

Skincare Routine Order

CHEAT SHEET

THE SKINCARE EDIT



Editor's Note

I created this resource to help you apply your skincare products in the most effective order. More and more of us are experimenting with active ingredients and new types of products—so it's crucial to understand how they'll work best and which combinations to avoid. With this cheat sheet, you'll be able to adjust your skincare steps (if necessary), understand wait times and pH, and get the most out of the skincare products in your routine.

Michelle

Skincare Routine Order

General Guidelines

When applying your skincare products, keep these general guidelines in mind:

- From thinnest to thickest consistency
- From watery to creamy to oily textures
- Actives first, then hydrators
- From lowest to highest pH
- Incorporate 20-30 minute wait times when the pH is more than 2.0 apart
- Avoid mixing water-soluble actives into oil-based products (they may not penetrate)
- Avoid layering active ingredients over silicone-based products (they may not absorb)

Morning Skincare Routine Order

Product	Need to Know
Cleanser	Cleanse with a gentle face wash, micellar water or even plain water.
Exfoliator	Option 1: Exfoliate with a non-abrasive cloth, cleansing brush or gentle exfoliating scrub.
	Option 2: Exfoliate with an AHA (alpha-hydroxy acid) or BHA (beta-hydroxy acid).

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Morning Skincare Routine Order — Continued

Exfoliator — Continued	<p>🕒 If you're using both AHAs and BHAs, apply the one with the lower pH and/or thinnest consistency first. Once it absorbs, apply the other (no waiting).</p> <p>Note: AHAs increase sun sensitivity, so consider switching to a BHA or nighttime use.</p>
Toner	<p>Optional:</p> <p>Tone with a gentle (non-acidic) toner.</p> <p>🕒 Wait 20-30 minutes to apply toner after an AHA/BHA. If you're using low-pH vitamin C, skip toner.</p> <p>Note: Some toners interact with AHAs and BHAs, causing redness and irritation. If you notice this, use them at different times of day or skip toner.</p>
Vitamin C	<p>Option 1:</p> <p>Apply a low-pH vitamin C (typically pH 2.0-4.0).</p> <p>🕒 Since they're close in pH, you can apply low-pH vitamin C at the same time as an AHA/BHA. Apply the one with the lower pH and/or thinnest consistency first. Once</p>

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Morning Skincare Routine Order — Continued

Vitamin C — Continued	<p>it absorbs, apply the other (no waiting). You don't need to wait to apply low-pH vitamin C after cleanser or exfoliator.</p>
	<p>Option 2: Apply a no-pH (anhydrous) vitamin C.</p> <p>⬇️ Since it's not pH-dependent, you don't need to wait to apply no-pH vitamin C after cleanser, exfoliator, AHA/BHA or toner.</p>
	<p>Option 3: Apply a vitamin C derivative (typically pH 6.0-7.0).</p> <p>⬇️ Wait 20-30 minutes to apply a vitamin C derivative after an AHA/BHA. You don't need to wait to apply a vitamin C derivative after cleanser, exfoliator or toner.</p>
Niacinamide	<p>Optional: Apply a niacinamide serum.</p> <p>⬇️ Wait 20-30 minutes to apply niacinamide after an AHA/BHA or no-pH vitamin</p>

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Morning Skincare Routine Order — Continued

Niacinamide — Continued	C. You don't need to wait to apply niacinamide after cleanser, exfoliator, toner, no-pH vitamin C or a vitamin C derivative (just let each layer absorb).
Mist and/or Essence	<p>Optional: Hydrate with a mist and/or essence.</p> <p>⌚ Wait 20-30 minutes to apply mist/essence after an AHA/BHA or low-pH vitamin C. You don't need to wait to apply mist/essence after cleanser, exfoliator, toner, no-pH vitamin C, a vitamin C derivative or niacinamide (just let each layer absorb).</p>
Serum and/or Emulsion	<p>Optional: Hydrate with a lightweight serum or emulsion.</p> <p>⌚ Wait 20-30 minutes to apply serum/emulsion after an AHA/BHA or low-pH vitamin C. You don't need to wait to apply serum/emulsion after cleanser, exfoliator, toner, no-pH vitamin C, a vitamin C derivative, niacinamide or mist/essence (just let each layer absorb).</p>

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Morning Skincare Routine Order — Continued

<p>Chemical Sunscreen</p>	<p>Optional: Protect skin with a chemical sunscreen.</p> <p>⌚ Wait 20-30 minutes to apply chemical sunscreen after an AHA/BHA or low-pH vitamin C. You don't need to wait to apply chemical sunscreen after cleanser, exfoliator, toner, no-pH vitamin C, a vitamin C derivative, niacinamide, mist/essence or serum/emulsion (just let each layer absorb).</p> <p>Note: Only use the safe chemical filters (bemotrizinol, bisdisulizole disodium, bisoctrizole, diethylamino hydroxybenzoyl hexyl benzoate, ecamsule,</p>
<p>Moisturizer and/or Eye Cream</p>	<p>Optional: Hydrate with moisturizing cream and/or eye cream.</p> <p>⌚ Wait 20-30 minutes to apply moisturizer after an AHA/BHA, low-pH vitamin C or chemical sunscreen. You don't need to wait to apply moisturizer after cleanser, exfoliator, toner, no-pH vitamin C, a vitamin C derivative, niacinamide, mist/essence or serum/emulsion (just let each layer absorb).</p>

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Morning Skincare Routine Order — Continued

<p>Face Oil</p>	<p>Optional: Hydrate and lock in moisture with a face oil.</p> <p>⬇️ Wait 20-30 minutes to apply face oil after an AHA/BHA, low-pH vitamin C or chemical sunscreen. You don't need to wait to apply face oil after cleanser, exfoliator, toner, no-pH vitamin C, a vitamin C derivative, niacinamide, mist/essence, serum/emulsion or moisturizer (just let each layer absorb).</p>
<p>Physical Sunscreen</p>	<p>Optional: Protect skin with a physical sunscreen.</p> <p>⬇️ Wait 20-30 minutes to apply physical sunscreen after an AHA/BHA or low-pH vitamin C. You don't need to wait to apply physical sunscreen after cleanser, exfoliator, toner, no-pH vitamin C, a vitamin C derivative, niacinamide, mist/essence, serum/emulsion or moisturizer (just let each layer absorb).</p> <p>Note: Only use physical filters (encapsulated octinoxate, titanium dioxide and zinc oxide) or the safe chemical filters (above).</p>

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Nighttime Skincare Routine Order

Product	Need to Know
Makeup Remover	Optional: Remove makeup with a micellar water or makeup remover.
Cleanser	Option 1: Cleanse with an oil, milk or cream cleanser. Note: Make sure to remove residue with a warm, wet cloth or by cleansing again with a sulfate-free gel or foam cleanser.
	Option 2: Cleanse with a sulfate-free gel or foam cleanser.
Exfoliator	Option 1: Exfoliate with a non-abrasive cloth, cleansing brush or gentle exfoliating scrub.
	Option 2: Exfoliate with an AHA (alpha-hydroxy acid) or BHA (beta-hydroxy acid).

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Nighttime Skincare Routine Order — Continued

Exfoliator — Continued	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● If using both AHAs and BHAs, apply the one with the lower pH and/or thinnest consistency first. Once absorbed, apply the other acid (no waiting).
Toner	<p>Optional: Tone with a gentle (non-acidic) toner.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Wait 20-30 minutes to apply toner after an AHA/BHA. If you're using low-pH vitamin C, skip toner. <p>Note: Some toners interact with AHAs and BHAs, causing redness and irritation. If you notice this, use them at different times of day or skip toner.</p>
Retinoid	<p>Optional: Apply an over-the-counter or prescription retinoid.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Wait 20-30 minutes to apply a retinoid after an AHA/BHA. Unless you're experiencing irritation, you don't need to wait to apply a retinoid after cleanser, exfoliator or toner. <p>Note: Damp skin enhances retinoid penetration and potential irritation. If you have sensitive skin,</p>

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Nighttime Skincare Routine Order — Continued

Retinoid — Continued	wait 20-30 minutes, until skin is fully dry, to apply a retinoid. You can also buffer a retinoid by mixing it with equal parts moisturizer. As skin gets used to the retinoid, gradually reduce the moisturizer.
Niacinamide	Optional: Apply a niacinamide serum. ⌚ Wait 20-30 minutes to apply niacinamide after an AHA/BHA or retinoid. You don't need to wait to apply niacinamide after cleanser, exfoliator or toner.
Mist and/or Essence	Optional: Hydrate with a mist and/or essence. ⌚ Wait 20-30 minutes to apply mist/essence after an AHA/BHA or retinoid. You don't need to wait to apply mist/essence after cleanser, exfoliator, toner or niacinamide (just let each layer absorb).
Serum and/or Emulsion	Optional: Hydrate with a lightweight serum or emulsion. ⌚ Wait 20-30 minutes to apply serum/

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Nighttime Skincare Routine Order — Continued

Serum and/or Emulsion — Continued	emulsion after an AHA/BHA or retinoid. You don't need to wait to apply serum/emulsion after cleanser, exfoliator, toner, niacinamide or mist/essence (just let each layer absorb).
Moisturizer and/or Eye Cream	<p>Optional: Hydrate with moisturizing cream and/or eye cream.</p> <p>⌚ Wait 20-30 minutes to apply moisturizer after an AHA/BHA or retinoid. You don't need to wait to apply moisturizer after cleanser, exfoliator, toner, niacinamide, mist/essence or serum/emulsion (just let each layer absorb).</p> <p>Note: If you have sensitive skin, try applying moisturizer right after a retinoid (no waiting) to reduce irritation.</p>
Face Oil	<p>Optional: Hydrate and lock in moisture with a face oil.</p> <p>⌚ Wait 20-30 minutes to apply face oil after an AHA/BHA or retinoid. You don't need to wait to apply face oil after cleans-</p>

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Nighttime Skincare Routine Order — Continued

Face Oil — Continued	er, exfoliator, toner, niacinamide, mist/essence, serum/emulsion or moisturizer (just let each layer absorb).
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