

# Do I really need to exfoliate my skin?

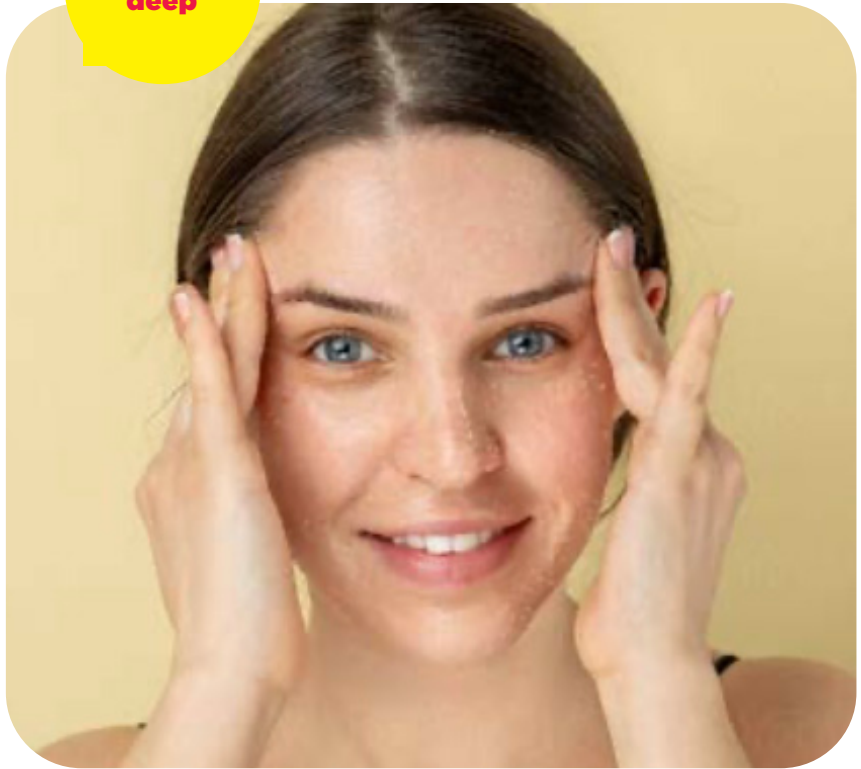


**THE EXPERT**  
Cosmetic doctor,  
Dr Ewoma Ukeleghe,  
founder of Skndoctor

**To exfoliate or not to exfoliate?** Exfoliation is accused of being the culprit for surging sensitivity and the phrase ‘physical scrub’ sends shudders down the spines of dermatologists everywhere, so you might be pondering the same question. But exfoliation is fundamental to skincare routines.

Exfoliating your face removes dead skin cells, typically from the epidermis’ upper layer, which reveals softer and more radiant skin underneath. This can be done via physical or chemical exfoliation. The former involves manual, mechanical techniques such as scrubs, brushes or loofahs; the latter refers to the use of acids, including AHAs (alpha hydroxy acids) and BHAs (beta hydroxy acids), which penetrate deep into the pores to lift away dead cells and debris on the skin’s surface. You can also achieve deeper forms of exfoliation through medical interventions such as clinical-grade chemical peels.

The glow-giving benefits of exfoliation are undisputed. But the rise of exfoliating hacks – not least from social media – has been blamed for an increase in secondary skin conditions such as sensitive skin or dermatitis (skin irritation). The reason? Over-exfoliation. Exfoliating too often or



using an inappropriate strength of acid for your skin type can damage the function of the skin barrier (the outermost layer of skin), manifesting as sensitive skin, redness, tightness and itchiness. If this sounds familiar, my advice would be to stop exfoliating until the sensitivity subsides and nourish the barrier function by using ceramide-rich products.

The right exfoliation routine will depend on your skin type and concerns. As a general rule, aim to use an exfoliating product two to three times a week – or more if the formula is gentle. I always urge my patients to adjust the frequency according to what their skin can handle – a product might call for daily application, but it’s okay to reduce this if your skin is becoming increasingly sensitised.

As for the chemical versus physical debate, I prefer chemical

exfoliants, as I believe they’re more efficacious and less likely to irritate (when used correctly). If you have sensitive skin – or are new to acids – look for formulas containing PHAs (polyhydroxy acids) or lactic acid. Due to their larger molecule size, they don’t penetrate as deep into the skin and offer a gentle exfoliation compared with other acids. If you have oily or acne-prone skin, salicylic acid will prove a salve, helping to reduce sebum levels by breaking down fatty acids, such as oil on the skin’s surface. Struggle with dark spots or hyperpigmentation? Look for glycolic or azelaic acid.

For those exfoliating on a regular basis, be careful not to overwhelm your skin with other potent actives like retinol (also a strong exfoliator) and to always wear sunscreen during the day, given that acids increase skin’s photosensitivity.



## EXFOLIATION STATION



### 1 Nip+Fab Salicylic Fix Night Pads, £14.95

Best suited for those with normal to oily skin types due to the inclusion of salicylic acid in the ingredients list.

### 2 Ren Clean Skincare Ready Steady Glow Daily AHA Tonic, £28

Includes lactic and azelaic acid for those looking to address hyperpigmentation.

### 3 Medik8 Press & Glow Daily Exfoliating PHA Tonic, £27

Best for sensitive skin, as PHAs are some of the gentlest acids, plus this one also contains soothing aloe vera.

### 4 FaceGym Skin Changer 2-in-1 Toner, £38

Essentially a toner meets essence for dull, dehydrated skin. Perfect for layering with your existing skincare routine.



# How do I know if my skin barrier is damaged?



**THE EXPERT**  
Dr Ewoma Ukeleghe, skincare specialist, founder of Skndoctor

There's a strong chance that the term 'skin barrier' has entered your beauty lexicon. It's the outermost layer of the skin and it's being touted as the ticket to a healthy glow. So how can you tell if yours is living up to its USP?

The skin barrier (stratum corneum) is the first layer of the epidermis and is designed to protect the underlying layers of healthy cells. Think of it like a brick wall: these 'bricks' (skin cells) are held together by 'mortar' (lipids, such as ceramides). They keep vital moisture in and undesirables (such as bacteria and pollution) out.

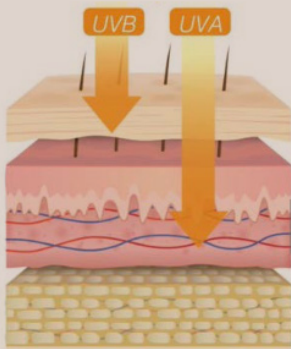
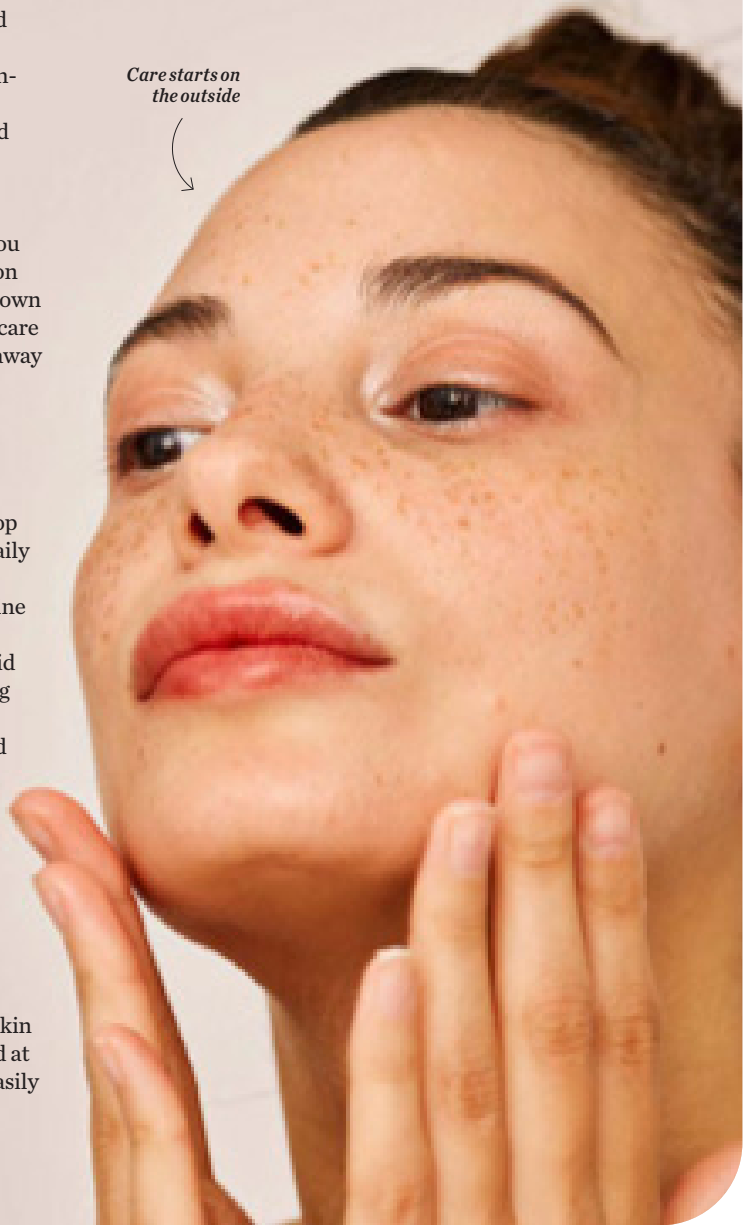
The good news? The stratum corneum is the layer most affected by products such as acids and retinol. They speed

up cell turnover, revealing the healthy cells below. The bad news is that an overzealous approach can erode the skin-barrier function, leading to an irritated, dehydrated and sensitive complexion.

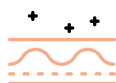
An increase in Google searches for 'damaged skin barrier' suggests many of you are suffering. An explanation as to why begins with lockdown ennui, when excessive skincare became the trend to while away the hours. The signs of an impaired skin barrier? Everything from dryness, roughness, itchiness and redness to sensitivity.

The first thing to do is stop overloading the skin. For daily barrier maintenance, take stock of your skincare routine – stay away from harsh physical exfoliants and avoid products loaded with drying alcohol. A simple routine could comprise a gentle and non-foaming cleanser, serum, moisturiser and SPF during the day and the same routine (minus the sunscreen) in the evening. Focus on hydrating your skin with ceramides and fatty acids, as they help to rebalance a compromised skin barrier. They can be applied at any time of day, so will fit easily into your routine and work best when teamed with peptides and antioxidants.

Care starts on the outside



## BARRIER BOOST



### 1 CeraVe Hydrating Cream-to-Foam Cleanser, £12.50, Boots

This cleanser has a creamy texture that leaves your skin clean, without feeling that it's been stripped.



### 2 Dr.Jart+ Ceramidin Cream, £32, Dr.Jart+ Liberty

A cult product among skintellectuals, thanks to its proprietary blend of ceramides. Its nourishing shea-rich formulation further supports its benefits to your skin.



### 3 Medik8 Clarity Peptides, £45, Liberty

This milky serum contains 10% niacinamide (a barrier-supporting active), zinc and peptides. I recommend this to anyone with acne or redness-prone skin and a damaged barrier.



### 4 Biossance Squalane + Omega Repair Cream, £45, Cult Beauty

This moisturiser hydrates and nourishes the skin barrier with biomimetic fatty acids and squalane. Ideal for very dry skin.



# How can I get rid of bum spots?



**THE EXPERT**  
Dr Ewoma Ukeleghe, skincare specialist, founder of Skndoctor

**Maskne** might have secured a place in the public's vernacular over the past couple of years, but as swimwear

season approaches, there's a new skin concern on the horizon: 'buttne'.

As the name suggests, 'buttne' refers to acne-like blemishes on the buttocks, but these marks aren't actually acne at all. It's usually folliculitis – an inflamed hair follicle – and typically presents as tender, red bumps that often have a white head.

This can be caused by a few different things: infection, blockage of the follicle or tight clothing. Infections can lead to painful boils; in this instance, you should see a medical professional for treatment.

If your spots aren't so severe, you're likely dealing with clogged follicles and irritation, which can be easily solved.

Regular exfoliation is key. Aim for twice a week – your body's skin is less sensitive than your face, but be



cautious and don't overdo it. Ease off if there's any discomfort or redness.

Always make time for a post-workout shower, too. If you can't, changing out of damp gear into fresh clothes will help to reduce the chances of irritation.

Avoid wearing tight clothes on your lower body if you can; the chronic rubbing puts pressure on your skin, which blocks your follicles and leads to ingrown hairs.

Take care after shaving or waxing as well. If you do shave your bum, try something like Gillette's Venus Pubic Hair and Skin range, which includes a great razor and skincare products to reduce the risk of ingrown hairs. If the problem persists, consider laser hair removal instead.

Another new emerging treatment is LED therapy. It's quite uncommon but promising. The blue and red light acts as both an antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory agent. The Light Salon's Boost LED Body Patch (£375, thelight-salon.com) can help target specific areas of skin.

Disappointingly, the skin on your body is quite often ignored – until you spot an issue (no pun intended) – but a few simple steps can help keep your skin glowing all year round, bum and all.



**1 BLEMISH-BUSTING BUM PRODUCTS**

Looking to banish those breakouts for good? Here are our four top picks

**1 Murad Clarifying Body Spray, £39**  
This quick-drying salicylic acid-based treatment comes with a 360-degree spray, making it super easy to use in awkward places. A go-to for blemishes on the body.



**2 Ren Clean Skincare Ready Steady Glow Daily AHA Tonic, £28**  
This toner blends AHAs, BHAs and azelaic acid – an exfoliating trifecta ideal for minimising lumps and bumps on the body. Use a few times a week at most.



**3 Ameliorate Transforming Body Lotion Supersize, £40**  
Enriched with lactic acid and sweet almond oil, this moisturiser is going to leave your bum feeling silky smooth. And it's great for sensitive skin.



**4 Acnecide Face Wash Spot Treatment, £9.99**  
Folliculitis isn't quite acne, but anti-acne ingredients can treat it – specifically benzoyl peroxide, which limits inflammation and bacterial growth.

