

Natural tips from the top

PS caught up with **Annabelle Personeni**, an expert on all things beauty. Starting her career in France, Annabelle is now the botanical chemist for A'kin skin and haircare. Here she shares some of her tips, tricks and insider knowledge.

Q WHAT'S POPULAR IN SKINCARE RIGHT NOW?

A Face oils have become popular because of their wholesome simplicity. In a simple oil you have everything your skin needs. There's a blend of fatty acids to soften and nourish the skin and strengthen the skin's barrier and vitamins and sterols to improve the natural metabolism of skin cells and build up defence against the environment and free radicals. When your skin needs extra nourishment, you can just add a few drops to your moisturiser and tailor your skincare regime to your skin's needs.

Also, consumers are concerned about chemicals and impurities but it is really difficult for the 'average' consumer to understand labels and be sure that 'natural' creams and skincare products are really pure. When you use an oil, it is clear. Olive oil is olive oil, macadamia oil is what it says it is: there's no added nasties. It's also worth noting that the extraction process is extremely important to the quality of the oil. Just think about the difference in taste between a virgin olive oil and a refined olive oil. It is very important to purchase quality oils, and at a bare minimum, cold pressed oil.

Q WHAT OTHER TIPS DO YOU HAVE FOR FACIAL SKINCARE?

A Use natural skincare products. Natural products work with the skin instead of providing a 'Bandaid' fix. They help the skin to balance itself; making more of its own moisturising substances; boost natural processes that make elastin and collagen to fight wrinkles. This is the A'kin skin principle: a healthy skin leads to a beautiful skin.

Skincare is first and foremost about regularity. If you have a solid routine of cleansing and moisturising that's 80% of the job done. Many people spend a fortune on skincare products that are then used irregularly. By committing to a naturally based cleanse and moisturising routine, the skin will reap the benefits.

Cleanse well (particularly, if you live in the city) and never go to bed without cleansing first. While we sleep, the skin surface is warmer than during the day and the heat helps product actives penetrate faster and deeper. This also means that you can get more out of your active serums. If skin is not cleansed, the impurities of the day (pollution, makeup, and so on) will be further pushed into the skin layers and damage the skin.

Q DOES DIET AFFECT THE SKIN?

A Our diet does affect our skin. A diet which is high in anti-oxidants will be beneficial to the skin as they play a role in how the organs function (both internally and on the skin). Everything that we take into our bodies eventually reaches our skin. Take alcohol for example, the worst offender.

When alcohol enters the body, it dilates blood vessels which means it reaches skin quicker than most ingredients we eat or drink. Within a short period—skin will stiffen and dry and you will see a visible difference.

Q HOW CAN PHARMACY ASSISTANTS HELP CUSTOMERS UNDERSTAND THE LABELS ON NATURAL SKINCARE PRODUCTS?

A It is not compulsory for a brand to disclose the level of natural ingredients and how concentrated the ingredients are. Some natural companies will list a large number of plant extracts, however they could be very diluted. In comparison, you can have only a couple of very concentrated extracts which can be more effective, but from a label perspective, don't look as "natural". Unfortunately, there's no regulation.. To ensure you're recommending the best products means gaining an understanding of different ingredients and how they affect your skin. Look at training opportunities through the pharmacy or there are even websites that provide detailed information about ingredients (try: www.ewg.org/skindeep/browse/blush/). Many brands are also keen to help you learn how to decipher label jargon and run training sessions on a regular basis.

Q WHAT OTHER TIPS AND TRICKS DO YOU HAVE?

A To get the most out of your conditioner, you should rinse it out in two steps - this enhances the deposition of natural conditioning ingredients. First, rinse with only half a cup of water (or even less if you have short hair), followed by a full rinse. Doing so will break down the emulsions, releasing more nutrients to the hair.

Thrifty is not always the answer. For example, be careful adding water to the end of your hand wash to produce a couple more washes. The thinned formula can cause bacteria to develop in as little as two days as the preservatives have been diluted.

Remember, it is not possible to make functional skin and hair care product exclusively with 100% natural ingredients, extracts and oils; most products contain a mix of natural extracts and oils mixed or held together with "naturally derived" ingredients (the emulsifiers) and occasionally a few synthetic ingredients. The best natural skincare products will then be thickened using natural gums (guar gum, cellulose gum, xanthan gum) compared to synthetic thickeners (such as PEG or polyacrylates) and fragranced with essential oils (compared to synthetic perfumes). This means that the best natural products contains lots of 100% extracts, some naturally derived ingredients, very low amounts of synthetic ingredients and if they have any, pure ones that do not contain toxic impurities. There is no legal definition of 'natural skin care'. Therefore, companies can claim they are "natural" even if they use only a few natural ingredients in the products. **PS**