

# The Many Reasons You May Want to Clean Your Makeup Brushes-Stat

Plus, the million-dollar question: Do you need to use a UV sanitizer?

By Liz Ritter, Executive Editor · APR 27, 2020



**I**f you have a long list of To Do items and an even longer list of “things I should do regularly but never seem to remember,” chances are, cleaning your makeup brushes almost certainly makes the cut somewhere. The basic move just never seems so simple—yet skipping the task can cause some serious issues.

*“Dirty brushes accumulate bacteria and dirt from their surrounding environment which, when transferred to one’s face during makeup application, can exacerbate skin conditions such as acne, or introduce bacteria under the skin to any areas where the skin is open, such as a cut or scrape,” says New York dermatologist **Jody Levine, MD**. “During this time, we want to take all precautions against contact with germs so cleansing brushes is important.”*

### **The Skin-Aging Connection**

*If the current climate and the “germ factor” doesn’t scare you, maybe all the visible skin conditions that can show up from dirty brushes will. As **Dr. Levine** explains, dead skin cells and oil can also accumulate on makeup brushes, leading to clogged pores, breakouts and—this is the big one—damaged skin. Plus, she adds, bacteria on and around the face can cause some very scary situations in the form of pink eye and staph infections. “This bacterium can lead to increased oxidative stress on your skin,” she says. “One can postulate that this oxidative stress leads to breakdown of collagen and elastin, the process involved in skin aging and wrinkle formation.”*

### **The Time Factor**

While we might have some extra time on our hands of late, Louisville, KY dermatologist Tami Buss Cassis, MD consistently stresses the importance of cleaning brushes as a standard recommendation to all her patients. “It has always been important to clean your brushes to protect your face from germs, which includes bacteria, virus and fungus,” she says. “But, of course, it’s now important that we reflect on the fundamentals of life and make sure we are measuring up.” Campbell, CA dermatologist Amelia K. Hausauer, MD does the same, regardless of the timing: “I don’t feel that it is particularly more important than usual right now—because it is always important—with the exception of two reasons: We now have more time to learn good habits so, that when life gets busier, we will already be cleaning our brushes and, two, we are being particularly careful about touching our skin at the moment. So, if someone is sick at home, you want to make sure that nothing contaminated touches your face.”

### **The Product-Buildup Problem**

While Dr. Cassis says you can buy a UV sanitizer that will fit a makeup brush, she’s a supporter of using straight-up soap and water. Brookline, MA dermatologist Papri Sarkar, MD agrees, and actually prefers the latter: “I think soap and water is better because makeup brushes can build up bacteria and mold, but they also build up product. UV won’t help to remove product, so a gentle soap and water is best,” she says. Celebrity makeup artist Ermahn Ospina also doesn’t use a UV sanitizer. “Instead, I like to focus on my routine of cleaning and sanitizing my makeup brushes with certain brush-cleaning products or drugstore hand soap and water.”

### **The Great Makeup Sponge Debate**

This is where things get a bit divided. Dr. Cassis personally uses both makeup brushes and makeup sponges, but she “follows the rules” (i.e., she diligently cleans them both). **Dr. Levine recommends using a brush over a sponge, since she says bacteria can seep into the sponge, but also flags the importance of cleaning both.** *“Regardless of the tool used for makeup application, both carry the risk of carrying bacteria and oil, and should be cleaned thoroughly.”*

Likewise, Dr. Hausauer prefers brushes—with an exception. “Disposable makeup sponges are good, but only if you use them for a few days, at most. Unfortunately, many are not particularly eco-friendly, which is always a concern,” she says, adding that any “Beautyblender-type sponges are amazing for giving an airbrushed finish, but they can also harbor a large volume of bacteria in the nooks and crannies, making cleaning that much more essential. What makes it worst is that you usually moisten these sponges, which is an optimal breeding ground for germs. A study out of the UK found that these makeup products had the highest concentration of bacteria, especially for staphylococcus, aka staph, and fungus. If you cut the sponge in half, you can actually see the debris.”

## **The Application Situation**

Makeup artist and brand founder Jenny Patinkin is also a huge proponent of always keeping your makeup brushes clean, mainly because makeup simply goes on more smoothly and efficiently when you do so. She also tags another, yet lesser-known reason: "Since we can't get to the store to replenish makeup products as easily as we once did, and since deliveries and shipments have been seeing delays, clean makeup brushes also help to make your current products last longer. Without any oil buildup on the tips, they will pick up less makeup from the pan and distribute it more evenly on your skin, which means you can actually use less makeup. And, it'll prohibit any transfer of those oils from your brush to the surface of your products, which causes those little shiny, hard speckles on the surface of your products that make it more difficult to pick up on the brush."

She also backs the soap route (she manufactures an eponymous Luxury Vegan Makeup Brush Soap) and defends the makeup sponge move, so much so that she just launched one. "The Brush Soap is very easy to use, comes in a portable and mess-free pan and rinses away quickly and easily. Plus, it's antibacterial and antimicrobial," she says, adding that, for total confidence you have exorcised any germs and bacteria, a couple of spritzes of rubbing alcohol on clean, dry brushes is the way to go. "I do not recommend submerging your brushes in alcohol, as that can dry out natural hair bristles or end up breaking down the glue which can lead to shedding." She recommends a similar route for using her makeup sponges. "They're antibacterial, but again, for extra insurance against virus microbes, it's best to spray clean, dry sponges with a little rubbing alcohol prior to each use."

## **The Bottom Line**

"Bacterial infections, viral infections, fungal infections! These are all things you want to avoid," says Dr. Cassis. "But, as always, when you need a board-certified dermatologist we are still here for you. Just as we always have been."

## **Bonus Round: Product Picks**

### **Cinema Secrets Brush Cleaner (\$24)**

Ospina lists this cleanser as one of his favorites. "It takes all the makeup and all the dirt off my makeup brushes easily and it dries quickly, which makes it convenient when I have to re-use a makeup brush right away," he says. "It also preserves the look and the soft feel of my makeup brushes not matter how much I use it."

### **beautyblender Liquid blendercleanser (\$18)**

"This one uses de-mineralized water and sea salt to absorb all toxins and germs out of my makeup brushes and my beautyblender sponges," Ospina says. "It also has a lavender oil that leaves sponges and brushes with an aromatic, soothing scent. Also very important for this the COVID19 era: It continues protection from 99.9 percent of harmful germs 24 hours after washing."

### **Dial Gold Antibacterial Liquid Hand Soap (\$2)**

"Because this soap kills harmful bacteria 10 more times that any other regular hand soap, it gives me me a great feeling of confidence that my makeup brushes are being sanitized," Ospina says. "It also contains conditioners that leave my hands and makeup brushes feeling soft. After washing my makeup brushes with Dial and warm water, I lay them flat on a paper towel and leave them to air-dry."

### **Puracy (Starting at \$6)**

Ospina likes this soap because it is non-toxic, biodegradable, hypoallergenic, natural, and "very gentle, but still strong enough to get all the dirt and makeup off brushes."