



THEY ARE BILLED as the wonder-workers of skincare, the good oil when it comes to wrinkle fighting. But are serums really all they are built up to be?

Essentially, most – but not all – skin serums are just moisturisers wearing a different hat. Like normal moisturisers they are designed to smooth, soften and hydrate the skin, which leads to a reduction in the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles. Where serums differ is in texture – they are actually lightweight liquid gels – and they usually contain more concentrated ingredients. Those billed as treatments not hydrators are designed to combat or correct specific problems such as age spots or pigmentation, dullness, deep wrinkles and scarring. And, although they usually contain some hydrating ingredients, they are meant to supplement daily moisturisers, not replace them.

“I’m keen on them,” says cosmetic physician Dr Teresa Cattin, who is featured in the My Style section (page 16). “Gels are usually colloids which carry very fine particles to the skin, making them a good delivery system. Ingredients can be suspended in the gel, the gel evaporates and you are left with the pure ingredient.”

Nutrient-rich powerhouses? Potent potions promising super-speedy penetration? Not necessarily. For a start, serums are usually the big-ticket items in any brand, which means it’s reasonable to expect them to deliver better results than ordinary moisturisers. They can’t do this unless they contain the same cocktail of skin-benefiting ingredients found in a good moisturiser. These include vitamins, antioxidants, cell-communicating substances such as linoleic acids, ceramides, topical exfoliants, salicylic acid and retinol, all of which help skin fight the signs of ageing. They must also be packaged in airtight containers.

Serums have one big disadvantage: they don’t contain sun protection which is the most essential anti-ageing ingredient of all. This is one of the reasons they are sold as companion products to your usual regime, since all beauty companies recognise the importance of sunscreen.

Price is a big issue with serums, with some costing more than \$500. But Britain’s Boots No 7 Protect & Perfect Beauty Serum was heralded as proof that effective serums exist at all ends of the dollar spectrum. Available here only over the internet, it’s comparatively affordable (about \$50).

Trialled by dermatologists at the University of Manchester on 60 volunteers, the product was found to stimulate the production of fibrillin-1, a protein that promotes elasticity in the skin. Over 12 months of daily use, the study showed that more than 70 per cent of volunteers had significantly fewer wrinkles. The product rockets off the shelves.

The Boots serum is billed as a treatment product, not a moisturiser. Other notable examples – in a higher price bracket – are Elizabeth Arden’s Prevage and Lancôme’s Génifique. Both claim impressive results – Génifique by boosting gene activity over time, Prevage by bolstering the skin’s defences via the powerful antioxidant, idebenone.

A good serum is a skincare asset, especially to treat a specific problem. But it does pay to do your research before making a purchase. ■

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Guinot Time Logic Age Serum \$385

Dior Capture Totale Multi-Perfection Concentrated Serum \$301

Shiseido White Lucent Intensive Spot Targeting Serum \$180

Gatineau Age Benefit Concentrate \$199

Olay Regenerist Micro-Sculpting Serum \$49.99

Weleda Pomegranate Firming Face Serum \$45.90