Surprising Tips for Sharpening Your Lovemaking Skills

How Well Do You Know Him/Her? (A Quiz)

Roseanne: Down to Fighting Weight but Bigger Than Ever

The Latest, Truest Update on What to Eat and Avoid

Q: I keep hearing about alpha-hydroxy acids. Can you explain how they work?

A: Alpha-hydroxy acids (AHAs) are the latest scientific weapon in the war against wrinkles, fine lines, age spots, and sun damage. These natural substances (derived from fruits, plants, and sour milk) work by loosening gluelike attachments in the upper dermis, causing dull, dry, dead skin cells to flake off, explains New York City dermatologist Alan Kling. Result: fresher, smoother, more-even-in-skin-tone complexion. AHAs don't irritate like such previous antiaging ingredients as Retin-A did, so they can be used without danger of redness, burning, or photosensitivity. See a dermatologist for a prescription and treatment program, or try one of the new AHA-based beauty products: Prescriptives' All You Need, Estee Lauder's Fruition, and Avon's Anew.
• **Salicylic acid** is chemical (as opposed to mechanical) exfoliant. Look for products that contain it.

• **At-home** chemical peel: Puree one papaya in blender, then apply like mask; enzymes eat away dead top layer. (Pepto-Bismol has same effect.)

• **Say adios** to sun-worshipping days... It's time to start thinking about complexion's future! If you *must* bake, be sure to apply lotion with SPF 15 (or higher) twenty minutes before exposure; reapply every two hours.

• **Tanning** parlors are even worse than real sun—emit stronger UVA rays. Avoid!

• **Squinting**, furrowing, frowning, cause *permanent* creasing. To break such bad habits: Whenever you're alone, place piece of tape over each area involved—that sharp little tug will soon teach you to stop.

• **Dislodge blackheads** with tomato slices. Drape over nose, chin, forehead, for ten minutes.

• **Mask** that makes skin soft, kissable: Mash a banana and spread all over face. Leave on ten minutes, then rinse with cold water.

• **Custom-blended** foundation is a godsend—and worth the money. (Lets you fake perfect complexion.)

• **Vitamin C** boosts production of healthy epidermal cells. Take 1,500 milligrams daily.

• **Exercise** equals great—which enlarges pores of arthritis. Wipe face with a toner-soaked cotton pad immediately afterward.

• **Alpha-hydroxy** ointment—treasured by dermatologists for everything—wrinkles to pimples—is now available at the drugstore. (Feels away surface dermis.)

• **Zany zit zappers:** sliced garlic, milk of magnesia, nail-polish remover. Take your pick; press into blemishes.

**BEAUTY DIRECTOR:** ANDREA FOMERANZ LYNN
**PHOTOGRAPHER:** ANDREW ECCLES
**HAIR** BY ROBERT OCCHIPINTI FOR ORIBE AT ELIZABETH ARDEN
**MAKEUP** BY VANESSA SCALI
**SKIN CONSULTANTS:** LEWIS M. FEELER, N.V.C.; ALAN KLING, M.D., N.V.C.; LYDIA SARFAI, RE'ECHAGE, N.V.C.
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HOME AND HIGH-TECH HELP

Proper cleansing is crucial. Use gentle, soap-free product twice daily—doesn’t matter which one, just that you use it! Follow with oil-free, over-the-counter acne medication (choose gel form) containing benzoyl peroxide, camphor, salicylic acid, or sulfur—all kill bacteria on skin’s surface. (“Natural” buffs: Honey does same thing—apply like mask for ten minutes, then rinse.) You might try a clay mask once a week to dry up oil too, but avoid exfoliants—scrubbing action may actually spread infection.

This basic routine can be supplemented at the dermatologist’s office via more-intensive methods. Most popular is Retin-A—works by thinning out top layers of skin, so blackheads and whiteheads “fall off,” explains New York City dermatologist Alan Kling. Results are evident after about four weeks of daily use; sunscreen is mandatory during treatment. Topical antibiotics (clindamycin, erythromycin) are often prescribed alone or in conjunction with Retin-A. These work by destroying bacteria, thereby sterilizing skin. Medications with prescription levels (more than 10 percent) of benzoyl peroxide have similar effect. In severe cases, oral antibiotics—tetracycline, Accutane—are prescribed, but only if patient has no intention of conceiving soon (can cause severe birth defects). A new three-step in-office plastic-surgery procedure—called microderm—is another option. First, skin is “dermaplaned”—less-intense form of dermabrasion—in which just top skin layer is sanded away (no blood is drawn). Next, acid solution is applied (gets into pores and loosens dead debris). Finally, dry ice is used to burn away bacteria. Whole treatment takes fifteen minutes and requires no “down” time—makeup will cover redness, so you can go right back to work, notes New York City plastic surgeon Barry Weintraub, who performs the procedure. You return three more times (every other week) and use Retin-A at home... voilà: gorgeous, blemish-free skin!