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L.A. beauty and wellness brands for the self-care we're all craving right now



By LINDZI SCHARF

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Most of us would agree that 2020 was the shortest long year, one in which you probably lost track of your routines. Although 2021 might be off to a rocky start because of political unrest and ongoing COVID-19 shutdowns, it's as good a time as any to take inventory of how you can improve your daily rituals.

Studies have shown that there is a psychological benefit to self-care. "Grooming is important for human behavior because it makes us feel better and it boosts our self-esteem," said Dr. Amy Wechsler, a New York-based psychiatrist and dermatologist. "When people are stressed, they stop doing their routines. Routines are important. They give us a sense of control, and right now people feel really out of control. Little ways to give you back the feeling or semblance of control are helpful."

For starters, Wechsler recommends maintaining your skincare regimen. "A few minutes in the morning," she said. "A few minutes in the evening. It helps ground a lot of people."

Here are tips and tricks from beauty and wellness experts:

1. Skincare suggestions



Cassandra Grey, founder of L.A. beauty boutique Violet Grey, says that skincare as a category has been on the rise over the last four years. 70% of her business' sales come from skincare while 25% of her customers are men. (Naj Jamai)

Cassandra Grey, founder of Los Angeles beauty boutique Violet Grey, has built her business around a belief in grooming and wellness as an important form of self-care. “Humans are motivated by three things — sex, power and self-respect,” she said. “I think skincare or self-care or beauty products that enhance the way you feel or the way that you look really help you achieve self-respect because you feel like you’re taking care of yourself.”

One of Violet Grey’s bestsellers is [Augustinus Bader’s the Cream](#), which has become something of a phenomenon since the German brand launched three years ago. “It just works,” Grey said of the cream (15 milliliters, \$85), which reportedly triggers existing stem cells to repair skin. “You use it, and your skin looks better. Period. That’s why it’s become a hero product. ... It is innovative in the formulation. There is not a formulation like that.”



One of Violet Grey's bestsellers is Augustinus Bader's the Cream. Three new Augustinus Bader products — a cleansing gel, body lotion and body oil — were added to the brand's lineup. (Augustinus Bader)

The skincare brand, which was created by leading stem cell and biomedical scientist Augustinus Bader, has released a [cleansing gel](#) (100 milliliters, \$65), [body lotion](#) (30 milliliters, \$35; 100 milliliters, \$95) and [body oil](#) (100 milliliters, \$95), which all contain the company's proprietary technology, a combination of natural amino acids, high-grade vitamins and synthesized molecules.

There are a number of result-driven brands and products on the market.

Among them are Protocol, which packages its [Complete Renewing Line](#) (four skincare products for \$262) in airless, UV-proof bottles in order to protect its products' oxidized retinol and L-ascorbic acid ingredients; L.A.-based Youth to the People's pro-grade vegan [Protect the Planet Refillable Minis Kit](#) (\$60); Goop's [Glowing Skin Bestsellers Kit](#) (\$79), which includes the Santa Monica-based skincare company's top three products (an exfoliator, face peel and super-powder); New Zealand-based clean beauty brand Emma Lewisham whose [Skin Shield Daily Face Antioxidant Protect + Repair SPF 30](#) (\$57) is packaged in 100% post-consumer-recycled container; the Beauty Chef's [Glow Inner Beauty Essential](#), a powder-based vitamin whole-food supplement (\$65); and Chanel's [La Solution 10 De Chanel moisturizer](#) (1 ounce, \$80), the latter of which Wechsler helped formulate as the luxury brand's consulting dermatologist.

2. Wellness, masks and meditation

Beyond skincare and cosmetics, Grey said her company has seen a rise in wellness products during the last year. “We’ve sold a lot of vibrators, a lot of candles,” she said, recommending Crave’s [Vesper Vibrator](#) (\$69) and Heretic’s [Dirty Grass Candle](#) (\$85). “It’s these rituals where you’re taking care of yourself and you’re getting present and in the moment and you’re feeling some comfort.”

However, carving out time for oneself, especially during the ongoing pandemic, can be quite a challenge, Grey said. “I wish I could say I was better at practicing what I preach,” she said, “but I think it’s always been a struggle for me to find balance between work, myself, my family and particularly now with us all sleeping at our offices. ... We’re not working from home anymore. It’s like we’re sleeping at our office.”

With limited time in our schedules for ourselves, Grey advises combining self-care tasks. “I do a treatment while I meditate because a lot of these treatments take time,” she said, adding that a few of her favorites include Dr. Dennis Gross’ [DRX Spectralite Faceware Pro](#) (\$435), [Hanacure’s all-in-one-facial starter kit](#) (\$29) and [Léonor Greyl’s scalp treatment](#) (\$48).



DRX Spectralite Faceware Pro by Dr. Dennis Gross, \$435.
(Dr. Dennis Gross)

“You feel refreshed,” Grey said of meditating, mentioning that she favors YouTube’s various free meditation videos. “I think a lot of people don’t meditate because they feel like they don’t know how to do it, or they try to sit still and they just can’t because they have so many thoughts or distractions or whatever. It’s just about sitting still. Even if you don’t get into a deep unconscious meditative hypnosis, it’s still healthy to sit still and try to get even just a moment of being present.”

3. Covering beauty basics



“Keeping up a routine through this stay-at-home period is really vital, but it’s about connecting with yourself,” said Michele Gough Baril, founder of Northern California-based beauty brand [Iris & Romeo](#). “That’s when you’ll feel calmer, grounded and connected. Having a modified beauty routine that makes you feel good, makes you feel connected but doesn’t feel like a chore is critical. It’s also important to get ready for yourself, not for others.”

Gough Baril launched her brand in 2019 after a personal lesson in self-care. In 2012, she was head of marketing for Smashbox, but after she helped grow the former indie company into a global Estee Lauder-acquired brand, Gough Baril decided to step away from the beauty industry. “I was completely burnt out,” she said. “I think this is really a common thing for a lot of women. We give so much, and we never take care of ourselves. And everything else comes first. There’s the needs of the family, the needs of the business, the needs of everything. ... It was really a time in my life where I hit that wall.”

After a year of soul searching, Gough Baril’s created Iris & Romeo, which, she said, “stands for all the things that I believe in — sustainability, clean beauty; a brand that supports the burned-out modern woman and her mental, spiritual and emotional health.”

Gough Baril launched just two skincare/makeup hybrid products in varying shades after “exploring what makes [people] feel good. For me, it’s hydrated dewy skin and lips,” she said. The brand’s [Best Skin Days](#) (\$64) combines five products into one; it’s a serum, moisturizer and SPF that provides coverage and blue light/pollution protection. “Women want a simplified routine,” she said. “What is the least you need to do to make you feel like the best version of yourself?”



Chanel's Rouge Allure Velvet Extreme matte lip color in Pivoine Noire (\$40), left, and Rouge Allure Laque Ultrawear shine liquid lip color (\$40) are from the brand's new Les Fleurs de Chanel spring/summer 2021 collection available at [chanel.com](https://www.chanel.com). (Chanel)

Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel used to say, “If you’re sad, add more lipstick and attack,” hence the brand’s wide array of [Rouge Allure](#) (\$40) lipsticks. However, Gough Baril said there’s a time and place for a red lip versus her brand’s [3-in-1 Power Peptide Lip Balm](#) (\$26). “For Chanel, it was about the power lip,” she explained. “That bold red lip has a psychological effect. I wear one when I go on VC meetings. There’s something about putting on a bold red lip that makes me feel like I’m in charge. But for me, the modern woman, what she’s going to use every day is a lip balm, a little hint of color.”

Gough Baril acknowledged there’s no need for lipstick beneath a COVID-19-era face mask but said Iris & Romeo’s lip balms add the perfect pop of color for video-conference meetings. “You just need enough to make you feel polished and pulled together,” she said. “Even though you’re wearing your sweatpants on the bottom; on the top, you want to have a little bit of [something]. It affects your mindset. It helps you pull yourself together and say, ‘I’m ready to face the day.’”

4. Avoiding adult acne

Although quarantine might seem like a good time to try new products, Wechsler warned that it's important to listen to your skin as you experiment. "If you're buying new product, test it out under a small area on your face for three nights or three days to make sure it doesn't bug you," she said. "Don't make huge, drastic changes. ... If you have a reaction and you used five new things, then you don't know what it's from. Just add one thing at a time if you're changing, and be weary of a lot of strong fragrance in some things. A lot of plant extracts are irritating. Just go slowly. One new thing at a time."

Also, buyer beware: adult acne has seen a rise during the pandemic. Some professionals have been quick to label it "mask-ne," but Wechsler has a different theory. "Stress is known to cause acne," she said. "I do think certain [rougher] mask materials can irritate patients' skin, and certain mask materials make people sweat more and may make them break out more. But I think it's the stress more than it is the mask."

To combat the problem, she advised that people "look at their sleep patterns" or, as she called it, "sleep hygiene." According to Wechsler, adults need 7 ½ to 8 hours of sleep a night. "We heal in our sleep," said the author of "The Mind-Beauty Connection."

Wechsler suggests monitoring your bedtime habits. "There's no way you can turn off [the] news and fall asleep in 10 minutes," she said, recommending you take a break from technology two hours before heading to bed. "Play a game. Read a novel. Watch a comedy. Have sex," she said, explaining that a stress-induced bad night of sleep can lead to a poor complexion.

She also recommended double checking your products. “A patient will come in and say, ‘I have not changed any of my skincare products but now I’m getting this rash,’” she said, explaining that it’s often the result of noncomedogenic products. “A comedo is a blackhead or a whitehead. [Noncomedogenic] essentially means it won’t clog your pores and cause pimples.”

Her top advice: make sure you wash your face when you come home from being outside and wash your mask after each use. “I’ve found a lot of people not doing that,” she said.

Acne can also be treated with salicylic acid, which, Wechsler said, “is a nice over-the-counter ingredient.” Conversely, she doesn’t recommend products with benzoyl peroxide. “It’s really irritating,” she said.

5. Drinking problems and solutions



Consider your alcohol intake to keep your skin looking fresh. A list of products from brands making sustainable wine and drink alternatives and additives includes Rescue Rosé, left, Kin Euphorics' Kin Spritz drink, Brighter sparkling drink and Renude's Chagaccino coffee boost. (Rescue Rosé; Kin Euphorics; Brighter; Renude)

Another consideration is alcohol intake. “If you drink too much, your skin will be dehydrated,” Wechsler said, adding that it’s not known if one type of beverage is better than another. “It’s theorized, but that study has not been done.” She said that people’s cocktail preferences and its effects are individualized but that generally speaking, drinking too much can harm how one sleeps.

If you need a drink, opt for biodynamic, organic and sustainable wines. After all, wine is known to have healthy antioxidants in it, Wechsler said.

Our suggestions: [Rescue Rosé](#), a sustainable California rosé wine from Los Angeles-based stylist and animal lover Nola Singer. The wine retails for \$25 at [rescuerosé.com](#) and benefits Los Angeles' Love Leo Rescue, a nonprofit that aids animals in need.

Or consider swapping alcohol for a healthier beverage. Kin Euphorics' Kin Spritz is a nonalcoholic spirit, made of adaptogens, nootropics and botanics, which includes a blend of fresh citrus, warm spice, hibiscus and ginger. A four pack is \$27 at [kineuphorics.com](#).

Another option is Santa Monica-based Brighter, a sparkling tonic with prebiotics, acetic acid and apple cider vinegar, which might be refreshing but also supports gut health. Sold in a 12-pack for \$34.99 at [brightertonic.com](#), Brighter's flavors include lemon ginger turmeric and mélange.

Lastly, Chagaccino is a new mushroom and adaptogenic coffee additive from West Hollywood-based Renude that reportedly helps relieve stress, boost immunity and has anti-aging benefits because of its clean, plant-based, antioxidant-filled ingredients. Each box includes 10 packets for \$29.99 at [drinkrenude.com](#).

6. Haircare help



Hairstylist Ted Gibson says self-care begins by taming one's tresses. "Hair can transform not only the way that you look but also the way that you feel," he says. (Ted Gibson)

Celebrity hairstylist Ted Gibson said that for many women self-care begins with taming one's hair. "Hair can transform not only the way that you look but also the way that you feel," he said, noting that many of the women who have come to Starring by Ted Gibson, his Los Angeles-based hair salon, were eager to make major changes to their hair during the salon's pandemic reopening.

"They felt like before COVID they were one woman and after COVID are another," he said, adding that there's a psychological connection between hair and one's mood. "It does make you feel better when you walk past a mirror and your hair is done [even if] you're in a pair of sweats."

His clients often associate their hair with major milestones in their personal lives, he said. "If you ask a woman of a certain age, 'What defines you?', she'll definitely refer to different hairstyles," he said, "and different periods of her life."



From top to bottom and left to right: Headbands and hair accessories from Lelet NY (\$168), LeLe Sadoughi X Stoney Clover Lane (\$195), Ulla Johnson (\$65), Sarah J. Curtis (\$17), Tarina Tarantino (\$55) and Suryo (\$71). (Lelet NY; LeLe Sadoughi X Stoney Clover Lane; Ulla Johnson; Sarah J. Curtis; Tarina Tarantino; Suryo)

Gibson said this pandemic is no different, and there are a number of quick at-home tricks to add a bit of style without much effort. One easy option is to change your hair's part. "If you're always used to having your hair down the center, change your part to the side," Gibson said. "It gives a whole new kind of sophistication because a center part can be a little girl-next-door and then a side part could be just a little sexier."

Another fix? "A hair accessory can always go a long way," Gibson said, adding that a headband or jeweled barrette can make a nice addition to a ponytail or messy top knot to add a little oomph to your next video call, romantic date night in the backyard or mirror selfie.

A number of fashion and accessory labels have options including [LeLe Sadoughi X Stoney Clover Lane](#), [Sarah J. Curtis](#), [Lelet NY](#), [Suryo](#), [Ulla Johnson](#) and [Tarina Tarantino](#).

When it comes to daily hair maintenance, Gibson said that most of his clients say they've been shampooing every other day, which he supports; however, he said that hair does need a daily styling refresher.

“Whether your hair is curly or straight or you want it to be a voluminous blow dry or after you put in some really beautiful beachy waves and you want the hair to have a tasseled feel to it, [Starring Shooting Star Texture Meringue](#) is the product I go to,” he said of the \$52 weightless mousse he created to use as a universal styling tool. “I needed something that I could pull out of my bag that I could use on Debra Messing, Gabrielle Union, Lupita Nyong’o and Sandra Oh.” He said he uses it on himself as well because of its provocative fig, coconut and amber scent.



Starring by Ted Gibson's Shooting Star Texture Meringue, \$52. (Ted Gibson)

7. Going beneath the surface

For her part, Gough Baril is quick to point out that hair, skincare and beauty routines merely scratch the surface when it comes to daily wellness practices.

“The emotional, the physical and the spiritual well-being of a woman is interconnected,” she said. “Self-care is not just a pedicure.”