

The Skincare Acids Guide

Seven acids, seven jobs. A plain-language breakdown of what each one actually does, who it's best for, and how they're typically used — so you can ask for the right thing by name.

#SkincareAcids

#KnowYourActives

#AHA

#BHA

#AntioxidantSkincare

⚠ BEFORE YOU START

Acids are **active ingredients** — they change your skin, which means they can also irritate it if you move too fast. Strengths, frequencies, and pairings below are general starting points, not a personalized plan. **Patch test anything new**, and check with your provider before combining several actives at once.

AHA vs. BHA, In Plain English

AHAs (lactic, glycolic, mandelic) are water-soluble and work on the skin's surface — great for texture, tone, and brightness. **BHA** (salicylic acid) is oil-soluble, so it can actually get inside the pore to clear out oil and debris. That's why oily, acne-prone skin usually reaches for a BHA, while dry or sun-damaged skin usually starts with an AHA.

7 Actives

Covered in this guide, from gentlest to most potent

2–3x

Per week is the typical starting frequency for most acids

THE GENTLE EXFOLIANTS (AHAS)

AHA · 5–10%

Lactic Acid

- Gentle exfoliation, brightening
- Good **first acid** for sensitive or dry skin
- Best for: keratosis pilaris
- 2–3x/week, PM

AHA · 5–10%

Glycolic Acid

- Renews skin, boosts glow
- Smallest AHA molecule — **most potent**, most irritating
- Best for: dark spots
- 2–3x/week, PM

AHA · UP TO 10%

Mandelic Acid

- Gentle exfoliation, evens tone
- **Safest AHA for deeper skin tones**
- Best for: sensitive skin
- 2–4x/week, AM or PM

HYDRATION, CALMING & PORE CARE

HUMECTANT

Hyaluronic Acid

- Deep hydration, plumps skin
- Apply to **damp skin**, seal with moisturizer
- Best for: dry, dehydrated skin
- Daily, AM + PM

10–20%

Azelaic Acid

- Reduces redness, evens tone
- One of the few actives safe for **daily use**
- Best for: rosacea
- 2–3x/week → daily

BHA · 0.5–2%

Salicylic Acid

- Unclogs pores, controls oil
- Oil-soluble — **cleans inside the pore**
- Best for: acne-prone skin
- 3–5x/week, PM

THE ONE THAT DOESN'T FOLLOW THE RULES

Vitamin C (ascorbic acid) is an antioxidant, not an exfoliant. At 10–20%, used daily in the morning under SPF, it helps fight free-radical damage and boosts your sunscreen's protection — which is why it's the one acid on this list that belongs in your AM routine, not your PM one. Save the exfoliating acids for night.

Pairing & Avoiding

The combinations that work together, the ones that cancel each other out, and how to build a routine that doesn't fight itself.

#RoutineBuilding

#WhatNotToMix

#SkinBarrier

#AskYourProvider

WHAT PAIRS WELL — AND WHAT DOESN'T

| ACID | PAIRS WELL WITH | AVOID MIXING WITH |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Lactic Acid | Hyaluronic acid, moisturizer after | Other AHAs/BHAs same night, retinol same night |
| Glycolic Acid | Hyaluronic acid, niacinamide (alternate nights) | Vitamin C same session, retinol same night |
| Mandelic Acid | Salicylic acid (alternate days), hyaluronic acid | Other AHAs same session, physical scrubs |
| Hyaluronic Acid | Everything — layers under any acid | Nothing — universally compatible |
| Azelaic Acid | Vitamin C (AM), hyaluronic acid, niacinamide | Salicylic acid same session |
| Salicylic Acid | Hyaluronic acid, niacinamide | Vitamin C same session, retinol same night |
| Vitamin C | Vitamin E, ferulic acid, SPF over top | AHAs/BHAs same session — destabilizes it |

BUILD A ROUTINE THAT DOESN'T FIGHT ITSELF

STEP 1

Start Slow

- One new acid at a time
- 2–3x/week for the first month
- Watch for redness or peeling

STEP 2

Separate AM/PM

- Vitamin C + SPF in the morning
- Exfoliating acids at night
- Hyaluronic acid fits either

STEP 3

Always Moisturize

- Acids work best on a hydrated barrier
- Seal actives with a moisturizer
- Don't skip SPF the next day

IF YOUR SKIN IS SENSITIVE

Start with mandelic acid or azelaic acid — both are gentler entry points with lower irritation potential, and azelaic acid is one of the few actives that can build up to daily use.

WHEN TO CALL YOUR PROVIDER

Persistent redness, burning, or peeling that doesn't settle within a few days isn't "purging" — it's a sign to pause and check in before continuing.

HOW WE THINK ABOUT IT AT HELLO GORGEOUS

Acids are powerful, but more isn't better — the right acid, at the right strength, used consistently, beats a five-step routine that irritates your skin. If you're not sure where to start, that's exactly what a consult is for. Still family-owned, still honest, still in your corner.