

it's not easy to suss out the concentration of acid in any given peel, since cosmetics companies aren't required to list the amounts of ingredients on the product label. Some do, such as the L'Oréal ReNoviste Anti-Aging Glycolic Peel (10 percent). And others will tell persistent magazine editors—so we can pass along that Avon Anew Clinical Advanced Retexturizing Peel has 10 percent glycolic acid.

Q ■ A mild peel from my dermatologist costs \$250, but my facialist only charges \$75. Would I be crazy to get a peel from a facialist?

Not at all. Depending on state regulations, facialists are allowed to use only low concentrations of acid, usually between 20 and 40 percent—so you should be safe. This level of peel will leave skin exfoliated and taut, and can help soften very fine lines. Some aestheticians may promise their peels will erase wrinkles and brown spots, but dermatologists say that to treat those, you have to go to a doctor who can use a much stronger acid solution.

If you're worried about irritation, stick to lower-concentration peels, particularly at first. And whatever you choose, make sure that the aesthetician performing your peel is licensed. It's a good idea to ask to see her credentials. Inquire about her experience, too. She should ask you certain questions, namely what you regularly use on your skin and what medications you take, since both can influence how the acid penetrates. If she doesn't ask—and can't answer any of your questions—tell her you've changed your mind and walk out the door.

Q ■ My dermatologist says I should get a whole package of peels, not just one. Is that really necessary?

Some dermatologists suggest a series of about six peels, followed by a maintenance peel every four months. This is because each peel can go a little deeper, addressing more fine lines and discoloration, if performed before a layer of dead skin cells has had a chance to build up again. At a spa, peels are probably too mild to achieve that cumulative effect. Still, booking a block of peels may get you a better deal.

Q ■ My spa offers a so-called lunchtime peel—but can I really go to a meeting a few hours later?

Common sense says to avoid any new treatments if you have to look your best afterward. That said, most women are fine after a mild peel. Skin may be flushed for a few hours, but it's OK to apply makeup right away. And despite the name, most spa peels are not strong enough to cause real peeling. "It's a micropeeling process," says

acid, the most common beta hydroxy, will penetrate clogged pores without irritating already inflamed skin.

Q ■ I'm 25. Would a peel be a total waste of time for me?
It depends. If you're in your early 20s, you don't smoke, and you've been assiduous about applying sunscreen, you probably don't need to bother. But mild peels are ideal for women in their 20s and beyond who have some sun damage—or

A home peel is like a glass of wine after a hard day: It will make everything seem better.

Doris Day, clinical assistant professor of dermatology at New York University School of Medicine. "You don't actually see your skin sloughing off." Even a doctor's lunchtime version won't cause anything worse than minor irritation and a little dryness and flaking.

Q ■ Glycolic acid, lactic acid, fruit acid—how do I decide which one to use?

Those are all alpha hydroxy acids, and there absolutely are differences among them. Glycolic acid is the smallest molecule, so it penetrates the skin faster and goes deeper than other acids. This makes it the most effective—and therefore the most prevalent—of the acids in chemical peels, but it also means it has the most potential to irritate. Lactic acid is gentler and has the added benefit of hydrating dry skin. "As it removes that top layer of cells, lactic acid draws moisture into the skin," says Great Neck, New York, dermatologist Jeannette Graf. Fruit acids, which are used almost exclusively by facialists, are by far the gentlest of the acids and have the least potential to irritate the skin.

For women with acne, dermatologists often recommend trying a beta hydroxy peel. "Beta hydroxies are better at dissolving oil," Graf says. Salicylic

know they will soon pay for those spring breaks in high school. Peels can help remove any sun-damaged tissue.

Q ■ Is there a peel that can zap my broken capillaries?

Unfortunately, no. A laser is better for visible veins or broken capillaries. Peels are designed to work on the "entire canvas of the face," says Lewis. "You are treating sun damage, pores, pigment, texture, and tone—the overall appearance." You should also be wary of anyone who promises to fix your very deep wrinkles, like the furrows between your brows. Even a strong peel from a dermatologist won't go deep enough to address them—injectable fillers or Botox are designed for that. The same goes for offers to alleviate the redness of rosacea with a peel. Most doctors advise caution before applying an acid to irritated skin.

Q ■ I've been using Retin-A for years—can I get a peel?

Yes, though it's crucial to tell your doctor or facialist if you're using any retinoid (including retinol). She'll probably tell you to lay off it for at least three days prior to the peel. Retinoids remove the top layer of the epidermis, which will