

## SMALL BUT MIGHTY

Given retinol's impressive resume, it's no wonder that we can't resist cranking up the potency in the hope of faster results. Cue a downward spiral of irritated skin, which sees us swear off retinol altogether. Meanwhile, sensitive skin types struggle to build tolerance with even the most frugal application – which is why retinol microdosing is fast becoming one of skincare's biggest trends.

As it turns out, our skincare routines can benefit from microdosing. Tiny amounts of retinol – typically 25 to 50 per cent lower in concentration than traditional over-the-counter versions – steadily accelerate cell renewal, while minimising the uncomfortable side effects.

A forerunner of the microdosing trend is Clinique's Smart Clinical Repair Wrinkle Correcting Serum, which combines a mild form of retinoic acid with hyaluronic acid to offset dryness. Likewise, Kiehl's Retinol Skin-Renewing Daily Micro-Dose Serum uses a mere 0.1 per cent concentration of retinol. For the brand's Global Scientific Director, Dr. Nancy Ilaya, it all comes down to mindful formulating. "We wanted to formulate a retinol product that could be used every day with minimal discomfort, while still offering powerful anti-ageing benefits," she explained. "To do so, our formula includes ceramides that release vital skin barrier lipids to prevent dryness. The precise dose of retinol can then be effectively delivered into the skin without over-accelerating cell turnover or disrupting the skin barrier."

Kiehl's Retinol Skin-Renewing Daily Micro-Dose Serum, Dhs230



## A SOFTLY, SOFTLY APPROACH

There are a few reasons why you might consider a retinol alternative: if you suffer from sensitivity or have a darker skin tone and are wary of using retinol for fear of triggering post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation.

Hailing from Ayurvedic medicine, bakuchiol is the most popular of these after a study in the British Journal of Dermatology found that it decreased fine lines and pigmentation at the same rate as retinol. "Studies show that bakuchiol mimics vitamin A in exactly the same way as a synthetic version would, by stimulating collagen, targeting the signs of ageing and hyperpigmentation," explained Shirley Conlon, founder of her eponymous Dubai-based organic skincare brand. "But unlike vitamin A, it won't cause irritation or photosensitivity; it doesn't thin the skin barrier or have a peeling effect." This is precisely why she chose it for her new Bio Retinol Vitamin A Serum, which is launching this month.

Retinoic acid extract from rosehip seed oil is another popular retinol alternative. Skincare founder Tata Harper, who has just launched her treatment menu at The Spa at Mandarin Oriental Jumeira, formulated her Retinoic Nutrient Face Oil around the botanical. "Enzymes on the skin's surface convert rosehip seed oil into retinoic acid," clarified Tata, noting that it additionally contains "essential fatty acids and antioxidants to support cell regeneration."

Shiffa's Rose Maroc Night Elixir also uses oil as a vehicle to deliver a retinoid into the skin. "Too much irritation from vitamin A means you won't use it where the first signs of ageing show – under the eyes," said founder Dr. Lamees Hamdan. "Granactive retinoid can be used under the eye without causing irritation." Nothing gets lost in translation with the healing rose oil base, either. "Vitamin A is a fat-soluble vitamin," added Dr. Hamdan. "Some oils are similar to the skin's natural sebum, so it absorbs them better. It's about understanding the importance of pairing active ingredients with natural ways of increasing delivery – and your skin reacts better to natural ingredients in my view."

Perhaps the most important thing to note is that skincare works best when applied consistently. With its promise of gentle daily application to attend to the signs of ageing, 'flexinol' is a tantalising prospect for quietly effective results. ■

Retinoic Nutrient Face Oil, Tata Harper, Dhs650



Shiffa's Rose Maroc Night Elixir, Dhs660