



The Beauty Beat: Beginner's guide to acid toners

The everyday girl's guide to make-up and skincare in the UAE

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There's no such thing as a miracle treatment in skincare, but something that does come very close is acid toning. It's one step that can easily be incorporated into a routine and will show results within days — in the long term it'll help with a variety of skin issues.

I've been trying to recruit all my skincare-loving friends to the Acid Toning Club, but there's a lot of information to convey if you're a beginner. Here's an introduction to what acid toning is all about, and why it isn't as scary as it sounds.

What is an acid toner?

It's a solution that contains either an Alpha Hydroxy Acid (AHA) or Beta Hydroxy Acid (BHA), or a blend of both. It might also contain soothing and hydrating ingredients to complement the acid treatment.

There are multiple AHAs — glycolic, lactic, mandelic and more — which due to their different molecular sizes will penetrate the skin differently. Glycolic is a commonly used one and is suitable for most skin types. Lactic and mandelic are more gentle and if you have sensitive skin, these acids are the ones to look out for.

What does it do?

An AHA works by loosening the bonds between dead skin cells that sit on the surface. When left untouched, those cells can make skin look dull and uneven, and cause blocked pores. The effect of an AHA is basically what a physical face scrub might do, but more gently and without the risk of rough beads ripping the delicate skin surface to pieces. The benefits of using acids include increased cell turnover, smoother and brighter skin, reduction in wrinkles and breakouts, lightening of acne scars and oil control. See, almost a miracle product.

BHA — which is salicylic acid — goes into the pores and helps dissolve oil and blockages that have collected there. This makes it particularly effective in the treatment of acne and it can be seen as an ingredient in many spot treatments.

How do you use it?

Gone are the days of the useless, alcohol-filled astringent toners that used to be applied after cleansing and before moisturising. For genuine results, use an acid toner in its place.

Swipe it over the skin with a cotton pad, concentrating on clogged areas and breakouts. However, don't use it on open breakouts or it will sting like you won't believe. If you're worried the acid might be too strong, use a few drops of it on a damp cotton pad. Increase it to full strength once your skin gets used to it.

In the beginning, use it just once or twice a week either day or night, going up to thrice a week. Using it every day puts you at risk of over-exfoliating and making the skin super sensitive, red and angry.

After acid toning, make sure to hydrate the skin well. I like to use a soothing mist or toner, topping it up with a moisturiser and maybe an oil if I'm feeling fancy.

A key thing to do when using an acid is use a sunscreen every time you're in direct sunlight, which you should be doing anyway. Acid toning makes skin more susceptible to burning, so if you don't regularly protect your skin, now is the time to start.

Who can use it?

A lot of mainstream skincare brands have acid toners that are gentle, practically fool-proof and pleasant to use, so whether you have normal skin to moderate acne, mature skin or teenage skin, you can't go wrong with sliding an acid into your routine. However, like anything in this world, don't overdo it. Start slow and listen to your skin.

If you have serious acne, rosacea or other skin issues, please consult a dermatologist before trying anything new on your skin.

What to buy

The Nip+Fab Glycolic Fix pads, which are available in regular and extreme versions, are a great option for beginners. It contains a blend of acids and hyaluronic acid for hydration. You get 60 pads that will last months even with regular use. Approximately Dh80 online and in various supermarkets in the UAE.

The Pixi Glow Tonic is a perennial favourite of bloggers and skincare enthusiasts alike because it's tried and tested, affordable and simply works. It contains 5 per cent glycolic acid, which is boosted by skin-soothing ingredients such as aloe vera, ginseng and witch hazel. Dh87 on cultbeauty.com

Alpha H Liquid Gold is a slightly higher-end product but it's highly effective and will leave you with glowing skin every single time you use it. The brand also has a great range of skincare products such as cleansers, serums and creams. Dh233 on ounass.ae

Biologique Recherche P50 is an acid toner for people who are borderline fanatical about skincare. It's known for being obnoxiously smelly, eye-wateringly expensive and pretty darn effective. It's not for the faint of heart because it is among the stronger acids. Starting from approximately Dh350 from Embassy of Beauty Dubai and Project Beauty.