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What is a chemical peel?

A chemical peel is an acid solution that is applied to the skin. It dissolves the outermost layer of skin cells, which then peels off over the following days to reveal the fresher, younger layer below. Peels are very effective in treating a large range of skin concerns such as aging, sun damage, acne, mild scarring, improving skin brightness, and evening skin tone.

Peels can be light, moderate or deep. Light peels require no down time from work and your normal activities. Moderate peels may require a day or two, and deep peels can require a week or more of down time to allow the skin to fully heal. Estheticians who are not working in a medical setting perform light to moderate peels only. Deep peels can only be performed by a physician, or under a physician's supervision, for your safety.

Preparing for treatment: Most skin colors and types can benefit from chemical peels, though it is best to check with your esthetician about which peel might be right for you. If you're taking acne medication, Retin-A or Accutane, talk to your esthetician and/or doctor about stopping the medication before and during treatment to avoid complications. Your esthetician can review any other contraindications with you prior to your treatment to determine if a chemical peel is right for you. Be sure to answer all questions honestly and completely on your consultation form prior to your peel.

What to expect during a chemical peel: The skin is cleansed and a prep solution will be applied to remove surface oils and allow the peel to penetrate the skin evenly. Any sensitive areas that cannot be treated will be protected with a thin film of petroleum jelly. Your eyes will be covered to protect them. One or more chemical mixtures will be applied, such as glycolic acid (from sugar cane), trichloroacetic acid (similar to bleach), salicylic acid (wintergreen—good for acne), lactic acid (from milk), or a combination peel called a Jessners peel. The peel will be applied in 1–3 layers, depending on the depth of penetration intended. The acids react with the skin to produce a “controlled wound,” allowing fresh skin to regenerate and emerge. A tingling, burning or hot sensation is normal. Most peels remain on the skin only a few minutes, and are closely watched by the esthetician. A fan may help you stay more comfortable. After some peels, a neutralizing solution is applied to stop the peel. Other peels are self-timed and stop on their own.

After the peel: After most peels, the skin will be pink to red, and look shiny and tight. It is vital to apply sunscreen of SPF 30 or greater to the skin for the next 48 hours, minimum. You must also stay out of the sun, as your skin will be very sensitive to UV rays and could be damaged by sun exposure. The skin will begin to flake or peel within 2–3 days after the treatment, unless you had a lactic acid peel—these encourage moisture retention and may not produce any actual peeling. Sun-damaged areas of your skin will appear darker at first, then will lighten. This is normal. Deeper peels can produce peeling for a week or more. To assist in removing the flaking skin, an enzyme peel or light microdermabrasion treatment is sometimes scheduled a week or so after the initial peel. For maximum results, a series of peels is usually recommended, and may be necessary for treating challenging issues such as hyperpigmentation.

Home care after a chemical peel: Your esthetician will recommend healing products to use for the week or two following your peel. These will soothe and nourish your skin, and aid in its recovery. Usually it is best to avoid makeup during this time, to allow the skin to heal and function without interference. However, if you must wear makeup, mineral makeup will not adversely affect the skin.

Your esthetician: Your skin care treatments should be provided by a properly trained professional. Don't hesitate to ask your skin care therapist about her background, training, and experience—especially as it relates to the treatment you are considering. Your therapist is a professional member of Associated Skin Care Professionals. Our members have been validated as meeting their state's licensing credentials and/or core training requirements, and agree to follow a code of ethics which ensures you'll be treated responsibly and with the utmost respect. ASCP also provides its members with comprehensive resources that allow them to keep up with changing trends, making certain you'll receive the most up-to-date therapies available.



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What is a facial? Why do I need one?

A facial is a professional cleansing, purifying, and beautifying treatment of the skin on the face and neck. Facials are the number one treatment performed by estheticians, and a good way for your therapist to get a good understanding of your skin prior to suggesting more aggressive treatments.

For most people, facials can be scheduled every four weeks, although your therapist may recommend a different schedule. There are many variations of facials based on different needs, as well as different lengths of time. A mini facial may be only 20–30 minutes in length, while a more luxurious version may be 75–90 minutes in length. Tell your esthetician exactly what you want to get out of your facial, and she/he will be able to recommend a facial to meet your needs.

Preparing for a facial: Be sure to allow enough time to fill out a comprehensive intake prior to your treatment. Plan to arrive a little early so you will not feel rushed and can enjoy the entire length of your treatment. Remember that your hair may become damp during the facial, and will usually be held back from your face with a soft wrap or headband, so you may not want to schedule a public appearance right after your facial! There is no need to remove your makeup prior to the appointment, as it will be cleansed off during the facial.

What to expect: Facials are generally very relaxing and soothing. Your esthetician will explain to you what the treatment steps will be. Be sure to communicate with your esthetician during the facial if any product burns, itches, or if you need anything or have any questions. Otherwise, just lie back and enjoy the experience. A basic facial generally includes the following steps:

- Makeup removal and cleansing of the skin.
- Skin analysis
- Exfoliation by mechanical, enzymatic or chemical means.
- Massage of the face and neck, to aid in relaxation and stimulate blood and oxygen flow to the skin.
- Extraction of blackheads and other impurities, either manually (using gloved hands and cotton or tissue around the fingers with gentle pressure to remove the impacted pore) or using a metal extraction implement designed to clear blocked pores. This can also include the use of a lancet (a small, sharp blade to lift the dead cells of the skin prior to extraction).
- Application of products targeted to your skin type (dry, oily, mixed, sensitive, or mature).

After the facial: After a facial, your skin will probably be soft, smooth and well hydrated. However, if multiple extractions were needed or if you required a fair amount of exfoliation, your face may be somewhat rosy for one to two hours or more, depending on how sensitive your skin is. This is quite normal. You can apply mineral makeup after your facial if there is some redness you want to conceal.

Home care after a facial: Your esthetician will go over which professional home care products for you to continue the improvement in your skin following your professional treatment. This way, you will be using products that maximize benefits and prolong the effects of your treatment. Your therapist can explain how, when and how much of the products to use. Feel free to call the therapist later, if you have any questions.

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What is microdermabrasion? How will I benefit from it?

Microdermabrasion is a method of exfoliation that uses a machine to remove dead surface skin cells and initiate cellular turnover. It was first adopted in Europe in the 1980s and was introduced to the United States in the late 1990s. Its introduction led the revolution of device-driven, noninvasive cosmetic procedures. Today, microdermabrasion remains one of the most popular services employed in both medical and day spas.

The two most common methods are crystal and diamond. The crystal method uses a wand which sprays fine crystals onto the skin, loosening and removing dead skin cells, while simultaneously using vacuum suction to remove the used crystals and dead skin. It has been compared to a mild “sandblasting” of the skin. The diamond method uses a diamond-tipped wand to sand and resurface the skin, combined with suction to remove the dead skin cells. Both methods stimulate blood circulation and revitalize collagen production, which promotes younger-looking skin. The degree of exfoliation depends on the number of passes, level of crystal spray or coarseness of the diamond wand, the pressure and suction used, and the frequency of treatment.

Microdermabrasion can be helpful to treat aging and sun-damaged skin, altered pigmentation, fine lines and wrinkles, stretch marks, and some types of acne and acne scarring. It is especially effective in treating the under-eye area and crow’s feet. Results may include improved skin tone, reduced visual appearance of aging, fewer breakouts, diminished appearance of scars, refined skin pores, renewed elasticity, and a healthy glow. Microdermabrasion may be recommended for those with chemical sensitivities and can be used on most skin colors and types, although there are some contraindications. Ask your skin care professional if microdermabrasion is right for you.

Preparing for treatment: The procedure is noninvasive and requires little preparation. You may remove your makeup and come to the treatment room with a clean face, or allow your skin care professional to remove your makeup for you.

What to expect: Most clients do not find the procedure to be painful, and it requires no anesthetic. The esthetician will instruct you to relax as she applies the wand to your face in a slow, methodical way. One microdermabrasion treatment should take 30 minutes to an hour. There are no side effects, and your skin will look glowing and fresh almost immediately after the treatment. Some more aggressive treatments may cause the skin to look slightly pink and tender for a few hours afterward. You can resume normal activities and apply makeup and moisturizer directly after your microdermabrasion session.

Home care after microdermabrasion: Because fresh skin has been newly exposed, it is important to apply sunscreen and to avoid direct sunlight and tanning booths following your session. Also, avoid products containing harsh chemicals, dyes, or perfumes until the skin has fully healed. Your skin care professional will explain the home care regimen that is right for you, and send you home with written instructions.

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What causes acne? How can skin care treatments help?

Acne is the most common skin disorder, and 85 percent of all Americans will experience it some time in their lifetime. While commonly thought to be an adolescent problem, it can appear at any age, most often on the face, back, and chest.

The causes of acne are complex, but usually involve the overproduction of oil, the blockage of follicles that release the oil, and the growth of bacteria in those follicles. This can be triggered by many things, including a change in medications or a change in hormone levels caused by stress or other factors. It's important to treat acne early to avoid scarring.

There are 4 grades of acne. Grade 1 is the mildest form, with open and closed comedones (whiteheads and blackheads). Grades 2 and 3 include papules and pustules as well. Grade 4 is the most advanced form, with all the above plus the appearance of cysts or nodules beneath the skin surface, that can be dime size or larger and often require medical attention to treat. Acne is not only painful but can be very emotionally and psychologically challenging as well.

Who can benefit from acne treatment? Anyone who has acne can benefit from treatment. Acne sufferers often state their quality of life and self-esteem improves dramatically once their acne is alleviated. If you are seeking a licensed esthetician's care, chances are you've already tried over-the-counter preparations with disappointing results.

Depending on the grade of your acne, your esthetician will go over the treatment options that would be the most successful for you. If you have Grade 4 acne, your esthetician will refer you to a dermatologist who can treat it medically. Once your acne is under control and improving, your esthetician can suggest treatments that will assist you in accelerating the healing process, relieving pigmentation which often accompanies acne.

Visiting your esthetician for acne treatment: Be ready to fill out a medical questionnaire and describe what medications and skin care products you are using. Your therapist will do an analysis of your skin, look for any interactions between products and medications, and devise a treatment plan that's suitable for your unique needs. Keep in mind that results require a commitment on your behalf to follow a prescribed home care and professional treatment program. This often involves a series of professional treatments. It takes time to balance the skin and treat acne. Though results may not happen overnight, you are on the path to reclaiming your beautiful, clear skin!

What should I expect from my acne treatment? You should expect regularly scheduled treatments. Your treatment program may begin with an acne facial. This may include deep cleansing and extractions (clearing blocked pores), special exfoliation that will not increase inflammation or spread bacteria, a balancing/calming mask, anti-bacterial and balancing products, or some combination of these. The goal is to deeply cleanse follicles and disinfect them, clearing away oil, bacteria, and dead skin cells.

Your esthetician may also recommend a series of chemical peels. Once the active acne is cleared, microdermabrasion will assist in minimizing the appearance of scarring and diminishing residual darkening of the skin (hyperpigmentation).

Home care for acne: Your esthetician can provide the best guidance on caring for your skin between treatments. Generally, this will involve keeping your skin clean and avoiding picking at your blemishes—the single biggest cause of scarring. It's very important you follow instructions given to you by your esthetician. Untreated or undertreated acne can lead to continuing, worsening outbreaks and scarring. Your esthetician will be in close contact with you to be sure your products are working effectively for you. As your treatment progresses, your esthetician may change your home care routine to fit your changing skin's needs.



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I've never been waxed before. How is it done?

Waxing is the most common method of hair removal in spas today. Hair on any part of the body or face can be waxed. Warm wax is applied to the area and then removed, bringing the hair with it. There are two types of wax: hard and soft. Hard wax, which is easier on delicate skin, is often used on the face, underarms, and bikini area. Soft wax is used on the legs, arms, back, and chest.

Waxing reduces hair growth when performed at regular 30-day intervals. Because waxing pulls the hair out by the root, it grows back softer, finer, and thinner. The more you wax, the less hair grows back.

Waxing should not be performed if you have particularly sensitive skin, because it pulls off a couple of layers of skin cells along with the hair. Waxing can cause tenderness and swelling. In addition, some medications will cause the skin to react badly to waxing. Don't wax if you're taking Retin-A, Accutane, or any type of acne prescription.

Preparing for treatment: Let the hair grow out to about a half-inch above the skin. If hairs are too short, the wax won't adhere strongly enough to pull them out. Refrain from taking a shower or bath before the treatment. Soaking the hair will soften it, allowing it to break more easily and making waxing less effective. Do not apply lotion to the skin before your waxing session.

What to expect: An antiseptic lotion may be applied to cleanse the area first. Some estheticians apply a light dusting of baby powder to be sure the skin is dry before applying the wax.

- If soft wax is being used, the warm wax will be spread on the hairs in a thin layer. A cloth strip (muslin or pella) is then applied to the wax, and rubbed in the direction of hair growth. The strip is then pulled quickly in the opposite direction of hair growth while the skin is held taut with the other hand.
- If hard wax is being used, a thicker amount of warm wax is applied and allowed to dry. No cloth strip is applied. The wax is flicked to allow the esthetician to grip it, and it is then pulled off quickly in the opposite direction of hair growth. Hard wax doesn't adhere to the skin as much as soft wax, and is therefore used on more delicate areas such as the bikini area, underarms and face.

How much does it hurt? Most people tolerate it well, and get used to the sensation after a few treatments. The level of discomfort you will feel depends on your level of pain tolerance in general, and on which area is being waxed. If you still find waxing very uncomfortable after several treatments, many estheticians offer numbing crèmes that can be applied 45 minutes prior to the service. Clients are also recommended to take two ibuprofen tablets prior to their appointment, to reduce discomfort and decrease inflammation in the post-waxed area. For women, it is generally best not to schedule waxing services just prior to or during your period, as you are more sensitive to pain at this time and will experience more discomfort.

Home care after waxing: It's important to care for the waxed area properly after treatment to prevent ingrown hairs, breakouts, or other reactions. Exfoliation, using a pumice stone or exfoliating gloves with a bath gel, will help keep the skin clear. Avoid using a bar soap because it leaves a film on the body that could cause ingrown hairs. For the face, back, and chest, use a more gentle exfoliant and an anti-breakout lotion (ask your waxer about recommended products). Directly after waxing, avoid direct sunlight and tanning booths, especially while the skin is still red from treatment. For 24 hours after waxing, avoid exercise, hot tubs, and products with harsh chemicals, perfumes, or dyes. Apply a gentle moisturizer 24 hours after treatment.

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What is Brazilian waxing?

Many people are familiar with bikini waxing, which removes pubic and leg hair that would otherwise show when a bathing suit is worn. Brazilian waxing got its start with the daring bathing suits worn by both sexes on Brazil's sunny beaches. It is now common in the United States and is preferred by many for the sleek feeling it provides.

The treatment involves waxing off all pubic and labial hair from front to back for women and all genital hair for men, including that on the penis and scrotum. A full Brazilian wax involves the removal of all genital hair. You can also request a variation on the standard Brazilian if you prefer to leave a small amount of hair.

What to expect: Try to arrive relaxed and ready to bare all. There is no modest way to receive a Brazilian wax. Your esthetician is a professional, and your dignity as a person will be respected in the treatment room.

Be ready to fill out a questionnaire and describe what medications and skin care products you are using. For women, it is best not to schedule a wax just before or during your period as it generally will feel more uncomfortable to be waxed at that time of the month. You can take 1-2 ibuprofen 30 minutes prior to your appointment to decrease sensitivity and inflammatory response following waxing. There are also numbing crèmes that can be applied 30-45 minutes prior to your appointment that help minimize the discomfort of waxing. Ask your esthetician for suggestions.

You should trim the hair to ½" in length for best results prior to your appointment. If it's shorter, the wax may not be effective, and if the hair is longer the wax will tug on the skin more, causing more discomfort. If you do not have time to trim prior to your appointment, be sure to let your esthetician know so that she can add extra time to your appointment for trimming.

Your esthetician: will use an antiseptic wipe or lotion on the area first to cleanse. Wax is applied to the area one section at a time. The wax is removed quickly and pressure is applied to the area to minimize discomfort. Cool compresses and soothing gel after the treatment also help to calm and sooth the area. It is normal to have a histamine reaction following waxing in this area, in which you may see red irritated skin and bumps for 24 hours or even longer. This is very common and will subside.

Your esthetician has learned the best techniques for removing the hair efficiently and effectively. Some of the positions you may be asked to be in may be a little embarrassing, but your esthetician is a professional who does this type of waxing frequently and will be very professional and understanding with you.

Home care after Brazilian waxing: Your esthetician can provide the best guidance on caring for your skin after a treatment. For 24 hours following a Brazilian waxing, you should not sunbathe, use a tanning bed, use a hot tub, be sexually intimate, or perform exercise that will cause significant sweating. Loose clothing worn after the appointment is the most comfortable.

Keep the area clean and gently exfoliate the area to prevent ingrown hairs. Special products can be purchased for this. Your esthetician will recommend which products will be best for you.

If you decide you want to continue sporting your Brazilian style, waxing at approximately four-week intervals is recommended to reduce discomfort on follow-up visits. In time, less hair will grow back, and it will become finer and lighter in color.



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What is rosacea? How is it treated?

Rosacea (rose-AY-sha) is a chronic skin disease that causes varying degrees of redness and swelling, primarily on the face, but also at times on the scalp, neck, ears, chest, and back. It is considered a vascular disorder (a disorder of the blood vessels).

The condition can develop over a long period of time and is more common in adults, particularly those with fair skin. More women get it than men, though in men the condition is often more pronounced. Severe, untreated rosacea can lead to a disfigurement of the nose called rhinophyma.

There are four grades of rosacea:

Grade 1: Mostly redness.

Grade 2: Pimples and other blemishes.

Grade 3: Edemas (swelling due to fluid retention) and inflammatory bumps on the nose.

Grade 4: Symptoms affecting the eyes.

No one knows the cause of rosacea, but it is thought to run in families and can be aggravated by environmental factors and diet. Although rosacea can be accompanied by pustules, it is not acne. Researchers believe rosacea might be caused by several things: abnormal function of the blood vessels, sun damage, and an abnormal inflammatory reaction.

People with rosacea often learn that certain things trigger their flare-ups. It is believed that fluctuations in temperature (especially extreme heat or cold) is a common trigger. Spicy foods and alcohol consumption can also cause flare-ups.

How is rosacea treated? The key to rosacea treatment is to catch it early. It may start with skin that merely flushes red. Reducing skin temperature and calming the skin is usually the first objective. Once inflammation is under control, other treatments follow. There are many treatments, including topical agents containing azelaic acid or the antibiotic metronidazole. Both have proven helpful in relieving the symptoms of rosacea. Your physician may also prescribe internal antibiotics in the tetracycline family. Esthetically, rosacea is treated with chemical exfoliation, ultrasonic treatments, and calming, soothing, hydrating treatments.

While not a cure, any of these treatments can help control symptoms, sometimes for several years. Self-treatment is not advised, beyond a simple and gentle cleansing routine. Some over-the-counter remedies may actually worsen symptoms, as will aggressive scrubbing and rubbing. Your licensed esthetician may refer you to a dermatologist for evaluation and medical support.

What to expect from a rosacea treatment: Be ready to fill out a medical questionnaire and describe what medications and skin care products you are using. Your therapist will do an analysis of your skin, look for any interactions between products and medications, and devise a treatment plan that's suitable for your unique needs. Be prepared to commit to a series of treatments and a home care regimen.

After your professional treatment, your skin care therapist can recommend a home treatment plan, as well as follow-up professional treatments. Your skin may be more sensitive after treatment. Many professional skin care lines provide specialized products that soothe the inflammation of rosacea. Your esthetician will carefully choose products for you that are least likely to irritate your skin.

Home care for rosacea? Your esthetician can provide the best guidance on caring for your skin after a treatment. In general, people with rosacea should keep a diary of things that trigger their condition: environmental factors such as sun, wind, stress, exposure to heat or severe cold, alcohol or spicy food consumption, and irritating face products. Responses to treatments vary widely; trial and error is unfortunately part of the process when working with rosacea.



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What are antiaging treatments?

Thanks to the wonders of science, and innovation by skin care professionals, you can choose from a wide range of antiaging treatments. You need not have wrinkles or discoloration to actively participate in an antiaging regime—many smart consumers begin caring for and protecting their skin at a young age.

Consumers today are opting for minimally invasive procedures to avoid downtime and the unmistakable appearance of having had surgery. People may notice after treatments with your skin care professional you simply seem healthier, happier, less tired, and more confident.

Some antiaging treatments your skin care professional may be able to provide are a wide variety of facials, microdermabrasion, chemical exfoliation, galvanic treatment, and phototherapy (exposure to light-emitting diodes or intense pulsed light). He or she may be trained in a host of other treatments that, while not strictly antiaging, go a long way toward making you feel more attractive, such as hair removal, makeup application, and sunless tanning.

Who can benefit from antiaging treatments? Anyone who is smart enough to use sunscreen is already participating in an antiaging regimen, and there is so much more you can do. Treatment recommendations will vary according to skin type and condition, chronological age and skin maturity, level of sun damage (everyone has some), and the goals you have for your skin. Your esthetician can outline your options and make recommendations.

How should I prepare for the treatment? Be ready to fill out a medical questionnaire and describe what medications and skin care products you are using. Your therapist will do an analysis of your skin, look for any interactions between products and medications, and devise a treatment plan that's suitable for your skin type and condition. If possible, come to your appointment without anything on your skin; otherwise your skin care professional will cleanse your skin. Start your care when you are ready to commit to a series of treatments and a home care regimen.

What to expect: The results of your treatment may be obvious right away or may take some time to achieve. This depends entirely on your program and the methods used. Your skin care professional should be able to outline realistic goals for you. In some cases, skin is in poor condition and needs to be strengthened and conditioned before antiaging treatments can be performed. If you are suffering from acne, dermatitis, or rosacea, you may have to set your antiaging goals aside until you've cleared those symptoms. The good news is you may gain younger-looking skin as a side benefit of clearing and treating these conditions.

Home care after antiaging treatment: Your esthetician can provide the best guidance on caring for your skin after a treatment. He or she may have products available for your use. It's key to commit to a home care regimen in order to maximize your investment in the treatments your esthetician provides.



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How can I get a “safe” tan? How do I choose the right sunblock?

Like many people, you'd love to have that bronzed look but don't want to expose yourself to harmful ultraviolet rays. With spray tanning and airbrushing, there are ways to get this attractive look safely.

The tanned look has been popular for decades and reached a new level of sophistication in the 1970s when tanning beds were invented. Many people found them a fast way to get an even, year-round tan. However, dermatologists soon became alarmed at the growing incidence of skin cancer and started educating the public about the dangers of overexposure to ultraviolet rays.

Some manufacturers of tanning beds promote the misconception that getting a base tan in a tanning bed will protect you from an even more damaging sunburn. But dermatologists agree there is simply no safe way to sunbathe or use a tanning bed.

Spray and airbrush tanning: Fortunately, there are safe alternatives. Most dermatologists consider spray and airbrush tanning as safe as applying makeup.

The active ingredient for sunless tanning, dihydroxyacetone (DHA), is derived from raw sugarcane and sugar beets, which reacts with the skin's amino acids to produce color. This color develops three to four hours after application, deepens over the next 24 hours, and lasts one week to 10 days. A session usually takes 30 minutes or less and may be performed in a spray booth or with a handheld spray unit. Clients undress to their level of comfort; many wear bathing suits. The solution easily washes out of fabrics you wear to your session and, in general, does not rub off onto clothes.

You'll still need to wear sunscreen, as spray and airbrush tanning don't provide protection from the sun.

Help or hype? It's also helpful to know which sun protection aids on the market measure up to their claims. Following are a few products and procedures you may have heard about.

- Some companies promote ingestible pills that purport to provide sun protection. Experts say there is insufficient scientific evidence to support these claims.
- There are bracelets that manufacturers claim will signal you when it's time to apply more sunscreen or to move into the shade. Experts don't consider these an adequate safeguard.
- While some companies claim their contact lenses protect your eyes from ultraviolet rays, this is a little misleading since the entire eyeball needs protection. For best results, use a pair of comfortable wraparound sunglasses with an ultraviolet block and polarizing lenses.
- Cellulose fabrics, like acetate and rayon, block some ultraviolet rays. Rit makes a product called SunGuard, a detergent you add into your washer, that significantly improves the sun protection factor of cotton clothes for about 20 washings.
- For maximum safety, look for some combination of these ingredients in a sunscreen: avobenzone, mexoryl, oxybenzone, titanium dioxide, and zinc oxide.

Your car windows are already protecting you from 50–75 percent of the sun's rays. Film that rejects as much as 99 percent of ultraviolet rays can be applied to windows. Have this done professionally, however, as the do-it-yourself products are very difficult to apply effectively and often bubble. Many states govern how much you can tint certain car windows, such as the windshield and driver's side front window. A window-tinting professional can provide guidance on this.