



Why using the right skin care product matters

The skin acts as a barrier to protect us from the environment. If the skin is dry and cracked, however, this function can be affected, and using the wrong skin care products can add to the problem. Read on to find out why the right skin care matters.



The skin is the largest organ in body, and has many important functions.

One of its key roles is to act as a barrier against the outside world. The epidermis, the outermost layer of the skin, performs this barrier function. In order for the epidermis to do its job well, it needs to be healthy and intact.

A wall of protection

Close up, the epidermis looks like a brick wall, with the 'bricks' or skin cells

held in place with a 'mortar' of natural fats (also known as lipids). These fats are responsible for maintaining the skin's hydration, firmness, and smoothness, and hold the skin cells or 'bricks' in place.

In its healthy state, there are no cuts or cracks in the skin, so its barrier function works perfectly. This brick wall-like structure makes the skin impermeable to foreign invaders, such as irritants, allergens, and micro-organisms.



The barrier function of the skin can be affected when the skin becomes dry and irritated. This results in damage to its defensive brick wall. This can happen as a result of exposure to things in the environment that strip the skin of its moisture and natural oils. This can include central heating, wind, sun and exposure to irritants such as abrasive skin care products. Once the defences of the epidermis are penetrated, more irritants can enter, and the skin may become red, dry and sensitive.

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So why does skin care matter?

Some products are full of abrasive chemicals that can strip the natural fats from the epidermis, leaving it dry and red. Continued use may result in breaks in the skin which provide an entry point for bacteria and irritants.

These products can also disrupt the pH of the skin, making it more alkaline and therefore more hospitable to the unfriendly micro-organisms that prefer these conditions to the

usual acidic environment of the skin.

Skin pH

The surface of the epidermis is designed to be slightly acidic, at pH 5.5. This is known as the acid mantle. The acid mantle protects us against infection, since the micro-organisms that could cause skin infection do not grow well in an acidic environment. Cleverly, skin-friendly bacteria are adapted to survive in these conditions.

Additionally, the enzymes that help the skin to shed old cells are activated at an acidic pH. Changes in pH can therefore affect enzyme activity and interfere with the skin's normal shedding process which could result in a build up of flaky skin.

The products we expose our skin to can sometimes affect its pH, and as a result, the protective function of the acid mantle.

In combination, cracked, irritated skin which allows entry into the body and a pH that favours micro-organism growth makes the risk of skin infection much more likely.

Cleansing and moisturising the skin regularly can help to maintain skin health but the right products must be used. Products that include perfumes and abrasive chemicals may strip the skin of moisture, and disrupt its pH, resulting in a damaged barrier function, so should be avoided. For all aspects of your skin care from cleansing to moisturising, look for gentle products with a skin neutral pH. Fragrance free, bland products will be gentle to the oily layer of the epidermis, helping to preserve its protect barrier. Look out for 'pH neutral' on the label. Skin-friendly products will cause minimal disruption to the skin, meaning it can work at its best. 

