

**FEELING THE PRESSURE OF
SPRING'S SOCIAL CALENDAR
TO LOOK AND FEEL PHOTO-
READY, JOURNALIST KATELYN
SWALLOW TEST DRIVES HEAVY-
DUTY MEDICAL-GRADE SKIN
TREATMENTS AND LEARNS SOME
NEAT SCIENTIFIC TRICKS TO KEEP
HER SKIN IN PRIME CONDITION.**

DEVIL'S ADVOCATE
***CLINICAL
BEAUTY
treatments***



THE ROAD TEST

Having acne in your mid to late 20s is a bit like your grandma having an iPhone. Common enough, yet eye-wateringly conspicuous. Day to day I'm not confronted with the burden of 'bad skin' and I doubt the casual observer – at Woolworths, say – would call it out. Yet between getting to my appointment at one of Melbourne's more renowned cosmetic clinics and this mortifying moment, my skin has gone from okay-at-a-distance to a meteorological map painted with spilled Ribena. Removing my foundation under lights that demonstrate how forgiving my bathroom is is one thing, but seeing the skin I ordinarily observe through a veil of cheapo make-up under the special light used for skin assessments is confronting – not least because I don't look like me or the image of my appearance that occupies my mind's eye.

One of The Victorian Cosmetic Institute's (thevictorianscosmeticinstitute.com.au) locations is tucked above a gigantic gym in the outer-Melbourne suburb of Berwick, a 25-minute drive from Melbourne. The intimidation factor of a contemporary monochrome interior, which lacks messy imperfections, is mitigated by the effusive welcome of my skin therapist, Lisa Brown. VCI's director of skin therapy, she ushers me to a chair and hands me a floral tea to sip while we talk all things skin.

"Skin health is so important because it is quite literally the face you present to the world," says Brown.

Facial skin conditions are among the most distressing dermatological conditions – because you can't hide them. Common complaints for which clients seek treatment include acne, rosacea and signs of ageing, says Brown, who believes in patient-led care rather than unilateral treatment.

"People come to the clinic because there is a change in their skin that they need help with – whether that be acne, rosacea and signs of ageing, or the products they were once using just aren't helping them anymore. We listen, we educate and then we treat."

After taking a thorough history (all my skin indiscretions exposed), it's time for the dreaded examination. True to its promise, the process, starting with cleansing my face of make-up and grime, is traumatic. Just because I'm generally outgoing and confident doesn't mean I feel less self-conscious about baring

my skin to a stranger (especially since I'm technically 'at work'). I can't remember the last time I went out minus any product and feel vulnerable and a little embarrassed.

"It's really sad to see the number of people – young and old – that come into the clinic unhappy with their skin's appearance. It affects self-esteem and every aspect of their lives," says Brown.

"I think that's why I love doing what I do. I love helping people feel good about themselves again."

After a quick yet enlightening examination – Brown notes that my pimples appear far worse due to 'post inflammatory hyperpigmentation' – I'm placed into the skin scope, which is basically a plain white box with two sides missing. Brown places her head in one end and I place mine into the other, so we are facing each other.

Inside? I'm surprised you didn't hear me scream.

The skin scope uses black light to look beneath the surface of the skin, revealing all those blemishes invisible to the naked eye – from dehydration to sunspots to acne. The mirror enables the same view – and it's absolutely terrifying. I had blemishes not only on my chin and cheeks, where most of my pimples were, but also speckled under my eyes and across my forehead from years spent in the sun. The thin skin underneath my eyes was painted purple from dehydration.

"You can see why a lot of clinics use the skin scope as a scare tactic. We prefer to see it as another way to collect information so we can treat effectively," says Brown, who tells me one story of a man so petrified by what he had seen inside the skin scope of another clinic, that he had opted for a chemical peel at home – resulting in third degree burns.

The good news for me is that these blemishes were fairly common and the acne on my chin didn't have the droplets of oil (acne bacteria) that indicate 'true' acne – the type that would warrant a trip to the doctor for an antibiotic. Instead, my acne was likely the result of hormonal fluctuations and bad skin care – both, hopefully, fixable in time.

Next, the dermograph: a fairly new piece of technology that looks much like a hand-held showerhead. It's basically just a camera a practitioner presses to multiple sites on the face to collect information on skin's condition and feed it back to the computer system. Delving two millimetres below the

surface of the skin to the dermal layer, it measures everything from skin's texture to hyperpigmentation to redness, on a sliding scale.

The most surprising discovery for me is my low oiliness rating.

"A lot of people who show signs of acne immediately begin using harsh foaming cleansers that promise to wipe away oil, when in fact, stripping away the skin's natural oils is harmful and degrades its condition," explains Brown.

"You can certainly clean your skin thoroughly and help prevent acne with the right products, without causing the dehydration, dryness and damage associated with some cleansers."

At least my skin's elasticity and firmness are 'average.' Can't win 'em all.

THE VERDICT

The experience has been an eye-opener. Despite being a self-proclaimed 'health freak' with a yen for whole foods and exercise, I hadn't really considered the health of my skin.

After a half-hour consultation, I walk out with years worth of insights (hell no, I will never again hit the gym in a full face of make-up when I know that vasodilation will open my pores and let gunk flow in).

Enlightenment also forbids daily moisturiser and those big brand make-ups in favour of a mineral make-up from Glo Minerals. In fact, counterintuitively, it's a better colour match and coverage than many liquids and doesn't reveal any redness.

LISA BROWN'S SKINCARE MAKEOVER

Detox your beauty cupboards and simplify spring racing prep with Brown's edit of what to keep, what to cull and what to invest in now.

CLEANSER

WHY USE IT?: to gently nurture the skin while removing dirt, surface impurities and make-up.

LOOK FOR: a simple list of ingredients, including plant surfactants and cleansing agents such as kiwi and coconut sugar extract. Aloe vera, peppermint and cucumber will soothe and calm the skin and naturally maintain PH levels. For oily skins, opt for a deep cleanser with plant extracts to decongest the skin and remove impurities. Everyone else, stick to mild versions.

AVOID: stripping the skin of its natural

oils, and creating nasty irritations and rashes. Avoid ingredients such as sodium lauryl sulphates (SLS), propylene glycol, isopropyl, mineral oils, synthetic colours and fragrances and parabens.

STILL UNSURE? Compare some of your store-bought cleanser's ingredient list to those of your household cleaning products – yep, scary.

MOISTURISER

WHY USE IT?: moisturisers have larger molecules that coat the surface of the skin, acting as a sealant and stopping the skin from losing moisture. On the other hand, serum-based hydrators have the



Glo Mineral Pressed Base Foundation, RRP \$70

Glo Minerals Satin II Liquid Foundation, RRP \$60



Cosmedix Clarity Serum, RRP \$59.40

What's more, I'm no longer anti-chemical peels after learning that horror stories usually result from ill-prepared skin or unqualified counsel. Before I have one to treat my acne scarring, I'll be using Cosmedix's Clarity Skin-Clarifying Serum day and night for a month.

"I like to prep all my patients with a product that contains the same ingredient we are going to use for the chemical peel," says Brown. "That way, we know the skin has had that chemical on it for a period of time, it's used to it and we can predict the skin's reaction."

One of the biggest lessons was the difference between regular store-bought beauty products at Coles and the 'cosmeceutical' products that Brown recommends.

ingredients and delivery system to penetrate deeper into the skin, hydrating from within.

LOOK FOR: hyaluronic acid and vitamin B – a naturally occurring hydrator already found in our skin.

AVOID: using the wrong type of product. A very dry skin will either be lacking in lipids – which are oils – or lacking in hydration. An acne skin or an oily skin should opt for a hydrator rather than a moisturiser. An older skin – which is lipid and moisture dry – will often need both a hydrator and a moisturiser.

EXFOLIATOR

WHY USE IT?: to remove the dead skin cells that rest on the surface of the skin, making it look dull, dry and uneven.

LOOK FOR: chemical exfoliators with ingredients such as lactic acid, fruit enzyme and salicylic acid. These ingredients work to release the dead skin cells and dissolve and digest the dirt and sebum from the pores.

AVOID: over-exfoliating, as it disrupts natural cell turnover and can lead to irritation, skin sensitivity and broken capillaries. Physical exfoliators that use micro beads, refined shells from fruit pips or other grains are too abrasive for the face.

MAKE-UP

WHY USE IT?: well, you don't have to, but if you do, make sure it's a natural extension of your healthy skincare regimen – after all, it sits on your skin for eight hours of the day!

LOOK FOR: mineral make-ups that are rich in vitamin A, B and E and have a built-in sunscreen.

AVOID: make-ups containing parabens, fragrances, binders and synthetic dyes. Dimethicone is a silicone often used in make-up to help the skin feel silky and to reduce the appearance of fine lines. While it may look great, it can congest the pores and be really damaging. Make-up brands also use talc as a filler, blocking pores and causing congestion.

“The percentage of active ingredients in your everyday product is very low – down to about one per cent. Beauty salon products have a slightly higher level of actives and a better delivery system into the skin because you receive some education,” says Brown.

“When you go to a clinic, with dermal clinicians and doctors and nurses, we can have the highest grade of cosmeceuticals because you are going to receive the consultation and education.”

But the percentages of active ingredients are not the be all and end all, Brown notes.

“I could have two cosmeceutical products – one with 10 per cent vitamin A and the other with five per cent. But the one with 10 has a poor delivery system – so the peptide molecule that's attached to take it down into

the skin isn't very good, so you might only get three or four per cent of the vitamin A,” says Brown.

“But the other one has an amazing delivery system and all five per cent goes in. Just because the bottle percentage is higher, doesn't mean it's what you are getting.”

THE CONCLUSION?

After just a few weeks of swapping my skin care and habits, my skin was less red, inflamed and blotchy, and my pimples were scarce. With a full skin consultation costing just \$45 – and my mineral make-up costing about \$60 (similar to what I'd pay for my usual MAC) – a trip to the skin doctors seems like a no-brainer. (Stay tuned for my chemical peel results.)



TECHNO TREATMENTS

While the skin treatments you opt for will depend on the condition of your skin, the amount of downtime you can afford and the amount of coin you are willing to spend, we figure it's good to know what help is available. We asked Brown about the newest trends to hit the market.

DERMAFRAC

WHAT IS IT?: A fairly new treatment, DermaFrac is a take on traditional skin needling. The needles penetrate the skin, creating micro channels and delivering 400 times the amount of product directly into the skin. Different serums can be used for different results. For example, hyaluronic acid will plump the skin, including that of the lips, eyes and any wrinkles.

DOWNTIME: Painless with very little downtime.

PRICE: Some people have them every six weeks, while others only preceding a special event. \$290 per treatment, including a bout of microdermabrasion to remove dead skin cells.

INFINI

WHAT IS IT? Skin needling but infusing RF (radio frequency) energy rather than product. The energy coagulates the collagen in the skin, resulting in a tightening. Works particularly well on the lower face and neck.

DOWNTIME: The pinprick of the needle creates some micro-crusting – tiny scabs on the skin that wash off over the course of a few days. Some swelling and redness. Max downtime: two weeks.

PRICE: Initially you need a minimum of three treatments, priced at \$850 per treatment. Then one treatment per year.

MICRODERMABRASION

WHAT IS IT?: Used and abused in the industry, according to Brown, microdermabrasion is simply a form of exfoliation.

“It takes off the dead layers of the skin – so she claims that it gets rid of pigmentation, acne scarring and acne are impossible,” says Brown.

Instead, Brown suggests microdermabrasion be used in conjunction with other treatments for best results.

“We do a gentle exfoliation before, then a microderm and then a chemical exfoliation (chemical peel) afterward,” explains Brown.

“So we are dealing with taking off the dead layers of skin, microderm to take off a little bit deeper and then the chemical peel that goes deeper still.”

And as for the at-home peels so often available online?

“Would you go and rewire your house? No, you would get an electrician to do it. So why would you buy chemical peels and put them on your skin?” says Brown. “You don’t know what your reaction will be, or the result.”

DOWNTIME: Depends on the strengths of peel, but anywhere from 0 to 24 hours.

PRICE: Triple exfoliation from \$200, chemical peels start at \$90.

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

So are the organic high-strength products really worth the extra coin? We asked the experts.

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Clinical-grade skincare products tend to be more science-based – in that natural ingredients are chemically altered in a lab. For example, you start with a natural ingredient such as coconut, it undergoes various processes, and what’s left over is something very different to the raw ingredient. The challenge is that some of these ingredients can be extremely irritating to the skin, whereas others are relatively safe and non-irritating. It’s very confusing for the consumer to discern.

Some supermarket and chemist brands are made with cheap synthetics and naturally derived irritants that wreak havoc on your skin and internal organs, but there are some that are fantastic. Read the full ingredient label, get to know the brand owner and manufacturer and ask questions about the source of ingredients.

I don’t recommend any clinical procedures that work against the natural function of the skin. New skin cells form at the base of the epidermis and slowly move upwards, flattening out as they mature. Extreme exfoliation methods such as chemical peels expose the layers of immature cells that are more vulnerable to damage from external pollutants, causing ageing and dry skin.

Instead, I suggest a shift in daily practices. Eat a balanced diet based on fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds. Drink plenty of purified water. Exercise. Enjoy sensible sunshine and fresh air. Reduce stress. And choose genuine naturally organic and biodynamic ingredients for daily skincare rituals.

It’s common sense that nature’s wholefoods are our best choice for optimal health, and skincare is no different. Nature is highly complex and science hasn’t even come close to understanding the complete depth and intricacies of how nature functions. When it comes to skincare, you can’t beat nature.

MICHELLE WONG

Science-based Beauty Blogger
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In general, clinical-grade skincare contains higher percentages of active ingredients; although it’s not always the

case. Clinical-grade skincare also tells you the exact percentages of ingredients and the formulation pH, so it’s easier to tell that it’ll be effective. For example, glycolic acid-based exfoliators should be above four per cent concentration and below pH 4.

Some clinical skincare products have ingredients and formulas based on what’s been found to be most effective in scientific studies, but some of them are just glorified versions of budget store-bought products. If you’re budget-conscious, there’s nothing wrong with a skincare routine that mixes both clinical and store-bought products. It’s more cost effective to use a couple of products that target your skin concerns, and use cheaper products for the rest of your routine. For example, an anti-ageing serum from a clinical brand with a store-bought cleanser and sunscreen.

Chemical peels are great for a range of conditions, including acne, fine wrinkles and photodamage (such as hyperpigmentation). A concentrated solution is carefully applied to destroy damaged skin in a controlled fashion, allowing new, undamaged skin to take its place.

Laser resurfacing can be fantastic too, and works much like a peel. Always ask your clinician if the treatment is supported by peer-reviewed studies and some examples of what to expect based on past patients’ experiences. ■

