

# AFTER GLOW

**Think lineless, poreless—dare we say it—flawless skin is impossible? Not so, say dermatologists. Now, chemical peels may very well grant you complexion perfection. By Elizabeth Angell**

**F**or instant gratification, skin peels rank at least as high as scratch-off lottery tickets and chocolate truffles. In just a few minutes, a chemical peel can do more to fade fine lines and brighten dull skin than months' worth of creams or lotions. No wonder more than half a million chemical peels were performed in doctors' offices in 2007—making the procedure one of the most popular tracked by the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. And that doesn't even take into account the rising number performed by aestheticians and by women in their own bathrooms.

Despite their popularity, peels can still be a scary concept—after all, their primary ingredient is acid. “When I start to talk about chemical peels, women immediately think of that *Sex and the City*

episode when Samantha gets a peel and she looks so red and raw,” says Francesca Fusco, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City. “I get this look of horror. But there is a peel for every skin type, there is a low risk of adverse effects, and any woman, at any age, can have one.”

This very variety is what leads to the confusion that still surrounds skin peels. Fortunately, the principle behind all of them is simple: The acid strips away layers of skin, eliminating old, damaged cells and promoting collagen production in the process. Mild peels, the kind you might do yourself or get at a spa, remove just the dead cells on the surface. Deeper ones, performed by a doctor, penetrate the dermis to address wrinkles, stubborn age spots, and mild acne scars. So far, so good. But for the finer points of what to ask for—and whom to trust—we turned to the country's top dermatologists to really go beneath the surface.

**Q ■ Do over-the-counter peels really do anything?**

A home peel is like a glass of wine after a hard day: It won't solve your problems, but it will make everything seem better. They work essentially the same way a peel from a doctor or facialist does; the difference is how deep the acid penetrates. “They're great for mild

exfoliation, especially if you're not exfoliating in your daily routine,” says Amy B. Lewis, clinical assistant professor of dermatology at Yale University School of Medicine. “They unclog pores and make your skin feel smoother and look brighter.” Test any home peel first on your inner arm (stinging is fine; burning isn't). Once you find one you like, “you can use it two or three times a

week,” says Susan Weinkle, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the University of South Florida. The effects of a peel should last for a few days.

**Q ■ How do I know if a home peel is the right strength?**

It should contain at least 10 percent acid in order to be effective. However,