

Beauty Labels 101

By Gina Roberts-Grey



Wondering what some of the practically unpronounceable words on the labels of your favorite products mean?

We were, too. So BELLA enlisted the help of experts to decipher the ingredients and elixirs found in moisturizers, shampoos and such, helping you determine which ingredients you shouldn't live without, and which ones you should think twice about paying for.

Here's an inside look at some of the most common beauty product ingredients:

GLYCEROL

Julie Fridlington, M.D., a dermatologist with Westlake Dermatology and Cosmetic Surgery in Austin, Texas, says this ingredient is frequently found in lotions, moisturizers, hair conditioners

and other beauty products. "Glycerol is a humectant (a substance that attracts water) and is one of the most popular ingredients used in cosmetic products."

Fridlington says glycerol is added because it helps draw water from the deep layers of your skin to the outermost layer. "This allows skin to have a smoother texture," says Dr. Fridlington. "Skin will retain water more efficiently if a product with a humectant is applied because glycerol helps the skin maintain smooth, silky lubrication."

SODIUM LAURYL SULFATE

Sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS) is a mild detergent that gives shampoos, body

washes and soap their suds. Without it, a product might still clean, but it wouldn't produce the telltale foam and bubbles you associate with "squeaky-clean" product performance.

"Many products combine small concentrations of multiple cleansers to clean dirt, dead skin cells, and oil from the skin and scalp. These small portions of mild cleansers decrease skin irritation and dryness that can occur with strong alkaline soaps," says Lawrence Samuels, M.D., chief of dermatology at St. Luke's Hospital in St. Louis, MO, and founder of Rx Systems PF, a skin care product line. "Sodium lauryl sulfate is the most common cleanser used worldwide."

It's also one of the most controversial. Studies have found that even the low amounts of SLS commonly used in shampoos and soaps can cause skin irritation and rashes, and that has some physicians and consumers wary of products containing it. If you experience redness, itching or any irritation of your scalp or skin after bathing, talk to your doctor about switching to products that don't contain SLS.

SALICYLIC ACID

Found in many skin care products like spot treatments and moisturizers, salicylic acid is a type of exfoliant that generally helps fight acne and redness. Salicylic acid also sloughs off skin cells to produce a regenerative effect. "Because of its ability to penetrate oil glands and hair follicles, it is a good weapon against acne and blackheads and has also been shown to decrease redness and irritation," says Dr. Fridlington.

Salicylic acid is found in low concentrations in multiple cosmetic products for acne control and in products that allow the superficial sloughing of skin cells. "It is also applied in physicians' offices in higher concentrations as a 'chemical peel' to induce a deeper sloughing of dead skin cells," adds Dr. Fridlington.

Dr. Samuels says it's possible to experience redness or irritation using a product with salicylic acid. If that happens, discontinue use and talk to your doctor about alternatives.

GLYCOLIC ACID

Similar to salicylic acid, glycolic acid is used in low doses in cleansers and spot treatments to purify skin, leaving behind a smoother surface. And like its sloughing salicylic cousin, glycolic acid helps prevent follicular acne and blackheads.

Its ability to stimulate collagen production makes glycolic acid a bit more beneficial than salicylic acid. That's because collagen is the cement that holds all the components of your skin together. It's what gives your skin a firm, supple, healthy look. As you age, you naturally lose collagen and develop wrinkles or saggy skin, so anything you can do to promote collagen production helps your skin look great.

"Glycolic acid has also been shown to reduce the appearance of age spots," says Dr. Fridlington. Dr. Samuels adds,

"It has antibacterial properties so it helps skin stay and look healthy."

Like salicylic acid, glycolic acid can be found in low concentrations in over-the-counter (OTC) cosmetic products, but is also used in higher concentrations in physicians' offices for deeper peeling effects.

RETINOIC ACID

Retinoic acid is the active form of vitamin A and is found in low levels in many OTC topical acne-fighting products. In addition to busting



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blackheads and zapping zits, it plays several other important roles, like aiding in the production of new collagen formation, reducing age spots and eliminating abnormal skin cells to improve the skin's overall texture, minimize fine lines and wrinkling and decrease blotchy brown age spots. "This all translates into skin with a smooth glow, uniform pigmentation and minimal fine lines," says Dr. Fridlington.

But beware! Retinoic acid can be irritating to the skin, especially in the first few weeks of use. Therefore, it might be wise to steer clear of this in products unless your dermatologist suggests you use products packing a retinoic acid punch. The most common signs of irritation are redness, peeling and stinging of the skin.

HYALURONIC ACID

Hyaluronic acid is naturally found in your skin. It's a "space-filler" that stabilizes skin and helps it stay firm. "The amount of hyaluronic acid in the tissues decreases with age and time," says Dr. Fridlington. Hyaluronic acid also plays an important role in skin healing and collagen production, so it's worth the money.

In addition to being found in OTC beauty products, Dr. Samuels says hyaluronic acid is also one of the common ingredients used in popular injectable filler materials.

CAFFEINE

Dr. Samuels says even though there's little scientific data proving caffeine's mettle, clinical data suggests it may be beneficial to your skin's ability to absorb other active skin care ingredients. In other words, caffeine appears to have some benefits.

What is the number one ingredient you should always look for? It's the one that protects against the sun's harmful rays.

"SPF is proven to help protect skin from all of the damaging and aging effects of UV light. I recommend SPF 30 that contains UVA and UVB blocking agents such as zinc oxide, titanium dioxide, or avobenzone," advises Dr. Fridlington. 🐼 🐼

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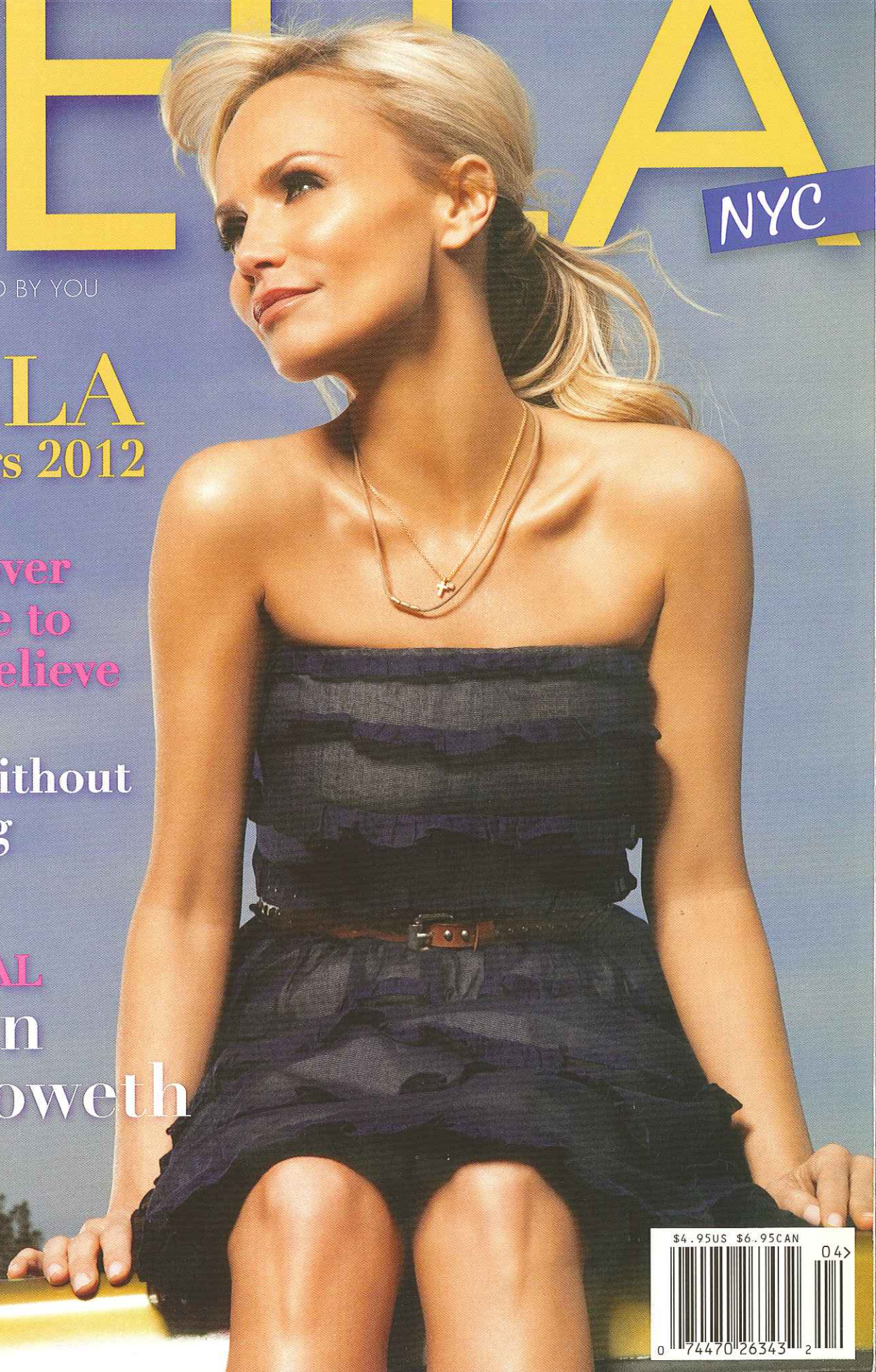
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