

Once upon a time, the only weapon against premature ageing was the surgeon's scalpel. But in 2002, something altogether less expensive, risky and painful is dramatically smoothing wrinkles – fast. 'Cosmeceuticals' are highly concentrated, active skincare formulas that blur the line between cosmetics and pharmaceuticals. Prescribed by dermatologists and plastic surgeons, or sold through specialist outlets and spas, they contain powerful doses of high-tech ingredients, such as glycolic acid and vitamin C, but are less than a hundredth of the cost of a facelift. Women in America are crazy for them and, even in the UK, experts agree that we are now seeing the future of skincare.

'Cosmeceuticals describe cosmetic products that have medicinal or drug-like properties,' says Wendy Lewis, skincare expert and author of *Wrinkle Rescue* (Quadrille, £4.99). 'And these are used to treat acne, wrinkles, sunspots, sun damage and scars, as well as improve the texture, quality and firmness of the skin.'

In the US, pharmaceuticals are subject to closer scrutiny and tighter regulation than cosmetics, and all pharmaceutical companies are obliged to substantiate and prove their products' claims to the Food And Drug Administration (FDA) before making them available to patients. As a result, most cosmeceutical products and treatments tend to contain more concentrated doses of active ingredients to ensure that their claims can be



Facelift in a jar

Would you consider a facelift if it didn't involve scalpels and stitches? Welcome to cosmeceuticals – the wrinkle-busters leading beauty's anti-ageing revolution. Sali Hughes reports

validated. They are able to penetrate the skin to improve its appearance visibly and often dramatically – fading uneven pigmentation, restoring elasticity and softening lines, sometimes in as little as four weeks.

Leading dermatologist and UCLA professor Dr Howard Murad was the first of several doctors to launch his own range of cosmeceuticals. His Murad range has now been joined by other high-tech cosmeceutical lines including DDF, Jan Marini Skin Research and B Kamins. He explains the difference between these and the mass-market ranges that you can buy in department stores: 'Cosmeceutical ingredients, such as glycolic acid (used in skincare to exfoliate), are generally found in much smaller doses in over-the-counter products. For example, a department store glycolic product will generally contain

around three to four per cent glycolic acid, while medical strength would generally be a minimum of eight per cent.'

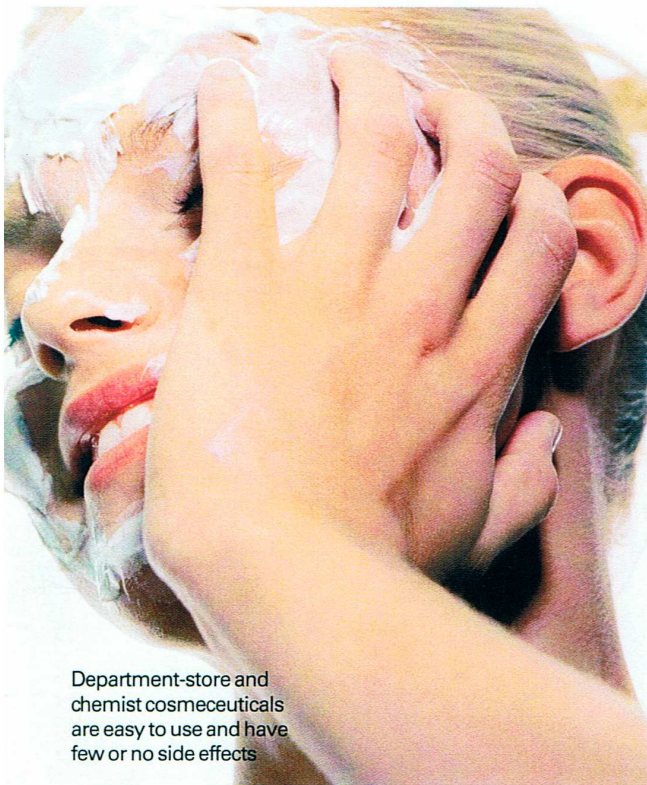
In some cases, FDA law dictates that certain proven anti-ageing ingredients, such as retinoic acid (the key ingredient in Retin-A and Renova) are prohibited in cosmetic products, but allowed in prescription-only treatments – the category into which many of the cosmeceutical brands

“Cosmeceutical ingredients are generally found in much smaller doses in over-the-counter products”

fall – and the situation is the same in Britain.

But in light of the rather dramatic effects of cosmeceuticals, does the average 30-something woman really need to switch from her normal moisturiser to one of these more specialised products, or even visit a clinic for a chemical peel? Dr Murad is a keen advocate. 'The sooner you start taking proper care of your skin the better.' He reminds us of the fact that cosmeceuticals are not always prescription-only. In fact, chemist, department-store and supermarket ranges have some distinct advantages over prescription-only and specialist spa-stocked cosmeceuticals: they are easy to use and have few or no side effects. 'After all,' he says, 'sunscreen is a cosmeceutical and you should be wearing that from as early as possible. Why is using other cosmeceuticals, such as the antioxidants vitamins C and E, any different?'

Wendy Lewis is also convinced of the unique benefits of concentrated doses, but feels that a balanced combination of these >



Department-store and chemist cosmeceuticals are easy to use and have few or no side effects

and good quality, mass-market products will suffice for most women. 'The best programme for a woman of 40-plus is a combination of over-the-counter and cosmeceutical skincare products that are specific to your skin type and condition, plus occasional professional salon treatments, such as microdermabrasion and glycolic peels. Until then, you can get away with using formulations from good companies that have the money to do serious research and development. Neutrogena Healthy Skin, Nivea Q10, Boots Time Delay and Roc Retinol Actif Pur are all great choices for beginners.'

For the more adventurous, prescription-only cosmeceuticals embody the 'no pain, no gain' beauty adage, with many new users

reporting initial redness, swelling, itching and peeling. The prescription-only Obagi Protocols programme, currently taking the US by storm, can take up to eight weeks for its varying side effects to subside and for the often dramatic anti-ageing results to be seen. But however impressive the outcome, eight weeks' downtime is an inconvenience few modern women can afford. Wendy Lewis says this is a common hurdle. 'The single biggest mistake women using cosmeceuticals make is not sticking with the regime long enough to judge the benefits,' she says. 'Women should use the products once or twice daily for six to 12 weeks to see real improvement.'

Dr Murad believes that, in most cases, unsightly side effects are unnecessary. 'A good dermatologist will have cosmeceutical products for all skin types, including sensitive. More easily irritated skins, such as Afro-Caribbean or very dry

complexions, need milder concentrations and suitable skincare formulas,' he warns. 'It's important to recognise that, while the key ingredients such as vitamin E, alpha hydroxy acids and so on can be extremely beneficial, like the engine of a car they are nothing without a good, well-thought-out shell.'

Whatever the formulas used, one side effect that seems universal to cosmeceuticals, even those bought in a chemist, is increased sensitivity to sun. Which brings us back to the only true skincare must-have: a sunscreen with a minimum SPF15. Wendy Lewis concludes: 'Adequate sun protection is the most important ingredient in any skincare regime. If you're bothering to use cosmeceuticals, not using a sunscreen is akin to missing the point.' □

COSMECEUTICALS TO GO

Over-the-counter skincare, straight from the lab



Olay Total Effects Intensive Restoration Treatment, £19.50 This mass-market cream treats lines and wrinkles with retinol (a milder version of the prescription-only retinoic acid).



Prada Beauty Lightening Concentrate/Face, £92 for 15 A lightweight serum, beta hydroxy acid and pure vitamin C. Diminishes dark spots and evens skin tone over time.



L'Oréal Plénitude Line Eraser Night Treatment, £10.99 A supermarket-shelf retinol (a form of vitamin A) treatment for lines and wrinkles. It has a large, devoted fan base.



Givenchy No Surgetics, £40 Aims to emulate the effects of minor cosmetic procedures such as dermabrasion, Botox and collagen injections, relaxing frown lines and plumping wrinkles.



SK-II Signs Treatment Concentrate, £120 With Vitamin B3 and Pitera 4* (a Japanese sake derivative), producing Keratin, to smooth lines, reduce dullness and tackle age spots.

COSMECEUTICAL DOS AND DON'TS

◆ **DO** think carefully about what you want to improve. Do you have sunspots you want to fade, or lines you want reduced? Different ingredients do different jobs, so it helps to be specific.

◆ **DO** see a qualified and registered dermatologist or plastic surgeon before using cosmeceutical products. They will be able to design an appropriate routine that will

get the best results without damaging your skin. Visit the British Association of Dermatologists website at www.bad.org.uk

◆ **DON'T** buy cosmeceutical products via the internet. Websites can't examine your skin and discuss your needs face to face, and are rarely able to alert you to incompatible ingredients and products.

◆ **DO** persevere with your routine if your physician says the side effects are normal. You will, in many cases, look worse before you get better.

◆ **DON'T** use cosmeceuticals if you're pregnant, unless a qualified medical practitioner tells you it's safe to do so.

◆ **DO** wear a sunscreen of SPF15 or above.