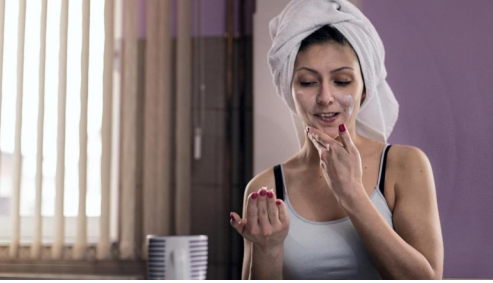


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Tired of expensive skincare products? Here's why glycerine could be a cost-effective solution

► This intensely moisturising and cheap ingredient is the beauty hero nobody talks about



Glycerine, a popular cosmetic ingredient, can be mixed with essential oils, aloe vera, rose water or frankincense to address skincare concerns. Getty Images

I might as well admit it – no matter how many studies I make notes of, or experts I speak to, when it comes to beauty and skincare, I'm never quite sure what I'm paying for. All I know is that, more often than not, I'm shelling out a lot. There are days when I wonder why I spend a few hundred dirhams on clear mascaras and brow gels, when petroleum jelly will do the job as effectively, and at a fraction of the cost.

Making our skin both look and feel good can be an expensive task. Hitting that sweet spot where the perfect alchemy of ingredients meets an affordable price point is the stuff that a hoarder like me dreams of. But every once in a while, comes along an ingredient that feels like the answer to all the skincare questions you've ever had. An ingredient that doesn't burn a hole in your pocket, and you realise it was hiding in plain sight all along.

For me, that ingredient is glycerine. And now that I've discovered it, I'm never letting it go.

Glycerine, or glycerol, is a thick, syrupy, colourless and odourless sugar alcohol that's immensely popular in skin products. It can be natural (plant or animal-based) or synthetic, which means it was derived by distilling petroleum. It's literally in everything – from soaps, scrubs and serums to cleansers, masks, moisturisers, hydration lotions and even many hair products.



Glycerine works beautifully with other ingredients, such as aloe vera gel for a soothing mask. Sarah Dea/The National

According to the Cosmetic Ingredient Review report for 2014, glycerine was found to be the third most widely used ingredient in the cosmetics industry, behind only water and fragrance.

Glycerine's secret popularity in the world of beauty ingredients is due to its super-hydrating properties. It is an exceptionally powerful humectant, which means it does a great job of pulling moisture from the air around us into the top layer of the skin. So much so that according to a 2016 study in the *Indian Journal of Dermatology*, researchers found glycerine to be the most effective humectant they could find, more so than even hyaluronic acid, another hero ingredient in skincare products.



You can use it as a mask, a moisturiser and even as a scrub, depending on what you combine it with. And you can combine it with practically everything

Vasudha Rai

It doesn't stop there. A 2015 study published in the *Journal of European Academy of Dermatology and Venerology* noted that glycerine not only hydrates the skin, but also acts as an anti-irritant, has anti-inflammatory properties, and boosts the skin's restore and repair mechanism. So if your big beauty struggle is irritated, cracked, or parched skin that never quite holds on to a dewy glow, you want to start looking for moisturisers and hydrators with a slightly higher concentration of glycerine.

Or better still, you might want to simply bring home a bottle of the wonder ingredient itself. While glycerine has been the beauty industry's unsung hero for a long time now, in recent years, people in the know have taken to using it in its pure, undiluted form. Vasudha Rai, author of *Glow: Indian Foods, Recipes and Rituals for Beauty, Inside and Out*, is certainly a big fan.

"What I love about glycerine is that it suits practically every skin type and is hypoallergenic. There are other popular natural ingredients that don't suit everyone, things like papaya, honey, lemon, and even milk. But I've never come across anyone whose skin was irritated by glycerine," says Rai.

"It's a mild and versatile ingredient. You can use it as a mask, a moisturiser and even as a scrub, depending on what you combine it with. And you can combine it with practically everything because glycerine works beautifully with other ingredients. Mix it with high-quality essential oils, with aloe vera gel for a soothing mask, with tea tree essential oil for acne, with frankincense for anti-ageing, with rose water to soothe and repair the skin."



Frankincense, found across the Middle East and parts of Africa, is another ingredient mixed with glycerine. iStockphoto.com

Another fan is Paayal Mahajan, founder of luxury skincare brand Essential Body Couture, but she prefers her glycerine plant-based and organic.

"At least you know that it's free of chemicals and additives. I'm a big believer in getting the quality and quantity right," she says. "I would say, apply a tiny amount, maybe a small coin-sized portion right after the shower on wet skin on the face and body for better absorption. And seal it in with a few drops of a barrier product, like a good-quality body or face oil to seal in the moisture."

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"I also find it particularly useful for the hair, especially fine hair. Because glycerine is a humectant, it's a great way to pack in some moisture and, because is very light, it won't weigh down your hair, and give it a nice sheen and bounce."

Despite its universal appeal and mild nature, both Rai and Mahajan advise first-time users to exercise restraint. "No matter how good a product is, there will always be people who either won't like it or it won't suit them. So I would always, always recommend a patch test of anything new that you're using. Also, if you're using retinol or chemical peels, don't combine it with lemon or any kind of citric acid. And don't make it a scrub. If you're not sure, the safest bet is always going to be glycerine and rose water," says Rai.

Mahajan, too, cautions against overusing it. "I would equate glycerine to almost hyaluronic acid in some ways. So it acts as an exfoliator, too, and real glycerine is warm when you rub it in," she explains. "Overusing it – especially if you're not mixing it with anything – may cause bumps, rashes and breakouts. Which is why I'd say use it only a couple of times a week."