



The Top 5 Active Ingredients Your Client Should Be Using



From Skin Care Literature website

The Euro Institute of Skincare
Swiss Skin Care, Inc.

Meet Mara

Founder + Lead Educator of [Skin Care Lit.](#)



I began the Skin Care Lit. education membership to create a stronger, more credible skin care industry — with professionals like YOU leading the charge. I'm a CIDESCO accredited aesthetician who has specialized in skin for the last 15 years. I'm also a global educator and business coach, and have worked with some of the top professional brands in our industry (such as Elemis, Hydrafacial, and Eminence Organic Skin Care — to name a few) developing training curriculums, coaching other skincare educators, and launching two post-graduate training academies.

After training over 5000 estheticians, nurses and physicians and leading a training team of more than 30 international educators, the missing link in our industry was glaringly obvious to me. Time and time again, the practitioners I met felt like they didn't have enough knowledge or the confidence to effectively address all of their client's concerns — despite regular brand representative trainings.

What you need to be a credible skin expert:

1. Unbiased, science-backed information to understand any product formula or skin type. (In other words, become a walking skin and ingredient dictionary).
2. Small, frequent, and well-designed lessons that help you retain information so you can build your personal knowledge bank AND stay motivated.

There are three keys to position yourself as the expert and gain your client's trust:

1. MAKE IT PERSONAL
2. DITCH THE SALES PITCH
3. LEAD WITH INGREDIENTS

Your clients want a customized experience, and they want to feel heard.

Don't underestimate the power of the word YOU.

The "features + benefits" communication model is over and will only trigger your client to stop listening. After all, no one likes to be sold to.

Focusing your communication on ingredients instead of products will make you look like an expert instead of a salesperson.

In my experience, this is how you make the leap from a job in aesthetics to a career as a skin expert — from selling a skincare brand, to selling your expertise! This e-book will give you a little taste of how we do this over at Skin Care Lit.

MARA JENKINS

Top 5 Active Ingredients

1. **SPF**
2. **Vitamin C**
3. **Hyaluronic Acid**
4. **Vitamin A**
5. **Peptides**

These five ingredients work synergistically together for optimal protection and skin health. As a skin care professional, not only should you know each of them inside and out — you need to know how to effectively translate your knowledge to your clients.

Below, we give you a comprehensive breakdown of each, including communication scripts to use when recommending these actives to your clients.

SPF

More of an ingredient class, SPF is the most powerful tool we have to prevent premature ageing. UV radiation triggers melanin production, it breaks down collagen, and produces free radicals — resulting in cell DNA damage. While the ultimate price we pay for this damage is skin cancer, you'll also want to discuss how SPF optimizes your client's skin health (i.e., the results their looking for!) rather than just what it prevents.

Remember: what's second nature to you is not always second nature to your clients.

PHYSICAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often preferred by skin care pros for its ability to protect without altering the natural function of the skin • Sits on top of the skin creating a physical shield of broad-spectrum protection against UV radiation • Most commonly Zinc Oxide and Titanium, which also reduce inflammation and are anti-microbial • Great for reactive skins, those prone to comedones, and for post-treatment care
CHEMICAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great for water-based activities or during physical activity when you may perspire • Absorbs into the skin and chemically reacts with UV radiation to convert it to heat • Some common examples are Avobenzone, Octinoxate, and Oxybenzone • Must be applied at least 30 minutes before sun exposure
SUN PROTECTION FACTOR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tells us how long the product will protect the skin from UV radiation measured by: [minutes it typically takes a person to burn] x [SPF] • Does not account for wear-off so it is always recommended to reapply every 2-3 hours • An SPF of at least 30 is highly recommended since the average consumer does not apply enough product to reach the labelled protection factor

Talking SPF with your clients

"Since 80% of skin aging is a result of sun exposure, SPF is the ingredient I talk about with every client. Did you know that even on a cloudy day, about 40% of UV rays still reach the Earth's surface? That's why it's so important to use it every day — especially considering your [insert primary skin concern]."

"Luckily, SPF formulas have come a long way in the last decade and include antioxidants and other skin-enhancing ingredients. This formula is my favorite for [insert skin condition] because it includes [insert active ingredient] to [insert result]."

"You'll want to use a minimum SPF [insert number] which will help protect your skin for about [insert time]. You can calculate this by taking the number of minutes it typically takes you to burn (about 10 minutes for the average person) and multiplying it by the SPF number."

WHY THIS WORKS:

Using real facts and numbers confirms your knowledge level to the client — immediately building trust. Similarly, leading with the ingredient (versus the product) shows them you're invested in their results, and not just trying to make a sale. And finally, always relating your recommendation to their primary skin concerns creates a personalized experience and shows them you're listening!

Vitamin C

As a potent antioxidant, Vitamin C protects the skin from oxidative damage caused by UV exposure, gas and particle pollution, and potentially blue light from electronic screens. It's also known to:

- stimulate collagen synthesis (aids wound healing and reduces fine lines)
- brighten hyperpigmentation to even out skin tone
- and strengthen capillary walls to reduce diffused redness in the skin

Vitamin C can be added to many skin care formulas, from cleansers to creams, but a serum form is ideal for maximum benefit due to its higher concentration. Below are the three most commonly used Vitamin C forms in professional skin care.

L-ASCORBIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Known to be the most potent and efficacious form • Notoriously unstable, so must be paired with other antioxidants such as vitamin E, glutathione or ferulic acid • Amber packaging can also help protect it from oxidation • Ideal concentration is 10-20%, though this can be irritating to sensitive skin or feel tingly when applied • SPF should be worn in combination for daytime use
SODIUM ASCORBYL PHOSPHATE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A mineral form sometimes referred to as 'Vitamin C Salt' • Must be combined with liquid ingredients to be applied topically to the skin • Transforms into L-Ascorbic once absorbed into the stratum corneum • This form of delivery makes it less irritating for sensitive or reactive skins and allows for a stronger concentration
L-ASCORBYL PALMITATE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A less potent form of Vitamin C compared to L-Ascorbic • Is fat/lipid soluble which make it much more stable • A good and effective option for sensitive or reactive skins

Talking Vitamin C with your clients

FOR EVERYONE:

"Almost everyone should be using Vitamin C in their skin care because it is powerful at protecting the skin from free radical damage caused by UV exposure and the gas and particle pollutants that accumulate on our skin every day."

PRO TIP:

From here, explain how free radical and UV damage contributes to your client's primary skin concern. As professionals, we understand how this damage is linked to almost every skin condition — but it's your job to educate your client!

FOR DIFFUSED REDNESS:

"Sun damage also displays in the skin as redness or broken capillaries. This can be hereditary and very difficult to treat. Using a Vitamin C serum helps to strengthen connective tissue — both collagen and capillary walls. Vitamin C stimulates to contract and dilate the tiny superficial capillaries that are visible at the surface of the skin, flushing out stagnant blood and strengthening them against future breakage — which will reduce your overall redness. Further, by rebuilding collagen, it will increase the opacity of your skin for a more even tone and better protection against stressors which cause the skin to flush (like wind, heat, and spicy foods)"

PRO TIP:

Explain why you've chosen a more stable form of Vitamin C for their particular skin and how it will lead to less sensitization. You may also advise your client to begin use every 2-3 days before working up to daily use — and always follow with SPF!

Hyaluronic Acid

Hyaluronic Acid is not only one of the most popular standalone ingredients on the skin care market, but it's also used in many products to support the delivery of other active ingredients. As a powerful humectant (retaining and preserving water), it supports the healthy function of the skin which relies on adequate hydration levels.

<p>IN OUR BODIES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HA is naturally found throughout the body in our connective tissues. It's the same humectant responsible for lubricating your joints and eyes • Just like collagen, our natural HA reserves deplete over time as we age • Lower levels cause the skin to lose its reflective properties gained from light bouncing off hydrated skin • Depleted reserves also diminish the volume of the skin as each molecule is responsible for supporting hydration — so as we lose HA, we can't retain the same plumping hydration levels we once did
<p>ON OUR SKIN</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each HA molecule has the capacity to retain over 1000 times its weight in water, plumping the skin and ensuring hydration retention • HA a form of GAG (glycosaminoglycan) which support the synthesis of our skin's collagen and elastin cells • Science now allows us access to Low Molecular Weight HA when previously its large molecular structure didn't allow for effective absorption • Some studies show that a lower molecular weight HA will help support the skin's synthesis of its own HA reserves
<p>SOURCES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most HA is now plant-derived or developed in a lab, however it used to be common practice to extract it from rooster combs (and still is for some medical purposes)

Talking Hyaluronic Acid with your clients

"I'm sure you're used to hearing about the importance of hydration in the skin, but did you know it's not always effective to reach for a richer moisturizer? As skin care professionals, when we talk about hydration, we're typically referring to water content in the skin — not oils. That's why your skin can feel both oily and dehydrated at the same time."

"Hyaluronic acid is humectant — meaning it draws in and holds onto water — and is naturally found in our skin. Just like our natural collagen breaks down with age, so does our skin's hyaluronic acid content. This can leave the skin feeling tight, lacking glow, and cause flakiness.

When we apply hyaluronic acid to the skin it draws in hydration from the atmosphere AND helps the skin retain the water you drink throughout the day.

Each molecule can hold over 1000 times its own weight in water molecules, so as it collects moisture, the molecules expand and plump the skin."

"Applying hyaluronic acid topically prevents skin barrier deficiencies that cause skin dehydration (also known as transepidermal water loss) which can cause [insert primary skin concern]."

WHY THIS WORKS:

Most clients will need a bit of education on the difference between hydration and moisture, and it's in your interest to invest the time to explain it. Not only does this show off your expertise (inspiring trust!) but it also lays the ground work for you to address their primary concern. After all, as pros we know that dehydration wreaks havoc on basic skin function, exacerbating ALL skin conditions. Now help your client understand exactly how this is relevant to them!

Vitamin A

Vitamin A (commonly referred to as retinol) is one of the most popular ingredients amongst skin care professionals — and for good reason. Vitamin A has the most scientific backing of any skin care ingredient, recognized as one of the only active ingredients that creates a physiological change in the matrix of the dermis.

When a retinoid is applied topically, it penetrates the stratum corneum seeking to bind to skin cell's **retinoid-loving receptors**. This response increases cellular turnover rate, resulting in new healthy cells and activated fibroblasts (the collagen synthesizing cells in our bodies) to ultimately reduce the appearance of fine lines, uneven texture, and sun damage. Plus, increased cellular activity helps to clear pores and build new collagen around them to repair "open" or enlarged pores.

You can liken this to how causing "micro-trauma" in the skin with specific professional treatments triggers an immediate healing response within the skin.

Vitamin A was the first topical skincare ingredient to be approved as an anti-wrinkle agent by the Food & Drug Administration in the US and Canada, and since then, its popularity has only grown. Even over-the-counter brands are taking advantage of the surge in demand. This means, as a skin care professional, you need to know how to communicate with your clients about Vitamin A — because they will ask about it.

Forms of Vitamin A

In cosmetic chemistry terms, we refer to the Vitamin A molecules that bind to the retinoic acid receptors in our skin cells as '**retinoids.**' There are different forms of retinoids used in skin care.

PRO TIP:

Brands often label their products as 'retinol' even when that isn't the form of retinoid they are using. That's because retinol is a recognizable term to the consumer and it's commonly used as a catch-all description for any derivative of Vitamin A. It's your job as the professional to know the difference!

When alcohol **retinol** is applied topically, it needs to convert into aldehyde **retinal**, and then **retinoic acid** to bind to the Vitamin A receptors in our skin. Retinoic acid is the most potent form of retinoid, as our skin accepts it as is to affect change — however, this also makes it the most sensitizing form.

Below are the most recognizable forms of retinoids in modern skincare formulations. Each has its place within the industry, so understanding the differences between them is key to helping your client reach their skin health goals...

RETINOL ESTERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produced by adding a fatty acid to retinol • Keeps the molecule from oxidizing with exposure to oxygen, however makes it more vulnerable to UV • Needs to convert 3x to become retinoic acid [ester > retinol > retinal > retinoic acid] making it less irritating, but allows more potential for loss of stability + efficacy • Most commonly found as Retinol-Palmitate + Retinyl Linoleate in products advertising anti-ageing properties
RETINOL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most common form of retinoid in professional skincare • The alcohol form of Vitamin A as it occurs in nature • Two stages away from its final transformation into retinoic acid [retinol > retinal > retinoic acid] • Not as potent as retinoic acid, but used in so many skincare formulations because it's less sensitizing • Specifically effective for treating collagen degradation, hyperpigmentation, and stimulating glycosaminoglycans
RETINAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Also known as Retinaldehyde • Considered one step more potent than retinol requiring only one conversion to retinoic acid • Works up to 11x faster than retinol but without the sensitizing effect of retinoic acid (often resulting in higher efficacy due to more frequent/consistent use) • Known for its ability to stabilize cellular processes and improve acne, wrinkles, and texture
TRETINOIN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often referred to as Retin-A or Renova • A pure form of retinoic acid, requiring no conversion for our cells to make use of it, so can cause significant sensitization • Only available via prescription by a physician or dermatologist so that its use can be carefully monitored • Most commonly prescribed to treat acne, advanced ageing, and in some cases, stretch marks
TAZAROTENE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A pure form of retinoic acid, requiring no conversion for our cells to make use of it, so can cause significant sensitization • Only available via prescription by a physician or dermatologist so that its use can be carefully monitored • A synthetic form of retinoic acid that has been developed to target specific cell receptors to treat chronically photodamaged skin, acne, and psoriasis

Talking Vitamin A with your clients

FOR AGE PREVENTION:

"Retinol helps to speed the skin's cellular metabolism helping form healthy new skin cells and activating collagen production, the connective tissue that helps our skin stay plump and youthful.

Since collagen production begins to slow by the time we're 18, dermatologists and skin care professionals recommend retinol because of its very unique and powerful ability to make long-term physiological changes to the skin. In other words, your investment in using Vitamin A helps to rebuild collagen now and in the future!"

FOR DULL SKIN, UNEVEN TONE, AND SIGNS OF AGING:

"As we age our collagen production and healthy cells deplete due to a slowing cellular metabolism (also known as the cellular turnover rate of our skin). Each year our skin takes longer and longer for cells to renew, creating dullness, fine lines, and uneven tone.

One of the main reasons this happens is due to depleted levels of Vitamin A within the skin caused by sun exposure, free radicals, and normal aging. Using a form of Vitamin A called [retinol, Retin-A, etc.] quickly replenishes the cells Vitamin A and brings new cells to the surface of your skin for a fresher more reflective appearance. This biological action also evens out skin tone and activates the special cells in our skin called fibroblasts that build back plumping collagen and other connective tissue in the body."

FOR OILY AND ACNEIC SKIN:

"There is a proven connection between people who become easily deficient in Vitamin A and people with acne. For treating breakouts and excess oil production, using a form of Vitamin A called [insert recommended form] to replenish your natural reserves will result in: decreased oil production, more efficiency in shedding dead skin cells (preventing them from clogging pores), and improved blood flow to areas

with breakouts to help speed up the healing process. For these reasons, retinol is typically prescribed by skin care professionals for acne above all other ingredients."

PRO TIP:

Retinol is particularly effective for difficult-to-treat adult hormonal acne and most likely to be invested in by this group of consumers — versus teenage acne which can often (but not always) be treated with a proper skin care routine.

FOR SCARRED OR TEXTURED SKIN:

"Textured skin or the textured scarring that takes place as a result of breakouts happens because the collagen in the skin where the breakout occurred became damaged. To create new collagen and smooth out these areas, we need to speed up your skin cells' lifecycle to mimic how the skin behaved when born – when it was creating lots of new collagen!

Creating new collagen using [\[insert recommended form of retinoid\]](#) will rebuild pore walls and refine their size, as well as smooth out the texture of the skin."

PRO TIP:

Since retinol products are typically positioned at a higher price point than most skincare products, it's important that your client knows exactly how they will use it at home. When, how, AND how often? How does it fit into their current routine? Do they know about the high-level of activity they might experience with a retinol? Answering these questions will assure your clients will get the most out of their investment by using it correctly and without any surprises.

Peptides

Peptides are a short-chain form of amino acid protein. In our skin, peptides naturally make up a large percentage of the skin's dermis in the form of collagen.

The peptides most commonly used in skincare formulas send signals to the skin to amp up replication of collagen peptides — which in turn, maintains density in the dermal layers of the skin where collagen is naturally found.

We know that as early as the age of 18, collagen density in the dermis begins to lessen due to decreased production of collagen peptides. Helping the body to continue creating collagen peptides is one way we can work to maintain the skin's healthiest state — preventing cellular ageing and other skin conditions. However, there are other forms of peptides that target different cells within the skin to perform different functions (like plumping, energizing, or renewing).

Peptides in skincare formulas can be derived from plant or animal origins, or they can be produced synthetically (aka biochemical engineering).

Peptide Categories

Since many forms of peptide products are created by private labs using proprietary formulas, the companies who have engineered a specific peptide will be best able to educate you on their exact benefits. That being said, most peptides – even those proprietary forms – fall into these 5 categories of peptides:

ENZYME-INHIBITING PEPTIDES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inhibits enzyme response such as tyrosinase release which leads to skin darkening during sun exposure and skin degradation
NEUROTRANSMITTER-INHIBITING PEPTIDES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inhibits the release of acetylcholine, the fluid that activates a neural synapse between the dermis and muscle tissue in the face. Inhibiting this helps soften lines associated with facial expression
CARRIER PEPTIDES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivers trace elements of copper and manganese which stimulate the skin's wound healing response and helps create healthier cell production
SIGNALLING PEPTIDES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signals a wound healing response that activates collagen synthesis
ANTIMICROBIAL PEPTIDES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Naturally found in the body, but when applied topically, they protect against the proliferation of bacteria on the skin — including p-acnes bacteria

Talking Peptides with your Clients

FOR PEPTIDES IN GENERAL:

"Peptides are important for in any skincare routine, but especially for those looking to optimize skin health and prevent the appearance of ageing. They are made of amino acids, which are the building blocks of the entire human body, including our natural collagen — so our skin recognizes them and therefore, can easily take advantage of their benefits."

"Peptides help to plump, even out irregular texture and firm skin tone by activating collagen renewal, helping to replace the natural collagen that has broken down with time. Increased collagen will also help address [\[insert concern\]](#)."

"Incorporating peptides into your home care routine can be as easy as choosing an antioxidant serum or moisturizer that includes a peptide complex — so you don't need to add a step to your routine to amplify your results."

PRO TIP:

Since peptides are so prevalent in anti-ageing formulas, make sure to mention unique points about the product you're recommending based on what you know about your client's preferences and interests. For example, sharing that a particular peptide is derived from hibiscus flower would be important to a client interested in "natural" or plant-based skincare.

FOR NEUROTRANSMITTER-INHIBITING PEPTIDES:

"The neurotransmitter-inhibiting peptide from the hibiscus flower signals to the deeper layers of the skin to slow the release of the fluid that triggers facial muscle movement. You can think of this peptide as a gentle and natural alternative to Botox.

You'll see an instant relaxation in [\[insert area of concern\]](#), and new collagen will start to rebuild to soften the appearance of lines in other areas — like the elevens between the eyebrows, fine lines on the forehead, or even crow's feet."

PRO TIP:

Let your client know how easy it is to incorporate peptides into their routine. This is a great technique for your clients that are motivated by simplicity and utility in their routines (think: products with more than one function, like a peptide-enriched moisturizer) AND for clients motivated by price. After all, formulas that include peptides usually come with a higher price point — you need to lead with value (i.e. the problems your recommendation will solve).



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