While some people wouldn't give a second thought to cleansing their face with an ordinary bar of bath soap, those with sensitive skin might think twice before lathering up this way.

Dr. Peter Vignjevic, a dermatologist in Hamilton, ON,

cautions against using detergent soaps. "Don't use anything harsh like deodorant or antiseptic soaps because they dry out your skin." As well, avoid products that contain granules or cleansing grains, which are meant to exfoliate but can further irritate sensitive skin.

When choosing a cleanser, make sure the product is intended and labelled for sensitive skin. While bar soaps made especially for sensitive skin are available, Vignjevic says cream cleansers are gentler. "They don't have a lathering agent in them so they're great for people who are super sensitive, but some people don't

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like them because they don't lather."

It's also good to keep in mind that fragrances, although sometimes pleasant, are chemical additives that can irritate the skin. Vicki Mulyk, a registered dermatology nurse in Edmonton, says most products suited to sensitive skin typically don't smell very good—if they do, it's a tipoff that perfumes have been added, which can wreak havoc on susceptible skin. Also, steer clear of any products that contain alcohol. "If your skin feels stripped, that's not good," Mulyk says. And, she adds, it's a good idea to skip the toner, too. "Some people use it to get every little bit of makeup off, but you don't have to. Just wash your face really well."

But cleansers and toners aren't the only culprits—using water that's too hot further strips away the natural oils in the skin, leading to dryness. "If your skin is very dry, take a tepid face cloth and put it on your face for a minute or two. After washing, apply a moisturizer to the face immediately," Mulyk says. Most people use their hands to splash some water on their face and to lather in a product, but if you like to use a soft brush, then go ahead, as long as it's not irritating like a loofah. "If it feels rough, it's wrong," Mulyk adds.

Suggestions: La Roche-Posay Tolériane Cleansing and Make-Up Removal Fluid, \$23; Eau Thermale Avène Tolerance Extreme Cleansing Lotion, \$27.50; Cet-

aphil Gentle Skin Cleanser, \$14.99; Marcelle Essentials Foaming Cleansing Gel, \$14.50.

Moisturizing

Moisturizing is probably the most important step in taking good care of your skin. Not only do moisturizers protect the skin from drying out, they also improve the skin's tone and texture. Mulyk says moisturizers don't actually moisturize the skin. They act like a barrier to seal in moisture, which is why it's important to apply a cream or lotion immediately following a bath or shower, especially if you have eczema or very dry skin.

But choosing the right moisturizer is as important as applying the product daily—three or four times a day if you have very dry skin. One of the biggest mistakes people make when buying a moisturizer is choosing one that's too thick or heavy, which can lead to blocked pores and acne breakouts. But finding the right product may come down to trial and error. Vignjevic says you should be able to tell if it's right for you. "If a moisturizer feels really greasy, you're probably going to break out."

As with cleansers, steer clear of products that contain perfume or fragrance in the ingredient list. The smell of lavender or lilies wafting through the air might seem comforting, but they'll end up drying your skin even further. Alcohol is another ingredient you should try to avoid because it strips the

skin of its natural oils, although Vignjevic admits it's difficult to avoid completely because it helps to dissolve ingredients.

Suggestions: Neutrogena Moisture Oil-Free for Sensitive Skin, \$15.99; Cliniderm Soothing Cream, \$16; Clinique Redness Solutions Daily Relief Cream, \$53; Aveeno Ultra Calming Daily Moisturizer, \$23.99.

Cosmetics

In women with sensitive skin, wearing makeup can be something of a Catch-22 situation—cosmetics can help camouflage symptoms associated with sensitive skin, but the products themselves can be the source of the irritation and inflammation.

"Usually when you have sensitive skin, there's a lot of redness or broken capillaries and you want to cover it, but you can't handle a heavy coverage," says Emily Heung, a beauty expert in Toronto. "If your skin is already irritated, you need something that's lightweight, with minimal to medium coverage."

When choosing makeup, avoid products that contain too many chemicals and parabens. (Parabens are used as preservatives in cosmetic products.) And don't assume that products labelled "organic" or "natural" are completely risk-free either. While a product may contain natural ingredients, you can just as easily



have an allergic reaction to a natural ingredient as to a synthetic one.

Mineral makeup is often recommended to people with problem skin. "Because of the mineral base, you're less likely to react to them, and they don't tend to clog pores," Vignjevic says.

Heung says that while mineral makeup is popular with some women with problem skin, it's not for everyone. She recommends choosing makeup that is also a skin treatment. "You need a product line geared for sensitive skin with ingredients that will soothe and moisturize everything from your forehead and cheeks to your eyelids—and it has to be good for the skin."

Heung has a few tips for applying makeup when the skin is sensitive: Apply foundation right after you've moisturized. If you find that powder irritates your skin, and you want to get rid of any shine, use a blotting tissue instead. You'll also get longer wear from an oil-free blusher or stick. If you're worried about using too many products on your face, try a tinted moisturizer instead.

Suggestions: Covergirl Clean Makeup Sensitive Skin, \$9.99; Clinique Redness Solutions Instant Relief Mineral Powder, \$39.50; La Roche-Posay Hydreane Tinted Moisturizer, \$25, Almay Wake-Up Hydrating Makeup, \$18.95.

Sun Protection

Sun exposure is problematic for people with sensitive skin.

While the best recourse is to avoid spending long periods outdoors, particularly during the summer, it's often difficult to avoid. That means sunscreen is imperative—and not just for people with sensitive skin. The growing incidence of skin cancer has taught us that we *all* need to protect our skin from harmful rays with sunscreen.

But the problem with some sunscreens, especially the thick, heavier brands, is that they can worsen sensitive skin because they can block pores and lead to acne. "Tropical" fragrances added to some brands can also lead to allergic reactions.

When you're choosing a sunscreen, Vignjevic suggests you opt for a spray or lotion, which can be lighter than, say, a heavy cream. He also recommends looking at the ingredient list for a product that contains Mexoryl XL, which is a good UVA block. (Both UVA and UVB rays are harmful and can cause cancer, but UVA rays tend to penetrate the skin more deeply. They're also the culprits when it comes to wrinkles.) Other sunscreen ingredients that are generally safe for people with sensitive skin include titanium dioxide and zinc oxide. (These ingredients are also found in mineral makeup.)

Suggestions: La Roche-Posay Anthélios XL Cream SPF 60, \$28; RoC Soleil Protexion Velvet Moisture Spray SPF 60, \$24; Neutrogena Ultra Sheer Dry Touch SPF 45, \$13.99; Vichy Capital Soleil Sun Block Cream SPF 60, \$29. ■

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