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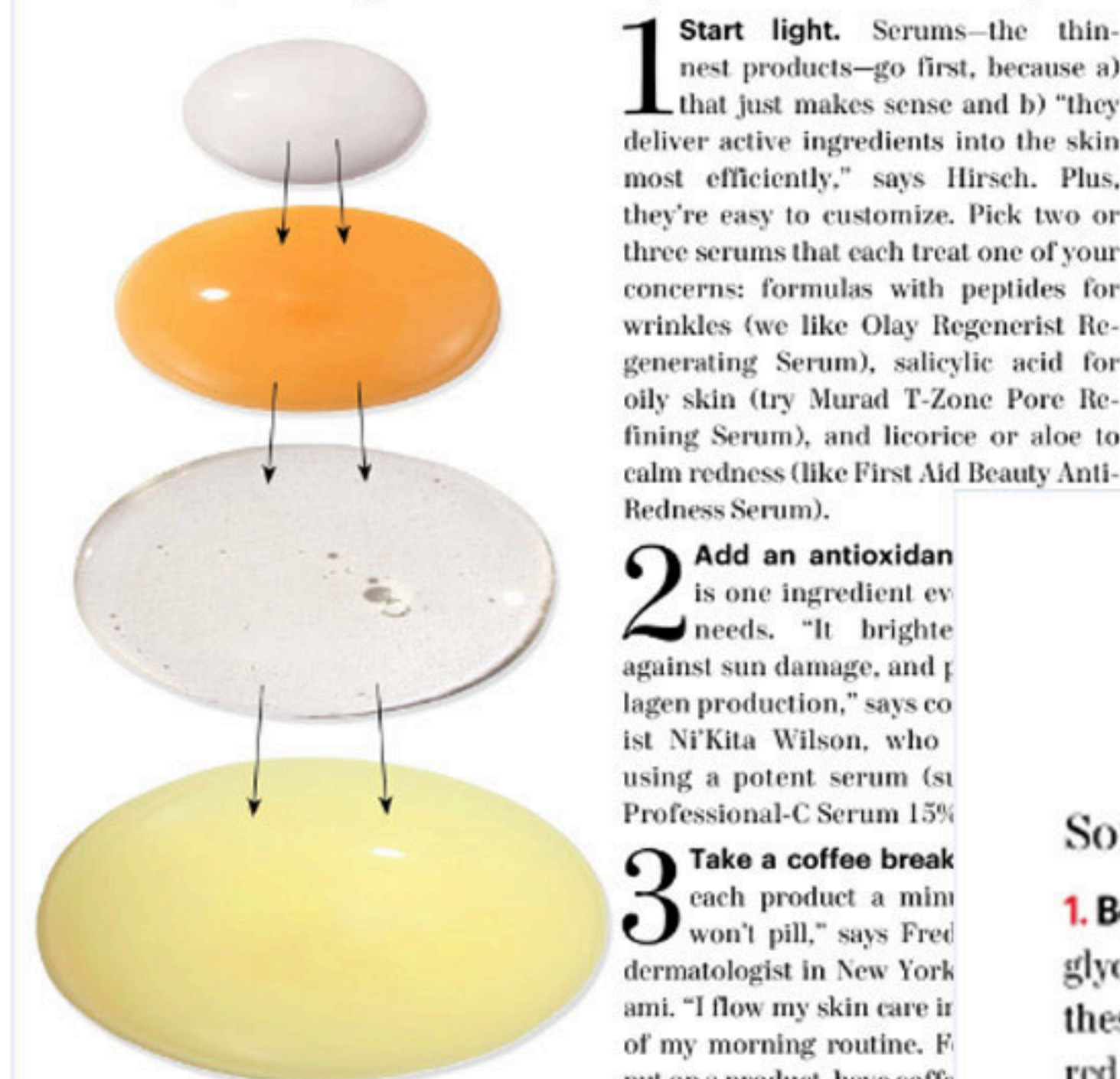
## PILE IT ON

A seven-step skin-care routine is less eccentric than you might think. In the quest for a radiant complexion, more can actually be more. By Elizabeth Siegel

Sex Pistols. Led Zeppelin. Your skin-care products. They've all got one thing in common, and it's not a knack for hiding massive hangovers. They all work better in groups. "Layering skin-care products can make each one more potent, so you're more likely to see a very noticeable difference in your skin," says Ranella Hirsch, a dermatologist in Boston. "People always want to know the secrets to great skin. Well, this is a big one." Asian women have been wearing multiple moisturizers and oils on their skin—simultaneously—for decades, but the concept is just starting to take hold in the U.S. And before you say, "But I already layer," we're not talking about putting *one* moisturizer over *one* serum. Please. That's skin-care-layering amateur hour. We're talking about sandwiching a cream and an oil between an essence (if you don't know what that is, keep reading), two serums, and a sunscreen. A cosmetics company's ultimate fantasy? For sure. But, done right, a multistep regimen can also have a gorgeous payoff for you. So what types of ingredients should you be layering? In what order do you apply them? And why do great bands break up? Can't answer that last one, but we can help you fine-tune the perfect wrinkle-smoothing, acne-busting, radiance-making skin-care routine.

## The Rules of Layering

Instead of just slapping on five creams—then washing your face because, seriously, that stuff is heavy—follow the lead of the pros:



**1 Start light.** Serums—the thinnest products—go first, because a) that just makes sense and b) "they deliver active ingredients into the skin most efficiently," says Hirsch. Plus, they're easy to customize. Pick two or three serums that each treat one of your concerns: formulas with peptides for wrinkles (we like Olay Regenerist Regenerating Serum), salicylic acid for oily skin (try Murad T-Zone Pore Refining Serum), and licorice or aloe to calm redness (like First Aid Beauty Anti-Redness Serum).

**2 Add an antioxidant** is one ingredient everyone needs. "It brightens against sun damage, and it stimulates collagen production," says co-scientist NiKita Wilson, who is using a potent serum (see Professional-C Serum 15% Vitamin C).

**3 Take a coffee break** each product a minute won't hurt. "I don't want to be a dermatologist in New York City," says Hirsch. "I want to be a dermatologist in New York City."

**FREE STUFF:** We're giving away products from First Aid Beauty, Murad, Olay. Tap to jump to the Free Stuff calendar for details on how to enter.

**4 Lock it down.** Moisturizer is key to any layering routine because "it seals serums on your skin, which can make them more effective," says Wilson. Feel free to keep it basic: Try Cetaphil Daily Facial Moisturizer SPF 15 for normal and oily skin and Simple Replenishing Rich Moisturizer for dry skin.

**5 Know when to go in reverse.** If your sensitive skin reddens at the thought of using even one treatment product, try putting on a simple, fragrance-free moisturizer first and then serums on top. "The cream will reduce the potency of the serums," says Hirsch, "but they'll also be less likely to cause irritation."

**6 Add an oil.** In small doses, oils make skin radiant. Put them on dry areas after creams—as a rule, oils can penetrate moisturizers, but not vice versa. We like L'Oréal Paris Age Perfect Glow Renewal Facial Oil, with sunflower-seed and jojoba oils. Skip the oil if you're wearing more than two serums.

**7 Don't forget p** screen is your morning," says J dermatologist in Great "It sits on top of your skin first, it prevents other ingredients from penetrating." Coppertone Faces for Sunny Days weight enough to lay products.

**8 Have a nightcap** as a sniffer of what your nighttime routine makes you look like. (Every dermatologist I've talked to agrees: anti-aging superingredient retinol over a serum anti-wrinkling helps retinol to work with less irritation." says Hirsch. "You can wear essences under serums for an anti-aging punch without feeling them on your skin," says Zeichner.

**Performance Enhancers** Essences are an Asian skin-care import that are as light as instead of cleansing or stripping the skin with alcohol, they're humectant, like glycerin. "Essences soften dead skin cells, so anything you put on top penetrates the skin more easily," says Zeichner, the director of cosmetic and clinical research at the Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City. We like SK-II Facial Essence, Hada Labo Tokyo Replenishing Hydrator, and Clinique Essence Lotion. "You can wear essences under serums for an anti-aging punch without feeling them on your skin," says Zeichner.

**FREE STUFF:** We're giving away products from Cetaphil, Coppertone, Dr. Brandt, Hada Labo Tokyo, L'Oréal Paris, and Simple. Tap to jump to the Free Stuff calendar for details on how to enter.

**3. Vitamin C and beta or alpha hydroxy acids:** "The acid changes the pH of vitamin C enough to destabilize it, making its antioxidant properties ineffective," says David Bank, a dermatologist in Mount Kisco, New York. If you're wearing a serum with salicylic or glycolic acid, choose an antioxidant serum with heartier free-radical fighters, like green tea or resveratrol. (Try Replenix Serum CF.)

Some ingredients don't play nicely with others. Split up these pairs.

**1. Beta or alpha hydroxy acids** (like salicylic, glycolic, and lactic) **and retinoids:** Layering these exfoliating ingredients can leave skin red and peeling. You can use both—but one in the morning and one at night.

**2. Benzoyl peroxide and retinoids:** You probably won't risk irritation—but you will waste your time. "The two ingredients have been shown to deactivate each other," says Brandt.

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### Seal the Deal

What will be the next big thing in layering? We'd put our money on skin finishers. They're staples at Asian beauty counters—and Sulwhasoo Luminature Essential Finisher (already available in South Korea) will be the first one in the U.S. next month. The pearlescent lotion is designed to be applied right before sunscreen for extra radiance. It also contains fatty acids, which help seal in the products underneath.

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