

Dry Skin Vocabulary

Having dry skin means you will often find yourself in search of the right products to help put your face back in the land of the soft and supple. As a result of either your natural skin type, cosmetics, or the outside elements (sun, wind, cold, or extreme heat), it can become a challenge to get your skin back into a position that requires less work. What you want is for the bindings between cells to be repaired, stay moist, and remain strong, keeping your skin in balance the way it should be.

Facing dry skin means you have probably heard a number of different terms in regards to product ingredients and what you should be putting on your face. You may hear these terms and think they sound good, important, and authoritative, but have you ever taken the extra time to figure out just what these terms mean?

Here is a fast and easy guide to those terms. Now you can finally understand what a cosmetics clerk is talking about and decide for yourself whether or not your skin is dry enough to merit certain measures.

Emollient: This type of ingredient is probably the one that is thrown around the most. If you have already guessed that an emollient is a sort of heavy duty moisturizer, you are half right. Where a moisturizer is meant to add moisture to the skin, an emollient is meant to help prevent that moisture loss. Emollients are more often ingredients in moisturizers instead of straight products themselves.

Emollients are the ingredients that can change a moisturizer from average to heavy duty, as in giving a moisturizer more power to your skin. Aside from preventing water loss, emollients help to soothe and soften dry and scaling skin.

Emollients can come in different forms. They can either be created and a product can have synthesized emollient ingredients, or they can be natural ingredients, such as almond oil.

Emollients essentially have three functions, the first being occlusion, which provides the surface of the skin with a layer of oil, thereby preventing water loss. The second is humectant, which will be discussed next. And lastly, lubrication, which helps add a glide over the skin.

Humectant: While humectant can be an action provided by certain emollients, it can also be provided separately by different ingredients. A humectant essentially gives the skin more of an ability to retain water. In doing so it helps to prevent water loss and even add extra moisture to your skin. This mostly applies to the outermost layer of the skin which is dead. If a humectant is not naturally a part of an organic component, then it is usually synthesized to help add moisturizing properties to skin care products.

Emulsifier: Dry skin usually means you will require both water and oil to help give your skin back its moisture. However, as we all know, water and oil do not mix well at all. Instead they will separate out, leaving us with a problem.

How do you get both water and oil to stay together? This is what an emulsifier is for. An emulsifier acts as a stabilizer for mixtures that do not normally mix well together. Under normal conditions, ingredients will split apart. An emulsifier does not allow them to do so. Because of emulsifiers, water and oil, as well as other separate components, are able to blend within lotions and creams.

Emulsifiers can either be created by mechanical agitation or through various chemical processes. There are also natural emulsifiers, such as beeswax, that can be added to products to help them merge agreeably.

Many products already contain ingredients that do these things.

Most lotions will contain emulsifiers and humectants, but will not always have emollients. Products will also have different strengths in order to be tailored to your specific skin needs. Someone with oily skin will most certainly not need a thick emollient rich cream, whereas sufferers of eczema and psoriasis find that the same cream eases their symptoms.

Gauge different areas of your skin and compare their dryness. From there you will be better able to make a good decision on which ingredients you want and how many of them should be in your products.

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