

SKIN HEALTH

10 Things to Never Do When Applying Skin Care

File these away under “moves-not-to-make.”

By Liz Ritter, Executive Editor · Updated: Mar 5, 2024



From your choice of towel to an all-too-common “dropper don’t,” these are the moves skin-care experts say you should stay away from when applying skin care.

Featured Experts

- **Jody A. Levine, MD** is a dermatologist based in New York City
- Joshua Zeichner, MD is a dermatologist based in New York City
- Elizabeth Bahar Houshmand, MD is a dermatologist based in Dallas
- Elizabeth Lampell is an aesthetician at Biologique Recherche Los Angeles
- Alicia McKeithan is aesthetician at Biologique Recherche Los Angeles

Don't take a dropper to the cheek.

New York dermatologist Joshua Zeichner, MD took to Instagram last year to “set the record straight” on what he categorizes as a huge mistake he sees skin-care influencers make every day on social media. “If you’re applying a skin-care product that uses a dropper, do not take that dropper and apply it directly to your cheek,” he advises. “You may like the way it looks in your video, but you’re contaminating the tip of the dropper that you are putting right back into the bottle. Instead, open the bottle, put a couple of drops on your palm or on the tips of your fingers and then apply it to your face.”

Don't apply your products to your palm.

Don't apply your products to your palm, says Dallas dermatologist Elizabeth Bahar Houshmand, MD. “Too much of your serums, lotions and creams will be wasted into your palms. Apply your products to the tops of your hands.”

Don't go out of order.

Besides not applying products consistently and not paying attention to your skin type and using products that aren't suitable for you, New York dermatologist **Jody A. Levine, MD** says a big miss is applying products in the wrong order. (For example, applying sunscreen before serum.) “It is very important to consult with a board-certified dermatologist to make sure that you have a regimen of products and a routine that is suitable for your skin,” she advises.

Don't dismiss a proper cleanse.

In addition to keeping makeup brushes and applicators clean, **Dr. Levine** says not cleansing your skin properly before applying skin care can lead to further skin issues.

Don't forget to wipe down your products.

Elizabeth Lampell, aesthetician at Biologique Recherche Los Angeles, strongly supports the above and offers this in-line advice: “Never dip your fingers directly into your product containers. Use a Q-tip or small product spatula,” she says. “Also, get into the habit of frequently wiping down the outside of your products. Clean products help to avoid the spread of bacteria on the skin which cause breakouts.” Dr. Houshmand also stresses the importance of this one: “You have to wash your hands before dipping into your jars! I like to use a little skin-care spatula and wash my hands as the first part of my skin-care routine.”

Don't use too-hot of water.

This one is more of a post-move, but it's still a solid one: Avoid the use of hot water on the skin, and, if possible, wash your face in the sink rather than the shower, Lampell advises. “Hot water can cause; sensitivity, inflammation, dryness and can lead to loosening the skins elasticity.”

Don't use a dirty towel.

Might sound like a no-brainer, but Lampell says she sees it a ton. “When drying your face, reach for a clean towel, a reusable cotton pad or a single-use cotton face towel.”

Don't go overboard.

Multistep skin-care routines may be the rage, but Alicia McKeithan, aesthetician at Biologique Recherche Los Angeles, is not a fan. “Less is always more! Applying too many products onto the skin at once can cause irritation and sensitivity which can lead to chemical burns, rashes, or textured skin.” Dr. Houshmand stresses that this rule really applies to exfoliation, in particular. “Don't over exfoliate your skin—your skin needs downtime. Once a week is enough.”

Don't wait to “feel the burn.”

“Products should never irritate or burn when applied to the skin,” McKeithan says. “That can be an indication of the product being too strong or the skin barrier is compromised.”

Don't drag.

If you don't really pay attention to how you remove a mask, McKeithan suggests you start. “When removing masks or cleansers, we never want to drag the skin,” she says. “It can result in premature aging and irritation.”