



## **Retin-A and Topical Vitamin-A Products for Sun-Damaged Skin**

Read this guide carefully in order to maximize the results you achieve by using this important medication.

### **What are Vitamin-A retinoids, and how do they work?**

Retinoids are medications that are related structurally and/or functionally to Vitamin-A. They work in the treatment of photodamage to decrease fine wrinkles, skin roughness, hyperpigmentation, and other characteristics that increase with age and sun exposure.

### **How to use retinoids in the treatment of photodamage:**

At first, retinoids may irritate the skin causing redness, flaking, peeling or possibly tenderness. These side effects are avoided by following the guidelines below.

#### **1. Start gradually**

When you first begin to use retinoids, do not use the medication every day. Work up to daily use slowly. This will help your skin adjust to the medication so you can get the most from the retinoid without being irritated by it.

#### **2. How slowly is slowly?**

For most patients, the following schedule works well:

- a. Apply the medication 1-3 times weekly or every other day for three weeks, then daily, as tolerated. Use a calendar to make it easy to keep track of this schedule.
- b. If your skin becomes irritated, stop using the retinoid for several days. When the irritation has cleared, start using the medication again. In this case, it may be helpful to apply the medication less often than you had originally, and to increase the frequency of applications even more gradually. Eventually your skin will adapt to the retinoid so that you are able to apply the medication daily, or at least every other day, without your skin becoming irritated.

#### **3. Be gentle when washing.**

Cleansing with your bare hands is fine, but unless otherwise instructed by your provider, use only gentle cleansers, such as CeraVe® Foaming Facial Cleanser or Cetaphil® Gentle Skin Cleanser. Pat skin dry with a soft cloth or towel. Do not rub your skin as this will promote irritation.

#### **4. Take a break!**

After cleansing and patting skin dry, wait at least 15-20 minutes for skin to dry completely, then apply the medication.

#### **5. Less is best.**

Retinoids are very powerful medications (**Use only a pea-sized amount** of medication for your

whole face). Gently rub in the smallest amount possible in a very thin film to all of the areas which you intend to treat, avoiding getting it into the eyes and corners of the mouth. If you do get it into your eyes, it does not cause blindness but it can be irritating. Likewise, make sure that you treat the middle portion of your lips. It doesn't taste great, but lips do get a lot of sun damage! In other words, retinoids do not work as spot treatments. You **should not** apply them only to your worst areas. You need to apply them regularly to all of the areas that tend to be photodamaged. It is fine to use the prescription on your neck, chest, arms and hands.

#### **6. Sunscreens are necessary.**

A sunscreen containing Zinc Oxide, Titanium Dioxide or Parsol is best to help reduce the discoloration from your photodamage and prevent future damage. We recommend Elta MD® and Solar® products.

#### **7. Avoid irritants.**

Do not use astringents, toners, exfoliants, masks, alpha-hydroxy acid, or glycolic acid-based products, unless approved by your provider. Although these products may be suitable for future use, they will be too irritating during the initial process of getting your skin accustomed to the retinoid. Later in your treatment program, depending upon your goals, your skin type, and response to treatment, your provider may recommend superficial chemical peels, microdermabrasion, Laser skin toning and/or other modalities and treatments.

**8. Remember to discontinue your Vitamin-A products at least 48-72 hours before a facial procedure such as a superficial chemical peel, microdermabrasion, laser hair removal, or even facial waxing.**

#### **9. Do not use during pregnancy!**

Oral retinoids cause birth defects. To be safe, we want you to stop your topical medications if you think you may be pregnant.

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:**

#### **What is Retin-A?**

Retin-A is a special form of Vitamin-A which has been widely used by dermatologists for over 30 years as a treatment for acne. Over more than a decade, it has been found to produce beneficial changes in aging and sun-damaged skin.

#### **What effects does Retin-A have on aging, sun-damaged skin?**

Over a period of months, the regular application of Retin-A will produce a rosier complexion while lightening brown spots, reducing the number of fine wrinkles, and unplugging clogged pores. In addition, early precancerous rough spots such as actinic keratoses will become less prominent or may even disappear after sustained use.

#### **What other vitamin A products are available that are similar to Retin-A?**

Retin-A products are based on the tretinoin molecule and have been proven to be effective in the treatment of sun-damaged skin through many studies over more than a decade. Retin-A is available in several forms including: .025%, .05%, .1% creams, .01%, .025% gels, .05% liquid, and a relatively new gel called Retin-A micro. Renova is also a tretinoin product in a strength of .02% in a creamy, gentle, slightly scented base developed for the cosmetic market a number of years ago.

There are other active Vitamin-A products such as adapalene (Differin), and tazarotene (Tazorac) released primarily for acne and psoriasis respectively, potent products that can also be used in sun-damaged skin. Other Vitamin-A compounds, such as Affirm, utilize Retinol as the active ingredient. These products are usually less potent than tretinoin. Many over-the-counter products contain Retinol or other Vitamin-A compounds. Their efficacy has not been proven.

### **Am I a candidate for Vitamin-A therapy?**

Patients who have sun-damaged skin, including fine wrinkles, a dull skin tone, splotchy or irregular pigment, and the tendency to have plugged pores will be excellent candidates for Vitamin-A therapy.

### **What are the side effects of Vitamin-A/Retin-A therapy?**

Retin-A has had an excellent safety record over its 20+ years of use. There are no known internal side effects, but is not recommended during pregnancy. Retinoids often produce excessive dryness and, at times, redness and irritation, particularly during the early weeks of application. Retin-A also makes the skin sensitive prior to salon treatments such as waxing or facials. Care should be taken to discontinue the use of the medications several days prior to a waxing, facial, or other salon treatments.

### **How should Retin-A be applied?**

The medication should be applied sparingly to the entire face. Use cautiously under your provider's directions around sensitive areas such as eyelids and lips. Apply the cream before going to bed and rub it in gently. Ideally, to minimize irritation, leave an interval of at least 15-20 minutes between washing the face and applying Retin-A.

### **How soon will I see improvement?**

The period between beginning treatment and seeing improvement is highly variable, but is at least 3-4 months. After 2-4 months of use, patients with precancerous lesions may notice the appearance of fine red scaly areas. These clear with continued application. We may instruct you to continue daily application for 6-12 months and then to apply the cream only 2-3 times per week.

### **Can I use Retin-A when I go out in the sun?**

A common misconception is that Retin-A cannot be used if one has an active outdoor lifestyle. Retin-A is drying and irritating thus making you more sensitive to the further irritant effects of intense sun exposure. One does not get a serious sun reaction or allergic reaction to the sun while on Retin-A. If you know you will be getting an intense day in the sun, such as at the beach or a mid-day golf game, skip the Retin-A the night before. This is usually not necessary if you practice sun safety with an adequate broad-spectrum sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher), use protective clothing, and avoid the intense midday hours of sun whenever possible (10 am - 3 pm). It is indeed safe to use Retin-A as long as usual, careful sun protection is always followed.

### **Is the Retin-A purchased in Mexico equivalent to the US brand?**

You will not see the Retin-A brand for sale in Mexico, but you will find the generic equivalent, Tretinoin, available and sold under a variety of brand names from several reputable companies. The Tretinoin cream products will usually come in .025%, .05%, and .1% strengths with names such as 'Retanyl'. As long as the Tretinoin is produced by a reputable company such as Johnson & Johnson, Roche, Steifel, or Galderma it should be fine. The reaction to the cream or its

effectiveness may not be the same as its US counterpart since it may be mixed in a different base vehicle with a different feel in some cases. These generic Mexican products are a mere fraction of the cost of a similar product in the states and in many instances can have a similar beneficial effect.

**If I take Vitamin-A capsules by mouth or apply their contents on my face will I see similar improvement?** No! Other forms of Vitamin-A are unproven for aging, sun-damaged skin and excessive doses of oral Vitamin-A can be highly toxic.

**Is OTC Retinol as good as any prescription Vitamin A cream such as Retin-A or Tazarotene?** Not all retinol cream products are created equally. While some studies have found some Retinol products to be quite good, the other retinoids, specifically Tretinoin, Adapalene, and Tazarotene have decades of excellent research indicating a consistent, dependable efficacy.

**What kind of soap and moisturizer should I use?**

While being treated with Retin-A, wash your face gently with tepid water (hot water increases irritation) using a mild soap or facial cleanser such as Cetaphil<sup>®</sup>, Dove<sup>®</sup>, Purpose<sup>®</sup>, or Basis<sup>®</sup>. For dryness, use a light moisturizer such as Avéne<sup>®</sup> or CeraVe<sup>®</sup> after applying the Retin-A or at alternate times without Retin-A. Avoid the use of strong soaps, astringents, abrasives, and any facial products containing alcohol.

**Can Retin-A be used in combination with other medicated products on the face?**

Retin-A can be used in combination with other products such as skin bleachers, skin cleansers, lotions or creams containing glycolic acid, Vitamin-C or medicated products for acne prone skin. Care must be taken when using these medications in combination since they may have an added tendency to irritate the skin. If excessive irritation occurs with a nightly retinoid, we will often recommend a complementary product such as a glycolic cream (Glytone<sup>®</sup>), a Vitamin-B (Nia24<sup>®</sup>), or a Vitamin-C serum (iS Clinical<sup>®</sup>) to use on alternate nights to achieve results for sun-damaged skin without additional irritation.

**How often should I return for check-ups while using Retin-A?**

In order to monitor possible side effects and to enhance your chances of a successful outcome, we will ask you to return at 6-12 month intervals during the first year and less frequently thereafter.

### **REMEMBER**

Premature aging of the skin, liver spots, wrinkles, precancers and skin cancers are primarily caused by overexposure to the sun and these changes are prevented by regular year-round use of sunscreens, hats, long sleeves, protective clothing, sunglasses, and avoidance of the highest intensity hours of the sun (10 am - 3 pm).

If you have any questions or difficulties while using **Retin-A** or your **Vitamin-A** product, please call our office for assistance at 520.795.7729.

**Please visit our website at [www.pimaderm.com](http://www.pimaderm.com) for more information.**

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