

# Are You Applying Serum the Right Way?

By Liz Ritter, Executive Editor | August 14, 2019



Serums, serums everywhere and, yet, sadly enough, most of us are taking quite a few missteps in the road to applying them correctly. So next time you slather one on, consider this cheat sheet to get the most from the skin-care staple:

## Targeted Formulas:

Let's start with the million-dollar question: What exactly is a serum? While mostly marketed for anti-aging benefits, serums can treat a variety of skin concerns. The sole distinguishing factor is that, unlike other formulas, serums comprise smaller molecules so the main ingredients are delivered deeper into the skin and provide quicker results. And, although they are just one piece of the beauty puzzle, serums can work wonders for the skin whether they are delivering antioxidants, peptides, vitamins, retinol and other anti-aging ingredients.

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## Marry With a Moisturizer:

Since most serums don't hydrate, Camp Hill, PA aesthetician Debra L. Yates' number-one tip is to not miss out on applying a moisturizer. "The moisturizer leaves a fine film on the skin and acts like a seal, while the serum allows the key ingredients to penetrate deeper."

## Full-Face Press:

New York dermatologist Jody Levine, MD recommends applying a few drops of your serum after you wash and tone your face, but before you apply moisturizer. "Gently press on with your fingertips and allow it to absorb into the skin for a few minutes before applying a moisturizer. Apply about a dime size of serum with two fingers, patting it on and then smoothing it out. Serums absorb deep into your skin, rather than sitting on the surface like moisturizers."

## Layer Away:

Rescue Spa's Kim Zimmerman says she often notices that clients don't typically know how to layer their serums properly and offers this general rule of thumb: "Layer your serums in order of thinnest to thickest in viscosity," she says. "This way, they can properly absorb deeper into the epidermis so that you receive the benefits of your products."

## Spot-Treat Tactics:

Zimmerman is also a fan of using serums to spot-treat, based on your skin concerns. "Not all serums need to be applied to all areas of the face. For instance, using a serum that is targeted toward healing acne on the T-zone, versus a more hydrating and anti-aging serum under the eyes, is best practice."

## The Waiting Game:

Serums are one skin-care product that need a little patience. "Let it sit for about 15 minutes before putting on moisturizer. Putting on moisturizer too soon can potentially affect the penetration of the ingredients," Phoenix dermatologist Mark A. Blair, MD says.

## Natural Order:

Dr. Levine says it's common to want to "massage" serums into the skin, but she urges to resist the temptation for best results. "Let the formula absorb on its own. Also, the serum should be applied in the correct order: face wash, toner, serum and before moisturizer."

## Microneedling Magic:

If you want your serums to work harder, Zimmerman recommends using a microneedling roller before applying. "This really pushes the product deeper into the epidermis as it enters the microchannels on the skin created by the needles."

## Ingredient Intel:

Zimmerman stresses that it is important to be aware of the ingredients in your serums, so that you aren't overdoing it on something active such as retinol, vitamin A or certain acids. "Depending on your skin-care routine, these ingredients may also show up in your cleanser and moisturizer, so it is important to be as aware—especially if you are sensitive."