

Soothing Sensitive Skin

by Dr. Claudia Aguirre

Burning, stinging, prickling, itching. Sound like a bad gardening experience? Actually, various reports state that 50% of the world's population suffers from these symptoms in a condition broadly termed 'sensitive' skin. The term sensitive skin generally refers to a skin condition defined by sensory symptoms rather than a disease entity. However, due to a lack of a clear definition, it does not account for the differentiation between a truly sensitive skin and a *sensitized* skin.

Sensitivity comes in many forms

A true sensitive skin condition is the result of your genes. This genetic predisposition is found in those who have fair skin and present other allergic diseases. They may also be susceptible to inflammatory skin diseases like Eczema, Psoriasis and Rosacea. Unlike sensitive skin, sensitized skin is not a result of genetics. It is a reflection of your environment, lifestyle and physiology- and can affect any person regardless of skin color or gender. Pollution, cosmetic and skin care ingredients, over-exfoliation, diet, alcohol and climate changes can all trigger sensitization in the skin. Luckily, this condition can be improved with proper skin care and lifestyle choices. There are sophisticated formulations out there that can deliver effective results for the most sensitized skin condition to reduce redness and soothe irritation for long lasting skin relief. However, there are also a number of products claiming they are made for 'sensitive skin.' How can you navigate between all the marketing hype?

New Ingredient Technology

Whereas immunogenic inflammation is triggered by your body's immune system, neurogenic inflammation is triggered by the nervous system. Both can yield the same redness, itching and irritation, resulting in sensitized skin. Fortunately, there is newer ingredient technology that targets the nerve response associated with inflammation and sensitization.

Red Hogweed (*Boerhavia diffusa*) root extract is a remarkable plant extract that helps to restore tissue integrity by favoring anti-inflammatory substances via different arms of the inflammatory pathway. One of these arms, neurogenic inflammation, is a nerve response that results in inflammation and its hallmark symptoms of redness and irritation. In reducing the nerve response, we can help reduce the sensitivity associated with neurogenic inflammation, bringing the skin to a normal level of sensitivity. Certain peptides, like acetyl tetrapeptide-15, have also been shown to curb neurogenic inflammation. Some botanicals have been used as anti-inflammatory agents for generations. The calming and soothing effects of Oat are widely known to reduce itch, redness and irritation, which is why it's still a popular ingredient for soothing sensitive skin. Ginger and bisabolol, a chamomile derivative, reduce redness by working better as a team, rather than separately, and should also be considered as anti-inflammatory ingredients. Together, these and other ingredients can provide serious relief from the inflammatory and neurogenic pathways that lead to skin sensitivity.

A restorative blend of lipids

When inflammation is paired with the loss of skin's protective barrier, the skin becomes highly reactive. To counter this, additional ingredients that mimic the skin's natural composition of ceramides, cholesterol and essential fatty acids are a must for sensitive skin. Borage seed and Evening Primrose Oil are high in gamma linoleic acid, a fatty acid required for intact epidermal layers. Avocado is a great source of natural phytosterols, while sunflower seed contains ceramides. So don't forget the barrier lipid layer when choosing a product for sensitive and sensitized skin. These lipids fortify the skin's barrier while the anti-inflammatory ingredients soothe irritated, sensitized skin. Approach sensitivity from all angles with tried and true anti-inflammatory botanicals paired with sophisticated ingredients that address the nerve response. And remember to de-stress! No topical ingredient can truly calm the skin without a little help from the mind.