

Sensitive Skin

About half of us feel our skin is sensitive. There is no formal definition of sensitive skin and there are many causes. Here we are referring to self-reported sensitive skin and this is a subjective complaint. So what products do you use? There are many products made for sensitive skin. You have to decide what type of sensitivity you have to select the right product.

Skin sensitivity in women increases during certain phases of the menstrual cycle. This increases other sensitivity complaints and skin breakouts. For those with breakouts tied to the menstrual cycle, be sure the products you use are not prone to cause acne (non-comedogenic).

The most common symptom of sensitive skin is reddening of the skin. Certain foods, alcoholic drinks, stress and emotion and temperature extremes may trigger this. If redness alone is your complaint, avoid these and avoid products with high alcohol content or medicated ingredients.

Stinging, tightness redness and blemishes seem to be caused by the use of certain cosmetics, soaps and cleaning products. The cosmetics industry has long known some people are “stingers”; various products produce this effect for reasons that are not clear. It appears that products pass through their skin barrier more readily. Alpha-hydroxy acids, acne medications and urea should be avoided. Because the effect is highly individual if you are a “stinger” you really have to try the product.

When tightness and dryness also accompany redness, this is aggravated by cold, dry air. If redness is accompanied by dry and tight skin, be sure to use a good, light moisturizer. Sometimes these complaints are due to a low grade, almost invisible, allergic reaction to a preservative or fragrance in the “hypoallergenic” products you are already using. Sometimes washing with tap water and moisturizing with plain Vaseline are the only thing that can be tolerated.

There are other, known skin diseases and allergies that cause the skin to be sensitive. These include atopic dermatitis, seborrheic dermatitis, rosacea, and contact dermatitis. These can usually be diagnosed by the dermatologist during your visit.