

THE LATEST TRENDS

Why Physician-Strength Products Out-Perform Mainstream Skincare

Post by Stephanie Simons on August 18, 2015



Our beauty writer Stephanie Simons swapped her high-faluting Chanel for clinical-strength skincare, and swears she may never need foundation again...

There's been a windfall of super-trendy skincare ingredients hitting shelves lately, from 24-karat gold and non-embryonic stem cells to snail slime and snake venom – all of them masterfully packaged in little boxes with big claims. I've tried them all (it's finally gotten to the point where I walk into Sephora they yell out my name as though I'm Norm on *Cheers*). Truth be told, I've even worn food on my face in the name of experimentation. You know that scene in *Mrs. Doubtfire* with the lemon meringue pie? Well, that's me, all in the name of intrepid beauty reporting. In fact, I briefly considered titling this article *'Skinsanity: Postcards From The Edge.'*

Eventually most women must learn the hard way (the expensive way, no doubt) that not all skincare ingredients are worth the hype. It's something I'm just now coming to terms with, after nearly a lifetime of reading *Allure*, which doesn't even begin to tap the surface when it comes to reporting on medical-grade products and what they can do to transform stubborn skin concerns like hyperpigmentation, acne and fine lines. Most of the mainstream products on the magazine's glossy pages have a temporary fling with fame only to get pushed to the back of your cabinet in lieu of the next best thing – which, more often than not, turn out to be the next big let-down. You patiently wait... and wait... and then, 'wait, is this stuff even working the way I want it to?' Harsh reality: Just because someone is sporting a white lab coat behind a department store counter – a brilliant marketing tactic to make you think they are in some way licensed to sell you expensive products with big claims – doesn't mean that whatever they're peddling will perform.

Now that I'm in my 30s, I want to see my skincare-money working for me the same way I like to see my clothes hanging in my closet. Products are my first love the way Manolos are Carrie Bradshaw's. I love the way they smell, the way they feel on my skin and the promise of being my best self. As far as I'm concerned, it's not superficial, it's superfun. And while I may have been late to shave my legs (wait, is fourth grade really that 'late?'), I started dabbling in Clarins, Clinique and even a little Chanel when I was 14 and watched my mom have flings with everything from Erno Laszlo to La Mer and La Prairie, only to rinse and repeat all over again. Knowing what I know now, I would have started my anti-aging efforts at birth. I would have used physician-strength products from the get-go. And I will most likely baptize my own daughter in a clinically-proven anti-wrinkle serum to stave off those 'traumatizing' first signs of aging for as long as possible.

"Drugstore and department store products are designed to be used by anyone," says Karen Fernandez, Lead Medical Aesthetician and Manager of Aesthetics for [SkinSpirit Skincare Clinic And Spa](#) with locations in California and Washington. "Anyone untrained in aesthetics needs to be able to walk into these places and pick out something that won't harm themselves. Since medical-grade products are administered by actual medical professionals, they can have higher active ingredients that work at a cellular level and get down to the dermal-epidermal juncture. This is what causes more change in the skin." These products become exponentially more powerful combined with controlled wound techniques (think lasers, peels, micropenning treatments) that force the skin to renew itself. And they are designed to protect your investment on these treatments, maintenance-wise.

Upgrading your products to clinical-strength and having a professional on speed dial (this can include a doctor, someone trained in medical-grade skincare or someone working under a doctor's watchful eye) is the only way to visibly and measurably change your skin for the long haul. Products sold in medical clinics like SkinSpirit are tested on-site for efficacy to ensure they really do what they claim to do before they ever touch your face, essentially putting the smack down on snake oil salesmen and women in stores everywhere. The high-performing brands to watch? [Revision](#). [SkinCeuticals](#). [Jan Marini](#). [Obagi](#). [PCA Skin](#). Some of the most life-changing skincare is not even in stores. These are the exclusives that deliver as promised and do what they say to prevent, correct and protect.

It turns out that now more than ever, truth-telling in the industry is going the way of the Malagasy dwarf hippo: it's becoming extinct. Every product on the mainstream market claims to be some kind of miracle, overpromising results with just one application. *Diminishes bags! Reduces sagging! Fades spots!* Trending now on Twitter: [#Sh*tMyMoisturizerSays](#). Let's face it, even Saint Jude, patron saint of hopeless cases, couldn't perform this kind of heavy lifting. Brightening products are perhaps the most convoluted of all, since 'brightening' can actually mean so many insignificant things in skin-speak, and 'lightening' is a totally different game all together.

I've recently upgraded my formerly label-conscious routine at the urging of our HintMD dermatologist board, using a customized combination of the aforementioned doctor-dispensed brands, and the results speak for themselves. I'm finally close to approaching the finish line when it comes to attaining the skin I want. It's a back-to-basics approach (one that required throwing out a lot of my own existing products with idle ingredients), but there's really nothing basic about it. Using them feels like targeting my concerns with laser precision, albeit without the lasers.

Here's what I know for certain – with an all-CAPS, *italicized*, **bold-faced** emphasis on the honest-to-goodness truth: my skin has never looked better and my wallet is heavier now that it has a focus (contrary to popular belief, it turns out physician-strength products aren't any more pricey than what I currently use, and what I'm really paying for is peace of mind and some solid scientific backing).

This is the premise of HintMD. We aim to cut the fat from your anti-aging regimen and get you straight to the visible results. To bring you the best skincare money can buy. To help you navigate the uncharted 'dermatologist-recommended' beauty terrain that's going to change the way you think about your daily regimen.

I'm a convert. A believer. A lover of all things doctor-dispensed and truly skin-changing.

My beauty habits will forever be changed by what I call the 'physician invasion' and I now adhere to the motto 'carpe derm' (roughly translated as 'seize the dermatologist appointment').

Because once you go doc, you'll never go back.