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WHEN TO PEEL

By Shannon Esau, Rhonda Allison Cosmeceuticals

Glowing skin signifies radiant health, vitality and youth, and helps us face the world with more confidence. So, it's no wonder humankind across all cultures and regions have been searching for ways to improve the skin's appearance throughout the ages. As we search for new, fresh modalities to assist our clients in achieving youthful, healthy and more beautiful looking skin, there's one technique that has consistently emerged throughout history as a top choice for rejuvenating the skin—the chemical peel.

This time-tested modality has come a long way. Consider the days in ancient Egypt, where enzymatic agents were first explored as a way to heal and repair the skin, or the 1800s to 1900s when dermatologists began wielding the rejuvenating and brightening properties of salicylic acid, resorcinol, phenol and trichloroacetic acid. Indeed, acids and enzymes have long been used to non-invasively repair and regenerate the skin.

Today, peel formulas have advanced to the point of being safe for most everyone's skin and can be tailored to treat specific skin challenges, like photoaging, acne, pigmentation and other skin challenges.

THE FUNCTION OF A PEEL

Regardless of how well your clients take care of their skin, for many, there often comes a point when you will need to step-up the intensity of their skin care program, and chemical peels can be the perfect solution. Chemical

peels are a controlled wound to the skin, causing the fibroblast cells to respond by synthesizing collagen and elastin, fibronectin, growth factors and other necessary healing nutrients. This process increases cell mitosis, giving you the opportunity to strengthen new epidermis cells. This is valuable no matter the condition you are targeting.

Depending on the level or strength of a peel solution as well as how that solution performs on the skin has a determining factor in the outcome. Because highly specialized acids and enzymes are used, chemical peels are an effective means of reducing cellular buildup, purging bacteria, minimizing pore size, stimulating tissue regeneration, treating hyperpigmentation and more.

The most exciting aspect regarding chemical peels is there are options for every client who walks through your door. This allows you to truly tailor every peel treatment to your client's specific skin condition. With peels, it is important to remember there is no one-size-fits-all solution (see **Peeling Rules of Thumb**).

DETERMINING THE BEST COURSE OF ACTION

The field of esthetics is constantly progressing, giving skin care professionals new tools and techniques. So, how do we know when skin rejuvenation in the form of a peel is the best choice?

PEELING RULES OF THUMB

In determining whether a chemical peel is the best course of action for you and your client, there are a few general rules of thumb to adhere to:

ALWAYS...

- Undergo appropriate training. This is very important.
- Complete a skin assessment and skin history on the client.
- Perform a patch test at least 48 hours before treatment.
- Send clients home with post-care instructions.
- Take before-and-after photos to track progress.
- Manage expectations prior to starting a program.

NEVER...

- Perform a peel on the first visit or on a client who is not willing to be compliant.
- Administer a peel on a client using Retin-A or taking Accutane.
- Conduct a peel if a client has received Botox or another injectable procedure that day.

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Chemical peels, microdermabrasion and laser skin resurfacing all work to exfoliate layers of the skin; however, both microdermabrasion and laser have their limits. Chemical peels are appealing because they are so customizable. Rejuvenation through chemical peels will bring change to almost any skin, including acne, pro-youth, rosacea and even a compromised barrier, as they effectively target bacteria, scarring, fine lines and sun damage while also rebuilding and strengthening the skin. But, deciding which solution is best for each client comes down to several factors: ethnicity or Fitzpatrick classification, skin sensitivity and lifestyle.

Also, note that when we talk about peels in esthetics, we're referring to superficial peels. This is an important distinction to make here, as these are not intended to penetrate beyond the epidermis or papillary dermis and are not to be confused with medical or physician-strength peels. Estheticians must remain within the boundary of superficial peels when endeavoring into this service.

Superficial peels vary in intensity from progressive to mid-depth to deep. Determining which level to use for your client hinges on your client's skin type, climate, desired results, overall health and again lifestyle. Intensities from mildest to most intensive include the following.

Progressive peels. Progressive peels remove dead cells from the outer layer of the skin and do not cause immediate exfoliation. These are effective in encouraging skin cell renewal and treating chronic dry skin, compromised skin, younger acne and uneven pigmentation at the epidermal layer. Considered the mildest of treatments, progressive peels are best performed in a series of three to six treatments, one to two weeks apart and can be termed as no-downtime peels.

Mid-depth peels. Considerably more intense, mid-depth peels reach into the intra-epidermal layer. These peels can smooth texture, improve photo-aging damage and discoloration while softening fine lines. While there's minimal downtime, it's common for exfoliation to occur full face for two to three days. These may be performed every three months.

Deep Peels. With the most intensity and targeting the deepest intra-epidermal layers, deep peels are particularly effective for deep-set wrinkles and acne scars. In this case, the skin will undergo considerable peeling calling for a recovery time of three to four days and a full 10 to 12 days to be completely peeled and healed. We recommend no more than two deep peels per year.

With three types of peel levels to choose from, the next step is gaining a better understanding of the formulations and ingredients.

TRIED AND TRUE ACIDS

Performing chemical peels is truly an art form—technique, reading the skin and choosing the correct acids all affect the creation of your masterpiece. It is not as easy as just reading a protocol. Begin with a thorough skin evaluation and discussion with your client to determine their goals to guide you to a successful plan. From there, the building blocks of how acids work together will further your art and success.

For starters, all acids are not created equally. Chirality, pH, percentage and base all impact how acids

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interact with the skin. Choosing chirally-correct ingredients, when available, give you the optimal performance in stability and potency. The pH dictates an acid's strength. The lower the pH, the more potent, and the higher the pH, the less potent. The percentage of an acid influences its intensity and its ability to create change in the skin. Lastly, the base is the final distinguishing factor of a formulation. Whether an acid is delivered in a gel, cream or aqueous base will determine its absorption beyond the stratum corneum. A gel will penetrate deeper into the epidermal layers and generate more exfoliation, whereas a cream base would keep the ingredients concentrated on the stratum corneum and offer a milder exfoliation. The base has variables to it as well and is more relevant with alpha hydroxy acids but keep in mind, the base will help you in understanding the overall formula and skin impact.

Every acid has a specific purpose and a direct effect on the skin. Some of the most commonly used acids include the following.

Alpha Hydroxy Acids (AHAs). Naturally occurring, nontoxic, organic acids, AHAs loosen the desmosomes allowing for deeper more even penetration of the main acid and begin to smooth texture gently. The most frequently used are glycolic and L-lactic acids

Azelaic acid. Up to 15%, azelaic acid is created by oxygenating oleic acid, an unsaturated fatty acid found in milk fats and grains, such as barley and wheat, and is used as a lightening, lifting and antibacterial agent.

Salicylic acid. Salicylic acid is a beta-hydroxy acid (BHA) extracted from willow tree and birch and is used to produce a dissolving lifting effect on the epidermis.

Jessner. The Jessner peel is comprised of multiple acids (salicylic, resorcinol and lactic typically). Most companies offer a modified version of a Jessner's and will vary in percentage and sometimes even contain added ingredients.

Acetic acid. Red wine vinegar acid (acetic acid) provides exfoliation with less free-radical damage and injury to the skin. Red wine vinegar is a natural acid that offers firming and toning to the skin.

TCA. TCA is a nontoxic, self-neutralizing and

keratolytic acid that can be used by itself or together with other acids. This is a fast-acting acid, and it is beneficial for deep lines and acne scarring.

Retinol. Retinol is a derivative of vitamin A that assists in collagen synthesis, aids in the formation of blood vessels and promotes healthy cell formation. It's an amazing ingredient to finish any peeling procedure and is a great option for rosacea and sensitive skin.

Over the years, skin care professional have been turning to "designer peels" to create highly specialized treatment and precise outcome. These incorporate next-generation acid formulas, as well as the blending of acids with one another and with other actives such as lighteners, retinols and peptides. Some of these are provided below.

Flower acids. Cellular benefits are provided from flower acids, from hydration, inflammation support, lightening capabilities and more. Flower acids offer cell regeneration, smoothing and firming, but are non-irritating and may be used on nearly any skin type.

Vitamin A and peptides. This acid blend not only exfoliates, reduces fine lines and uneven pigmentation, but stimulates cell regeneration, rebuilding the skin leaving it toned and firm.

Hydrogen peroxide and acids. Ideal for photo-damaged skin, this emulsion is a blend of several low-strength acids. Oxygen-based, it supports tissue respiration, stimulates blood flow, brightens tone and stimulates regeneration, giving skin a healthy glow.

Once you've established the right course of action for your client by considering their needs, skin type and determining the best formulation, what else can be done to enhance a peel?

PEEL PREP

Pre-treating the skin is a valuable step to ensure a successful acid peel, no matter the depth. It prepares the skin surface by reducing lipids, which ensures absorption of the peeling agent, and also reduces the chances of post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation (PIH). It also will help desensitize and strengthen the skin to enhance the healing process following the peel.

Overall, retinaldehyde, next-generation lighteners, antibacterial and anti-inflammatory ingredients are good to incorporate into a pre-treatment home care regimen. However, creating the right pre-treatment will be based on the desired outcome, the type of treatment and the client's skin. Ingredients like daisy flower extract, salicylic acid, totarol, retinaldehyde, mandelic and glycolic acid might be included in a pre-treatment regimen. In most cases, you will want to start their pre-treatment one to three weeks prior to a peel. Keep in mind, when pre-treating the skin, the peel levels of intensity can change. A progressive peel could turn into a progressive plus or mid-depth depending on skin and how you pre-treat.

POST-CARE PROTOCOL

Following any chemical peel or rejuvenation treatment, a post-care system is absolutely essential. Unfortunately, this is often a missed step and ignored by practitioner and client. Proper healing is the most critical component to healthy skin after peeling, and post care will prevent the many complications that can arise. One rule of thumb with peeling, if they won't use the proper post care and follow your instructions, don't do a peel.

Keep in mind, when performing peels, you are creating an injury to the skin that disrupts the protective barrier resulting in necessary wound repair. How you advise your clients to care for their skin after a peel is as important as the peel itself (see **Peel Post-care Regimen**).

POWERFUL RESULTS

Chemical peels deliver powerful results that work wonders to rejuvenate and renew a variety of skin concerns. Take the time to master the building blocks, and you'll have the power to create highly tailored treatments your clients will love. ✂



Shannon Esau is the CEO and national educator at Rhonda Allison Cosmeceuticals. She brings more than 20 years experience in the esthetic industry. Esau owned skin care salons in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area, has studied chemistry in skin care formulations and has been mentored by Rhonda Allison for decades.

www.RhondaAllison.com and www.REDmethod.com



PEEL POST-CARE REGIMEN

CLEANSE

Use a gentle cleanser that provides antiseptic, hydrating and skin-rebuilding support. Make sure cleanser is free from irritating botanicals, sulfates, parabens and fragrances. Look for something soothing with milk protein and rosewater. Cleansing is recommended in the morning and at night with a soft and sterile cloth and gentle pressure.

REBUILD

To support, soothe and rebuild the skin, integrate ingredients like omega -6 essential fatty acids and epidermal growth factors. The goal is to reduce inflammation, deliver hydration and increase cell strengthening.

PROTECT

Broad-spectrum UVA and UVB protection is essential. A mineral blocker like zinc will deliver protection as well as provide healing, soothing, antimicrobial and antioxidant support.

The right system for your client will require a customized approach based on your knowledge of their skin and desired outcomes. Also remind clients to drink a lot of water and to follow your instructions until they are completely peeled and healed.