

Why Glycerin Is the Ultimate Hydrating Skin-Care Ingredient

All of your questions, answered.

By Isabelle Friedman and Olivia Wohlner, Editorial Assistant - Sep 21, 2021



If skin-care ingredients were people, glycerin would be the fun, popular friend who's good at everything. Glycerin's powerful hydration ability makes it a key ingredient in moisturizers, and it's found in tons of other skin-care products from cleaners to pore minimizers to lip balms. So, where does glycerin come from, and why is it so ubiquitous?

Where does it come from?

According to cosmetic chemist Perry Romanowski, most glycerin is naturally derived from plant fats during the soap-making process called saponification. In saponification, natural oils (usually from vegetables) are combined with lye, the chemical reaction produces both soap and glycerin.

How does it work?

According to Montclair, NJ, dermatologist Jeanine Downie, MD, glycerin is a humectant, a type of moisturizing agent that pulls moisture out of the air and into your skin. "In skin care, it hydrates the skin, decreases fine lines and wrinkles and alleviates dry, itchy skin. **It's also good for the hair and the nails, especially for moisturizing the cuticles," she says. As New York dermatologist Jody Levine, MD explains, it also aids in wound healing, so it's great to use on the face or body after a skin injury or even after a procedure.**

Where is it found?

"Glycerin is found in many skin-care products including moisturizers and shaving creams," says Dr. Levine. According to Dr. Downie, it's also found in shampoos, conditioners, nail products, lotions and anti-aging products. Romanowski explains that glycerin is found in makeup, too: "It helps foundation and other liquid cosmetics stay flexible and crack-free," he says.

Who should use it?

Romanowski notes that glycerin is non-comedogenic, so it won't clog the pores or cause breakouts, but Dr. Downie says it's best to use on the face if you're not prone to acne. "That's because too much glycerin can slow absorption and make the skin greasy, which is not ideal for acne-prone skin. It's important to use it sparingly."

Another skin type Romanowski says glycerin loves is sensitive skin. "It's very unlikely to trigger irritation, especially in the relatively low concentrations used in skin care."

Skin-Care Favorites

1/6

Drunk Elephant T.L.C. Framboos Glycolic Resurfacing Night Serum (\$134)

With an abundant amount of glycerin—along with glycolic, lactic, tartaric and salicylic acids—this product works for all skin types. After washing your face, apply this serum at night to wake up with supple and radiant skin.



2/6

The Ordinary Natural Moisturizing Factors + HA (\$8)

This oil-free hydrating moisturizer delivers a double benefit by protecting and caring for the skin at the same time.



3/6

Eau Thermale Avene Skin Recovery Cream (\$35)

Designed for sensitive skin, this hydrating moisturizer heals and treats skin's outer layer while preventing future irritation and fine lines.



4/6

SkinCeuticals Triple Lipid Restore 2:4:2 (\$130)

To add brightness and life to the skin, this blend of glycerin, vitamin E and antioxidants does just the trick. Upon application, it dissolves quickly into the skin and with daily use, you'll see a significant difference in your skin's moisture and texture.



5/6

Aesop Rejuvenate Intensive Body Balm (\$97)

The non-greasy, light texture of this product contradicts the common misconception of body lotion being heavy and uncomfortable. Glycerin goes hand in hand with macadamia and sandalwood to create a luscious balm that quenches parched skin.



6/6

Paula's Choice Enriched Calming Toner (\$21)

Formulated to remove makeup, cleanse and hydrate, this glycerin-based toner improves skin's defenses against environmental variables, stress hormones, collagen loss and of course moisture.

