

What Are Retinoids?

The first retinoid was approved back in the seventies for treating acne, but since then retinoids have become more and more popular, and now skincare products containing some form of retinoid are popular for anti-ageing as well as acne. What are retinoids, and why are they so effective?

Retinol is the purest form of vitamin A available for use on your skin. It consists of the whole of the vitamin A molecule, which is really beneficial for skincare. Because retinol is a very potent form of antioxidant, it's also used in anti-ageing skincare products to protect skin from damage by free radicals, to stimulate skin growth and cell regeneration. Retinols are so effective because the molecules are small enough to penetrate the outer layers of skin, as far as the elastin and collagen layers, where they work to repair the skin from inside. When retinoids come into contact with skin, enzymes in the body convert it to retinoic acid, the active form of vitamin A.

Other retinoids include retinoic acid (also known as tretinoin), retinyl palmitate, and retinaldehyde. Tretinoin is the active ingredient in prescription acne creams.

In the case of acne, retinoids work because they make cells regenerate faster and reduce their 'stickiness' which stops dead cells from clogging up the pores. Retinol also helps slow down production of sebum so it has a two-pronged effect on acne prone skin.

Retinoids for Wrinkles

The first retinoid product to be approved by the FDA for wrinkles was Tretinoin, which works by stimulating collagen production, plumping out the skin. Because it also stimulates the blood vessels in your skin, it can sometimes give you a more youthful and rosy appearance, as well as helping to fade age spots. It had plenty of medical benefits as well as the cosmetic ones too – it's been known to have an effect on reducing pre-cancerous skin spots called actinic keratosis. Tretinoin also may help prevent some of the effects of ultraviolet radiation.

Although there are no over the counter products available that contain Tretinoin, there are other really effective retinol based creams that can be great for helping to reduce the signs of wrinkles as well as making sun-damaged skin look better. They are most effective if you use them along with other skincare products that also contain alpha-hydroxy acids, as these can really give your skin a much smoother appearance.

A word of warning; using any retinol product will make your skin more sensitive to UV light, so whether you're using a retinol product for acne or for its anti-ageing benefits, you should always use a good quality sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher at the same time. And make sure that any retinol products you apply during the day are suitable for daytime use too.

Speak to your esthetician if you'd like more advice about how retinoids work, or for recommendations about the type of retinoid treatment that would suit your skin, and how best to use it.