

## How to Use ACV for Glowing Skin — Without Burning Your Face Off

Once forgotten in the depths of dusty condiment cabinets, apple cider vinegar (ACV) is no longer balsamic's misunderstood stepsister — it's a whole damn mood when it comes to holistic wellness.

ACV gets praise for its possible weight loss benefits, but if you've fallen down a natural skin care rabbit hole on the 'gram, you know it has complexion-clearing properties too.

But how exactly does a salad dressing ingredient boost your glow factor?

Experts say it's all about the beneficial compounds that form when apple cider is fermented with yeast and other helpful bacteria to create ACV.

“ACV contains acetic acid, which has antifungal and antibacterial properties,” says Dr. Keira Barr, a dermatologist based in Gig Harbor, Washington. “It also contains alpha-hydroxy acids (AHAs) like citric, lactic, and malic acids, which exfoliate the uppermost layers of the skin, and phenolic compounds, which are potent antioxidants.”

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Still, slathering this smelly kitchen staple on your face may sound *slightly* less than intuitive — not to mention irritating. After all, ACV is largely composed of acids, and it's been shown to cause chemical burns (yikes!) when applied directly to skin.

Curious if ACV can boost your complexion? Here's the lowdown on what it can do for your face, how to use it safely (Hint: *Dilute* that sh\*t!), and when to just say no.

### **Fast facts:**

- **Main benefits:** antibacterial + antifungal properties, exfoliates with natural acids, balances pH
- **Skin-supporting compounds:** citric acid, acetic acid, malic acid, polyphenols
- **Potential risks:** irritation and chemical burns if used incorrectly
- **Who should try it:** people with oily, acne-prone skin
- **Who should avoid it:** people with dry, sensitive, irritation-prone skin
- **How often can you use it:** typically 1–3 times per week
- **Hard and fast rules:** dilute, dilute, dilute!

## What apple cider vinegar can (and can't) do for your face

Research on ACV's topical skin benefits is limited, but there's a bit more info available about the natural fruit acids and polyphenols it contains. Here's what we know.

### Fight acne

Acne is primarily caused by bacteria on your skin or by hair follicles becoming clogged with oil and dead skin cells. The good news: ACV may help with both. The main acid in ACV is acetic acid, which has [antifungal and antimicrobial](#) properties.

"When acetic acid is used topically, it clears bacteria-related infections of the skin and conditions such as acne," says [Dr. Zenovia Gabriel](#), a dermatologist based in Newport Beach, California.

Additionally, the AHAs (such as citric acid) that ACV contains may be particularly helpful for comedonal acne, which is characterized by blackheads and clogged pores.

"Excess keratin causes dead skin cells to bind together, leading to clogged pores and acne," explains Gabriel, "but AHAs help reduce follicular plugging by dissolving excess keratin."

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"Acne is also an inflammatory condition, and phenolic compounds in apple cider vinegar, such as epicatechin and caffeic acid, have anti-inflammatory properties," says Barr.

Keep in mind: No studies have specifically looked at ACV's acne-fighting potential. And if you have open lesions on your face from popped pimples, the acidic nature of ACV may make it too irritating.

### Reduce hyperpigmentation

[Skin hyperpigmentation](#) — dark spots caused by excess melanin production — can affect all skin types and is often triggered by sun exposure.

While there's no scientific data on ACV's ability to lessen the appearance of dark spots, some of its main [AHA compounds](#) look promising.



“ACV contains malic acid, which decreases melanin production to help lighten brown spots and hyperpigmentation,” says Gabriel. “And citric acid, which increases skin cell turnover, has been shown to decrease age spots.”

## Exfoliate dull skin

Chemical exfoliants, including a variety of naturally derived AHAs, can be found in serums, toners, and cleansers that claim to smooth and brighten your complexion.

ACV contains several naturally exfoliating AHAs such as lactic, citric, and malic acids, which, according to Barr, help break down the topmost layer of dead skin to reveal skin that appears smoother and more hydrated.

Additionally, the caffeic acid in ACV has tissue-repairing properties and plays a role in collagen production, says Barr, which could help smooth the appearance of acne scars.

## Balance skin pH

A good facial toner should remove excess dirt, shrink pores, and balance your skin’s pH — and ACV seems to check most of these boxes.

ACV is slightly acidic, just like your skin, which should hover around a pH of 5.0. But substances like strong soaps, which are more alkaline, can throw your skin’s pH out of whack and impair skin barrier function, leading to irritation.

“Therefore, when properly diluted, ACV can be used safely on skin — without stripping the epidermis — as a toner or balancing agent,” says Gabriel.

## Soothe eczema

It’s not clear whether ACV actually has an effect on eczema.

It makes sense in theory: There’s speculation that ACV’s lower pH may improve barrier function in conditions where the skin’s pH is more alkaline, like eczema (aka atopic dermatitis).

However, in a small 2019 study, 22 people with eczema reported no significant symptom relief or improvements in the health of their skin barrier, and many even experienced additional irritation.

So, while ACV may help rebalance the pH of relatively healthy skin, it may be too irritating if your skin barrier is already compromised.

## Smooth wrinkles

While ACV may temporarily tighten your skin due to its astringent (pore-constricting) properties, there's no scientific evidence that it can treat wrinkles.

“While the acids in ACV can slough the dead top layer of skin, true wrinkles are deeper than the superficial epidermis, and ACV alone won't eliminate them,” says Gabriel.

## Eliminate skin tags

Skin tags are noncancerous growths of flesh that protrude from the skin. They generally become more common with age.

Some home remedies for skin tag removal include ACV. The general idea is that ACV will dry out the skin tag so it eventually falls off. But “acids have not been effective in eliminating or preventing skin tags,” says Gabriel.

If you want to ditch your skin tags, your best bet is to see a dermatologist who can freeze them off with a bit of liquid nitrogen.

## Soothe sunburn

Some sunburn-soothing remedies call for spritzing or soaking skin with a combination of ACV and water. But again, there's no scientific evidence to support this.

While ACV does contain anti-inflammatory compounds, the naturally exfoliating nature of ACV may be too irritating when it's applied to already-damaged sunburned skin.

## DIY apple cider vinegar face treatments (Hint: Dilute or bust!)

Unless you're using ACV as a spot treatment, you should *always* dilute it before application to prevent irritation and chemical burns.

“To avoid redness and irritation, the recommended dilution is 1 part vinegar to 3 or 4 parts water,” says Barr. If you have sensitive skin, open cuts, or eczema, you should dilute it even more — or take a pass.

Another pro tip: Apply a small test spot on your skin and watch for an adverse reaction. Wait at least a few hours. In the clear? Here are a few DIY treatments to consider.





## ACV toner

ACV's natural astringent properties and acidic pH make it a popular natural toner.

Combine 1 part ACV and 3 to 5 parts water (depending on your skin's sensitivity level). Apply this mixture to your face with a cotton ball, leave it on for about 1 minute, and then rinse and apply moisturizer.

Over time, you can ramp up to 15 minutes but no longer, says Barr. Use it 1 to 3 times a week if your skin tolerates it.

## ACV cleanser

ACV's antibacterial and antifungal properties can help naturally rid your skin of impurities. Compared to harsh soaps, diluted ACV is more in line with your skin's natural, slightly acidic pH.

Combine 1 tablespoon of ACV and 1/4 to 1/2 cup of warm water (depending on your skin's sensitivity level). Apply the mixture to your face with a washcloth, and then rinse and apply your normal moisturizer.

## ACV spot treatment

Due to its antibacterial, antifungal, and astringent properties, you can also use ACV to dry out blemishes and potentially halt their formation.

Simply soak a cotton swab in undiluted ACV and apply it to individual blemishes on your face.

## Not the DIY type? Try one of these ACV-infused facial products

If measuring and mixing aren't your forte, there are plenty of premade products that harness ACV's benefits. Bonus: These picks incorporate soothing ingredients and are suitable for all skin types.

### ACV toners

#### S.W. Basics Toner

Made with just five ingredients, this all-natural toner combines ACV with skin-clarifying sandalwood and clary sage essential oils, as well as witch hazel, which is known for its anti-inflammatory and astringent properties.

Find more [ACV toners here](#).



## ACV spot treatments

[Coy Beauty Apple Cider Vinegar Facial Towelette](#)

For a hit of ACV on the go — whether you want a full-face rubdown after a trip to the gym or a quick spot treatment on a new breakout — wipes and peel pads are the way to go. These wipes feature soothing rose, lavender, and chamomile.

Find more [ACV wipes and spot treatments here](#).

## ACV facial cleansers

[The Rain Face Cleanser](#)

Formulated by aesthetician Daniela Belmondo, this small-batch cleanser delivers a deep clean without drying your skin, thanks to a combo of hydrating aloe, skin-calming lavender and rose essential oils, and naturally exfoliating organic ACV.

Find more [ACV face cleansers here](#).

## tl;dr

Apple cider vinegar isn't a magic bullet for your facial skin woes, and more research is needed on its topical benefits before we go all in.

But dermatologists acknowledge that ACV contains a range of beneficial science-backed compounds (including AHAs) that can help support a clear, balanced, and smooth complexion.

Using ACV on your face isn't for everyone, though. If your skin barrier is already compromised or if you don't properly dilute ACV (1 part ACV to *at least* 3 parts water), you could end up with irritation or chemical burns.

As always, call up your derm if you have concerns or personal questions.