



# Age erasers

## Do "miracle" products really work?

*AHAs (alpha-hydroxy acids) are everywhere—in moisturizers, shampoos, even lipsticks.*

*What, really, can you expect from them?*

**How to judge if that elixir is doing its job? You should see results within eight weeks.**

**W**ith their seductive promise of delivering clear, smooth skin in just weeks, alpha-hydroxy acids have been touted as the beauty breakthrough of the '90s. First they appeared in face creams. Then came AHA-enriched body lotions. Now they've crept into everything from lipsticks to self-tanners. The big question: Do AHAs deliver?

To some extent, yes, say most dermatologists. But getting good results depends on the products you buy and how you apply them.

### The way they work

AHAs are derived from natural sources such as glycolic acid (from sugar cane) and lactic acid (from sour milk). They dissolve the links between skin cells, allowing dead cells to slough off and reveal the youthful-looking skin underneath.

Many dermatologists believe that regular use of AHAs can help diminish fine lines, fade age spots and

soften dry, rough patches. But the effects are subtle. Says Harold Brody, M.D., chairman of the American Academy of Dermatology's AHA task force: "AHAs won't get rid of deep wrinkles or sagging skin."

### Beyond face value

The newest AHA potions target more than your complexion—and with varying degrees of success. The exfoliating action of the acids, for instance, can boost the effectiveness of cuticle creams and therapeutic lip balms, says dermatologist Mary Lupo, M.D., an associate clinical professor at Tulane Medical School in

New Orleans. And an oil-free AHA body lotion can treat back and shoulder acne. "By removing dead skin cells, AHAs help unclog pores," explains Lupo.

But many doctors question the value of adding acids to cleansers (the acids wouldn't stay on the skin long enough to do much good) and self-tanners (because they are exfoliants, AHAs could actually cause the self-tan to fade faster).

### A user's guide

No matter which AHA product you try, keep in mind that some people find chemical exfoliants irritating and that no long-term formal safety studies of these products have been completed (several are now in progress).

Most doctors deem AHAs safe in over-the-counter concentrations (typically 2 to 10 percent), as long as they're used properly. Some guidelines:

- Read the fine print. For instance, if the package directs you to dry your skin completely before using the product, do so.

(Applying AHAs to damp skin can cause irritation.)

- Be stingy with face creams. A little goes a long way. Apply a thin film to your face; avoid contact with eyes and upper lids.

- Go slowly. Start with a mild concentration (e.g., 4 percent; if the strength isn't listed on the label, inquire at the cosmetics counter or call the company). Barring any irritation, work up to an 8 to 10 percent concentration for best results.

- Be smart about sun protection. Newly exfoliated skin is especially vulnerable. Look for AHA products with sunscreen, or follow up with sunblock. ■



**Experiment with various brands. Because of your personal body chemistry, a glycolic-acid product may affect you differently from one made with lactic acid—even if each has the same AHA concentration.**

## should you be using an AHA?

If your complexion is flawless, obviously not. But if you have dry or rough skin, sun spots or fine lines, it might be worth a try. "We suggest women begin to use AHAs

at the earliest signs of aging—normally around 32 to 35," says Jack Mausner, Ph.D., senior vice president of Chanel Inc. Use one much sooner and it'll probably have more

of an effect on your wallet than on your skin. That's because AHAs don't prevent skin damage, say dermatologists. They simply improve the look of the skin you have now.



## A fun look at what 2002 holds for you...



**ARIES** Taking initiative comes naturally to you, Aries, and this year will be no exception. You'll view work as a great adventure that suits your independent spirit. Because of your open-heartedness, your love life also looks quite bright in 2002. But don't be surprised if the year finds you re-evaluating a few friendships. The Sun and Moon eclipses prompt you to integrate your physical and spiritual sides; consider staying fit with yoga or martial arts.

**TAURUS** This promises to be a year of greatness, Taurus. Chances are, you'll accomplish whatever you set out to do! Expect favorable changes in finances; just be aware of a tendency towards greed. Pluto's cycle may have you exploring the shadow sides of those closest to you. Yes, it's disillusioning—but ultimately it will help you view others more realistically. Don't waste time reliving old hurts. Instead, get out and make those dreams come true!

**GEMINI** Your intuitive abilities are even more pronounced in 2002, Gemini. A free, independent thinker like you will find

your problem-solving talents are much admired by others. Be patient with those closest to you, especially if their need for routine sometimes dampens your love of spontaneity. Search your soul, and you're bound to awaken to new possibilities in work and relationships. Learn to express your own needs more clearly.

**CANCER** As a Moon child, you're naturally very nurturing. 2002 will find you even more sensitive to the feelings of others, particularly family members. Jupiter will move through your chart in July—encouraging you to move in a positive new direction either at work or in your personal life. Your spiritual side, already strong, will also be heightened this year. Looking at hidden possibilities will make this time period very illuminating and fulfilling.

**LEO** Since Leos love recognition, you'll view this year as a terrific one! On the flip side, your loyalty may be put to the test in a personal relationship. Jupiter's movement into your sign in July signals you to step out of your comfort zone. Doors

will open with abundant opportunities. Expect to make exceptional progress in a lifelong quest. Some of you may find yourselves suddenly single. If so, tapping into an old hobby could prove very rewarding.

**VIRGO** You meticulous Virgos can expect much success in 2002: visionary talents in business and matters of the heart are highlighted. Others will be inspired by your can-do approach. Heal an old rift; carrying around grudges is detrimental to your well-being. Exercise to release tension, as you tend to carry a great deal of stress in your body. Although you are skilled at cleaning up other people's messes, it could leave you feeling resentful. Let others lead their own lives.

**LIBRA** This year you can be a major facilitator of change, Libra. People are drawn to your charm and grace. Just be clear about your own limitations. It's a great year for travel and for romance. Learning is also emphasized; consider a course in something you've always wanted to study. You'll be unusually supportive of loved ones' accomplishments, and they'll thank you for it. When Jupiter enters your sign in August, you're bound to feel your spirits soar.

**SCORPIO** Your wise, perceptive nature may lead you on a truth-seeking mission in 2002. A spiritual retreat between January and July—while Jupiter is in your chart—could be beneficial. Someone you hold close to your heart might disappoint you this year. Under Saturn's influence, you're apt to be more disciplined about exercise and nutrition. Forgiveness can be a challenging life lesson. Start by forgiving yourself, then extend that gift to others.

**SAGITTARIUS** Under the exuberant influence of Jupiter, Sagittarians tend to be happy and outgoing. Yet you also have

a strong desire to do the right thing—so this year, expect to work hard to overcome an injustice. In romantic matters, you'll be motivated to revitalize a long-term relationship. The tides could turn financially favorable in 2002; in fact, a partner might bring prosperity. A family relationship may need some retooling. With patience, you'll gain wisdom.

**CAPRICORN** This year will find you working hard to accomplish a goal. Happily, you'll feel the support of friends and co-workers. Jupiter helps you discover the truth about close relationships this year; a family member you doubted may prove extremely loyal. Keep a close eye on finances and be wary of lenders. You're going through an enlightening time; the eclipses will enable you to confront and fix some destructive habits.

**AQUARIUS** Aquarians, this is your year! The impression you make on others is likely to last a lifetime. With Jupiter influencing your job sector, you can certainly make your mark. Just beware of taking on more than you can handle. Expect to probe intimate relationships in 2002. While it's tempting to focus on a partner's shortcomings, look honestly at your own contributions to a dilemma, too. It's a more positive approach with a better outcome.

**PISCES** Since you are ruled by Neptune, spirituality is a big part of who you are, Pisces. A keen sensitivity to others could make it difficult for you to differentiate between your own feelings and the wishes of outsiders. Be aware of how this tendency might shortchange you. Expect to meet a soul mate in an unexpected way. Your career can get a charge in July, when Jupiter moves through your sign. Family relations may be strained in the first half of the year but perk up by the middle of August.