

Women's Skin Care for a Soft Body

What to buy for a smooth, silky body.

By Karen Bruno
WebMD Feature

Reviewed by [Louise Chang, MD](#)

Women's skin is naturally softer than men's. But over time, the skin on a woman's body is subject to chafing and irritation from clothing. The skin dries out from hot water and harsh soaps. And it becomes drier and flakier as a woman gets older.

What's a woman to do? Fortunately, body washes and moisturizers can restore the softness that aging takes away. It's important, however, to look for products designed specifically for the body.

Some of the compounds found in advanced facial skin products -- peptides, retinols, and fatty acids such as ceramides -- are also used in body creams and moisturizers. But products for the thicker skin on the body are formulated differently than those made for the delicate, thinner skin of the face and hands.

Here's what women need to know when it comes to body skin care.

Soaps and Body Cleansers for Women

Deodorant soaps and other harsh bar soaps lift dirt from the skin, but they can also strip skin of its oils and leave an irritating, itchy film on the skin.

Dermatologists say it's better to use a moisturizing bar soap or a moisturizing body wash. These skin cleansers are milder than typical bar soaps. And they are packed with emollients and humectants that moisturize and smooth skin.

Consider going fragrance free if you have sensitive skin. "Fragrances can be irritating to the skin," says Amy Derick, MD, an aesthetic dermatologist in Barrington, Ill.

For soft, silky skin, look for cleansers and soaps that contain the emollient glycerin and humectants such as petrolatum, sunflower oil, and soybean oil.

Body Scrubs for Women

Body scrubs and all-in-one body washes help remove dead skin cells, allowing your moisturizer to penetrate skin. Women also use these scrubs before applying self-tanners for an even look. And some women use body washes with benzoyl peroxide to clear acne from their backs or other parts of the body.

But not all body scrubs are equal, says dermatologist Derick. "Versions containing fruits smell terrific but can be harsh," she says.

- Look for scrubs containing synthetic beads, or tiny grains of sugar. These particles are more uniform in shape than those in fruit scrubs, and less damaging to the skin, says Derick.
- If you have dry skin, use a body wash containing glycolic acid or lactic acid, which are moisturizing. "They may not smell great, but they work," says Derick.

Skin Moisturizers and Creams for Women

Dry, flakey skin becomes more common with age. It's important for women to use lukewarm water when bathing, and apply moisturizer on damp skin after they get out of the bath or shower.

Which type of moisturizer you use depends on your skin type. Many moisturizer creams contain oils derived from seeds and nuts: jojoba oil, almond oil, olive oil, and the like. For women with normal skin, lotion with a natural oil may do the trick.

Women with very dry skin might consider "intensive" body creams, which are heavier than lotions. These creams contain high-powered humectants, such as dimethicone, a form of silicone, that lock in moisture.

- For extra moisturizing, look for a cream containing glycerin, lactic acid, urea, or ceramides.
- Remember, creams that come in a tub or pot are more moisturizing than ones dispensed through a pump.

Rough, calloused skin that forms on knees and elbows may need extra help. Look for a cream specifically formulated for these rough spots that contain salicylic acid or malic acid, which help gently, dissolve rough skin.

Toning and Firming Creams for Women

Certain body creams and lotions contain ingredients that promise to banish cellulite and lift or firm the skin. In fact, these creams work only temporarily. They plump up the skin, masking cellulite dimples. Dermatologists say none of these creams works in the long term. Buy them if you wish, but know that you need to reapply the creams often.

Antiperspirants and Deodorants for Women

Most antiperspirants and deodorants contain aluminum compounds that plug sweat glands, such as aluminum zirconium and aluminum chloride. Beware: Some of these may stain clothing or leave a white residue. Antiperspirants may also irritate sensitive underarm skin.

- Look for antiperspirants that are "clear," "non-staining" or "invisible." These products may appear white in the container, but will become clear after they're applied.
- For sensitive underarms, look for an antiperspirant/deodorant that contains petrolatum, which helps moisturize skin.

If a daytime deodorant doesn't do the trick, apply the deodorant at night before you go to sleep. "Putting it on at night allows the aluminum chloride to diffuse into the sweat glands, so that you get more protection during the day, when you need it," explains Dee Anna Glaser, MD, professor of dermatology at Saint Louis University. In the morning, be sure to wash it off in the shower, since aluminum chloride can cause irritation. Afterward, if needed, apply your usual daytime deodorant for added protection.

Sun Protection for Women

The sun's ultraviolet radiation not only causes skin cancer, it also causes age spots and wrinkles as you get older. Yet women often forget to apply sunscreen to their bodies unless they're headed to the beach. Hence, many women have more wrinkles on their necks than on their carefully protected faces.

To help, many body lotions now contain broad-spectrum sun filters that protect the skin from ultraviolet radiation. Apply SPF 15 or 30 body lotion every day to all parts of your body that aren't covered by clothing. And don't forget your neck and upper chest!

- Look for the terms "broad-spectrum" or "UVA and UVB protection" on the lotion label.

Remember, creams that contain alpha- or beta-hydroxy acids for exfoliation can make skin more sensitive to light, as can certain medications. If you use lotion with those acids, be sure to apply a separate sunblock over the lotion.