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Your Skin-Care Routine Based On Your Period Cycle

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You're probably all too familiar with the blitzkrieg of blemishes that show up on your jaw line just before your period. This splotchy smattering is essentially a billboard to the world that reads: "Hey! I'm about to shed my uterus!" Less noticeable, but still frustrating, is the fluctuation of oil production and dryness that also occurs throughout your cycle as a result of hormonal shifts. Periods are a beautiful thing, aren't they?

In short, your skin undergoes a series of changes over your 28 days (give or take). As such, altering your cosmetic routine based on the time of the month will be super beneficial. We spoke to several dermatologists to help you make the best skin-care choices during your monthly cycle. If you are on the pill, your hormones are regulated so you don't ovulate. Your monthly skin changes might be less

dramatic because you have less acne-causing testosterone, but they can still follow a similar pattern.

Post-Period

After your period ends, your levels of estrogen begin to increase. This causes your uterine walls to thicken and prompts an egg to mature within a follicle. At this time in your cycle, your skin typically looks and feels in tip-top shape.

"Our skin tends to look its best when our estrogen is at its highest — right before ovulation," says Debbie Palmer, MD, a board certified dermatologist and the medical director of Dermatology Associates of New York. "During this time, skin tends to be hydrated, pores appear smaller, and collagen production is increased."

As always, make sure you're wearing an SPF. However, now's the chance to skip the heavy foundation and let your skin breathe. May we suggest a no-makeup makeup routine during this estrogen-packed portion of your monthly cycle?

If you're prone to acne throughout the month regardless, continue to use products containing acne-fighting ingredients such as salicylic acid, benzoyl peroxide, and tea tree oil. You may find that you need a less potent dose during this time of the month.



Ovulation

Ovulation occurs about two weeks before your period arrives, or roughly 14 days into a typical 28-day cycle. This is when a wee egg, called an ovum, leaves your ovary and makes its trek to your uterus via a fallopian tube. The continued increase in estrogen levels during this time triggers an increase in a different hormone, referred to as Luteinizing hormone (LH).

Unfortunately, LH increases oil production, which breeds the ideal environment for bacteria and, you guessed it, acne. You're likely to see a blemish or two appear during these days in your cycle, so this is prime time to really amp up your anti-acne routine and tend to your skin as best as you can.

"During the oily times, make sure to use an oil-free makeup and oil-free moisturizer," says Michele Green, MD, a board certified dermatologist and contributor at RealSelf.com. She

says to look for the words "non-comedogenic" when buying and using skin-care products, as they have been tested and do not clog your pores or cause acne.

Pre-Menstrual

Once your egg adheres itself to the now-cushy walls of your womb, it sits and waits for a sperm to join the party. But when fertilization doesn't happen, your level of estrogen will decrease, which initiates good ol' PMS as your uterus preps for a shedding extravaganza.

"Skin tends to look its worst during the days leading up to your period," says Dr. Palmer. "There is a decrease in estrogen and surge of progesterone and testosterone about a week before your period. This surge can cause oil production and pores to become clogged with sebum, making them appear larger."

Welcome to breakout city. "These breakouts can be anywhere on the face, but typically hormonal acne tends to be on the chin and along the jawline," notes Dr. Green. Sounds familiar.

Dr. Palmer recommends using a cleanser with a higher amount of salicylic acid during the blemish-prone period that is PMS. This type of cleanser cleans out pores more effectively, nixes excess oil, and keeps bacteria and blemishes at bay.

"I always recommend using a retinoid because it will not only even out your pigmentation, but will also reduce your risk for breakouts and give a smoother texture to the skin," adds Ava Shamban, MD, a board certified dermatologist and founder of AvaMD.

As you may have guessed — or surmised from your own experience over the years — this is the portion of your cycle where your skin is most sensitive. For this reason, it's particularly imperative that you're attentive to its needs.

An interesting aside: You may find you have a greater desire to wear more makeup during this time of your cycle. And it's not just to cover up your skin, according to a study completed by psychologists at the University of Glasgow, you can thank your increased testosterone levels for that.

"Results suggest that testosterone may contribute to changes in women's motivation to wear attractive makeup and, potentially, their motivation to appear attractive in general," the study reports. But, the combination of an increase in makeup and a higher likelihood of breaking out doesn't bode well.

"With regard to makeup, you must be more diligent about washing your face and removing make-up, especially if you are prone to breakouts," says Dr. Shamban. "You want to allow your skin to breathe."

Menses

You all know how this story ends: with blood. As your uterine wall sheds, tissue and blood pass through your cervix and make their way out of the body. "During your period, levels of estrogen are low, and inflammatory prostaglandins are high," says Dr. Palmer. Though your skin isn't as oily or as prone to breaking out as it is during PMS, it's still not in the best of shape.

"[Low levels of estrogen] can cause your skin to look blotchy and leave you feeling tired and run down," notes Palmer. "It is during these times that I stress the use of topical and oral antioxidants to help soothe your skin. My favorite ingredients are *Coffea arabica* (fruit of the coffee plant), green tea, and Vitamin C."

With all that said, know that no two menstrual cycles are the same. To regulate hormones and increase circulation to the skin, do your best to live a balanced life. Translation: Get enough sleep, manage stress levels, exercise often, and listen to your skin's needs.