

Snow Glow

Exfoliate to brighten winter skin.

BY DR. MELISSA SCHWARZSCHILD

In the low-humidity months of winter, my skin tends to become dull, dry and blotchy, and my face seems to lose its glow. So every year at about this time, I go into exfoliation mode. Even though I use a glycolic acid cream on my face every day as a mild exfoliant, right about now I like the added boost of a series of chemical peels to get my complexion looking smoother and brighter.

Chemical peels are topically applied acids that help restore and rejuvenate the skin's surface. They stimulate a uniform shedding of several layers of skin so that the dull outer layers are sloughed off and replaced by new, refreshed skin. Peels are most often used to treat blotchy, uneven pigment and sun damage on the face, but they aren't limited to that area -- the neck, chest, arms and hands can also be treated. To ensure a uniform peel and minimize potential side effects, chemical peels are best performed in a medical office.

Glycolic acid is the most common agent used in this procedure. Peels performed in a physician's office use a solution that is 30 to 70 percent glycolic acid; at-home kits are significantly milder. For best results, a series of four to

six treatments is performed, each about two weeks apart. There should be few side effects, other than mild redness after each peel. Because the top layer of skin is removed during the procedure, your skin will be more sensitive to the sun, so sun protection is more important than ever in the days following each treatment.

You can maintain your results by using a glycolic acid face cream at home and by having periodic touch-up peels (every six weeks or so) after the initial series is completed. Creams for home use range in strength from 10 to 30 percent glycolic acid. I recommend starting with the lowest strength, using it regularly (every other night to nightly) and gradually increasing the strength as tolerated. This is a great way to keep your skin feeling smooth and looking beautiful as we move into spring.

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