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Alpha hydroxy acid facial treatments

Alpha hydroxy acids or AHAs rejuvenate the skin by encouraging the shedding of old, sun-damaged surface skin cells. Glycolic acid is a fruit acid most frequently used for facial treatments but lactic and citric acid are also useful. Lactic acid is found in meat, cheese, yogurt and pickled vegetables.

Who should use AHA treatments?

AHA preparations are recommended for those whose skin is showing signs of [ageing](#). [Fine lines](#), [brown marks](#) and dry spots ([solar keratoses](#)) can improve with regular applications or peels. Glycolic acid may also prove helpful for those prone to [acne](#).

How do they work?

With time and sun exposure there is a gradual but slow-down in the rate at which old cells leave the surface of the skin and are replaced by newer cells. This results in a surface layer of dead skin cells that are responsible for the appearance of aged skin.

AHAs loosen the glue-like substances that hold the surface skin cells to each other, therefore allowing the dead skin to peel off. The skin underneath has a fresher, healthier look with a more even colour and texture.

With high concentration and long-term use, AHAs may also affect the deeper layers of the skin. Collagen and elastin regenerate making fine lines less obvious.

What do AHA peels involve?

An ideal treatment for busy people who are unable to take time off work for a deeper peel or [laser resurfacing](#), AHA facial peels gently retexture the skin over a period of a few months. The treatments are also helpful in stabilising oily or acne-prone skin and improving skin tone.

A glycolic acid [peel](#) takes about 15 – 20 minutes. It is usually repeated at one to two weekly intervals as it is superficial so recovery is rapid. The strength of each peel ranges from 20 – 70%, depending on skin sensitivity and starting gently.

The face is cleansed thoroughly and then the peel solution is applied for three minutes. It stings mildly. The solution is then washed off.

Treated skin may be a little pink immediately after treatment. A little peeling may occur over the next few days. It can be disguised with moisturizer or normal make-up.

AHA skin care products

There are many products with varying concentrations of various AHAs in differing bases. For the best results, leave-on preparations should be applied at night, if necessary twice daily. They can be alternated with other anti-aging preparations including [retinoid creams](#) and [vitamin C](#).

There are specific preparations for dry, normal and oily skin. Those available from medical practitioners are stronger than those at pharmacies and beauty therapists.

Don't forget the most important skin care tip – Always [protect your skin from the sun!](#)

DermNet does not provide an on-line consultation service.
If you have any concerns with your skin or its treatment, see a [dermatologist](#) for advice.

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