

## A Plus Buyer's Guide: Beauty Products and Fragrance

"An endless fountain of immortal drink  
Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink."

--Endymion, John Keats

Beauty captures our attention. In the melting auroras of the Northern Lights. In a spill of winter stars. In the face of a lover, softened by sleep, brushed by dawn as we watch over them, our hearts pulled to theirs, one mutual breath beneath the rising and falling sheets. Beauty entrances. We seek resonance: beauty that somehow seems intended and destined just for us.

Beauty embraces all of the senses: it feeds every part of the human capacity to feel. The softest caress tingles against petal-soft skin. The slightest hint of a fragrance washes us in nostalgia, memory, longing. We can spend hours intoxicated by the sight of a lover's face, a cascade of hair, the memory of a shoulder's taut curve. Because we recognize beauty, we must care for it. How we care for ourselves reflects our gratitude and our appreciation for it: in doing so, we care for the mystery of our own beauty and for the vastness of beauty itself.

### **Hair:**

Raven tresses, sun-gilt waves, or chestnut curls; luxuriously long, seductively short, or somewhere between the nape of the neck and the center of the back, hair is the feature that can most define or redefine your looks. Beyond cut and color, however, is the every day care that keeps your locks lustrous and healthy. We'll talk a little bit about basic hair care and some of the most common challenges.

Hair is composed of the protein keratin: the same protein found in our skin and nails. Its growth starts in the hair follicle. The visible part is called the hair shaft. The sebaceous glands in the scalp produce sebum, an oil that protects the hair and the skin. Think of sebum as a natural conditioner: it moisturizes your hair. Using a natural bristle brush helps evenly distribute this oil throughout your hair, keeping it nourished while stimulating the sebaceous glands. Don't over-brush your hair--it can cause split ends. Like so many other things, too much sebum can be a bad thing: it can make your hair look oily and flat, attracting dust and environmental contaminants. That's when it's time to shampoo and condition.

Shampoo allows water to penetrate sebum and wash away the excess along with dirt and foreign matter. Dry shampoos are available as fragranced powders that

absorb excess sebum before they're brushed out. These are great for when you're on the go or if your hair needs a mid-day lift. Many liquid shampoos contain plant extracts and vitamins intended to volumize, hydrate, lightly condition, and nourish. If you have colored or recently treated hair, look into a sulfate-free shampoo. Sulfates are lathering agents that are claimed by some to cause dryness and follicle damage. Sulfate-free shampoos use natural ingredients like aloe, avocado, and honey to cleanse hair and protect color treatments, so that your trip to the salon isn't washed out the next day. If you use a lot of hair products--sprays, mousses, color, etc--use a clarifying shampoo a few times a month to give your hair a break. Oily hair needs a purifying shampoo, which will reintegrate body and lift. For dandruff, a medicated shampoo will alleviate the condition: and don't be embarrassed, it affects roughly half the population.

Over-washing, excessive chemical treatments, and heat from blow drying or too much sun can all leave hair looking flat and dull. Conditioners help restore oil and balance to shampooed hair. Leave-in conditioners are applied after washing and left in until the next shampooing, while an ordinary conditioner is applied and then rinsed out. Conditioners may also employ sunscreen to protect against split ends, brittleness, and photoaging. They may also include moisturizers to improve texture, and essential fatty acids, which mimic sebum. For deep conditioning, which should be done once or twice a month if you have dry hair, split ends, or simply want to pamper yourself, try a hot oil treatment, which penetrates the cuticle--the outermost layer--of the hair shaft and restores vital moisture and body to tired hair.

### **Skin:**

When it comes to the largest organ of the human body, prevention is key. Protection against harmful solar radiation and sticking to a healthy lifestyle will go a long way in keeping your skin radiant and soft. A daily skincare routine is a vital part of a beauty regimen. Your foremost concern should be photoaging: the cumulative damage done by exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays. There are two types of UV radiation that cause injury to the epidermis: UVA and UVB. UVA rays create fine lines, wrinkles, and penetrate deep into the skin, damaging the dermis and causing photoaging. UVB rays are largely responsible for sunburns and may also cause the formation of freckles, dark spots, and precancerous or cancerous lesions. Before you wrap yourself up in a suit of armor, know that the cosmetic and medical risks posed by UV radiation can be mitigated through the use of broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF (Sun Protection Factor) value of at least 15.

SPF numbers can be thought of in two ways: protection time and percentage value. Both have to do with UVB rays, though a broad-spectrum sunscreen will help protect against both types. The SPF can be multiplied by the average

number in minutes that it takes your unprotected skin to redden in the sun. If it usually takes 15 minutes, then wearing SPF 15 should allow you to remain in the sun 225 minutes--just under four hours--before starting to burn. If you sweat, go swimming, or shower, you'll have to reapply it: there is no product that is reliably "waterproof."

**The rule is: if you don't stay dry, reapply.**

Another way to understand SPF is by the percentage of UVB rays that are blocked. A rough guide is that SPF 15 blocks around 93%, SPF 30 97%, and SPF 50 about 98%. There is no sunscreen that provides 100% protection: don't be fooled by products with super high SPF numbers. The safest bet is to go for a broad spectrum SPF 30 and reapply it every few hours.

The other key to basic skincare? Hydration. Those long nights of drinking and dancing are fun, but the next day can be a dermal disaster. Take care to stay hydrated and avoid salty foods and you'll avoid waking up with new purses under your eyes. In the meantime, you can apply a light eye cream, gently dabbing a bit just under the lower eyelid. Always wash your hands and use the tips of your ring fingers to dab--not rub--eye cream around this sensitive area. This will ensure a gentle touch.

### **Skin Types:**

In order to care for your skin beyond the basics, you need to know what your skin type is. The way to determine this is by looking in a mirror and gently wiping your face with a clean tissue when you wake up in the morning. If your skin appears shiny or greasy and leaves residue on the tissue, you have oily skin. If your skin feels tight, looks dull or flaky, or if the tissue feels abrasive, then you have dry skin. If you only notice a little shine on your forehead and around your nose--the "t-zone"--it's combination or normal skin. Finally, if you're prone to breakouts with certain products, you have sensitive skin. Whatever your skin type, you need to pay attention to its particular needs when it comes to choosing cleansers, exfoliators, toners, and moisturizers.

**Dry skin** is most susceptible to signs of aging and can be itchy and flaky. If you have dry skin, take warm--not hot--showers to keep your body's natural oils from washing away and use a mild, moisturizing soap or body wash: try one with jojoba, shea butter, or honey or a hydrating body wash. Products with almond oil also do wonders for flaky, dry skin. Gently pat yourself dry with an all-cotton towel afterwards and apply a rich moisturizing body lotion twice a day, paying attention to dry patches. Use a lighter, SPF-rated face cream. Lotions containing Retinol and Alpha-hydroxy acids minimize wrinkles. Keep your facial

moisturizer on your nightstand so you remember to use it before bed and after waking up.

**Oily skin** is prone to breakouts, so use a gentle cleanser with Alpha Hydroxy in the morning and evening to remove excess oil. In the shower, most body washes are fine for oily skin. Go for light, non-greasy moisturizers and sunblocks. Clays or purifying masks keep pores clean and leave the skin feeling refreshed, but should be used sparingly, as they can over-dry. Toners and astringents also shrink the appearance of pores, but often contain alcohol, so limit application to the t-zone or problem areas. Unless you have really oily skin, use rose or orange flower water: these toners are lower in alcohol than astringents.

Medicated pads and cleansers containing beta-hydrolic acid, benzoyl peroxide, or glycolic acid that are marketed for acne treatment also do wonders for cutting oil: again, use conservatively. Blotting paper can be carried in a purse or wallet and quickly dries oily areas without over-drying: it's great for quick touch-ups and helps prevent acne.

If you have sensitive skin, look into hypoallergenic and unscented products, including deodorants. A sunblock with a lower SPF will decrease the chances of an allergic reaction, but remember to reapply it frequently. Wash linens and clothes with unscented detergents and keep your showers on the cooler side of warm. Look for all-natural or organic moisturizers: they have less chemicals that you may be sensitive to. Avoid perfumes and opt for essential oils instead.

**Normal or combination skin** should, like other types, be moisturized after showering and before bed and protected with sunscreen during the day. Shower gels are a great way to have fun with various fragrances, so spice up your bathtime by trying moisturizing oils, energizing washes, or botanical mixes. Keep your skin hydrated with a light cream or lotion moisturizer and healthy and be sure to exfoliate 4-5 times a week. Use a separate exfoliator for body and face, unless it indicates that it may be used for both. A sugar or salt scrub in the bath or shower is a great way to relax, while reviving your body and improving circulation. Exfoliators remove dead cells, firm the epidermis, and improve the skin's overall appearance. Freshly exfoliated skin shows a restored, healthy glow and vigor. Exfoliators work by using tiny particles to gently resurface the skin or using a mildly acidic cleansing peel to clear the pores and wash away dead cells. Both techniques may be combined to smooth and vitalize. If using the granule type, begin by removing make-up and wetting the face with warm water. Apply the exfoliator to the face, but be careful to avoid the thin, sensitive area under the eyes. Gently rub the exfoliator in circles, polishing and refining without scratching or scouring. Then rinse your face and pat dry with a towel. You'll see and feel the difference immediately.

## **Liquid Memory: The Power of Fragrance**

When asked in an interview what she wore to bed, Marilyn Monroe answered “Chanel No. 5:” the famous perfume epitomizing the same glamour and frisky sophistication shared by the actress and revealed so playfully in her unforgettable reply.

No other sense is so bound to memory as scent. The olfactory system is closely tied to the amygdala--the emotional center of the brain--and the hippocampus, which processes associative learning. We link each smell to a certain person, a moment, a place. The smell of honeysuckle might suddenly evoke the crisp spring winds of our childhoods, while the light smell of rosewater might remind us of a grandmother or aunt. The trace of a lover’s perfume on a pillow or a shirt can make us ache or soar. The memory of a scent might fade, but the memories and emotions attached to it can rekindle instantly upon its return. Perfumes are liquid emotions.

A perfume blends the essential oils of aromatic plants and substances in a solvent, usually alcohol. It’s easy to get confused about the differences between perfume (or parfum) types but it’s simple: each refers to a different concentration of oil, ranging from the strongest (perfume and Eau de Parfum) to the lightest (Eau de Toilette and the citrusy Eau de Cologne). Knowing a little about how perfume is bodied--how it changes over the course of a day and reacts with your own body chemistry--and the basic types of scent will help you be unforgettable.

The top notes of a perfume are sharp and fresh. It’s because they are so volatile that you must try a dab of perfume on the wrist when choosing a scent. These top notes evaporate after a few minutes: they tease and then move on. Citruses, like bergamot and lime can be very bright top notes, as can eucalyptus and sage.

Top notes give way to the heart--the middle notes--of the perfume. These emerge after a few minutes and last from four to six hours. Pine, lavender, and geranium can be found here, as can pepper.

The base notes are the foundation of a perfume’s architecture. These are the sensual, spicy, woody oils like sandalwood, patchouli, and clove. Vanilla and rose are found here. The base notes emerge after an hour or so and evaporate slowly.

There are eight major perfume categories, but it’s rare that any single fragrance is so straight-forward so as to fall into one. Fragrance should be an exciting experience, so have fun. The categories are: citrus, spicy, woody, floral, aquatic,

green, fruity, and oriental. Oriental, spicy, and woody fragrances are often thought of as night or winter perfumes: they tend to have a mysterious, heavy character to them: the equivalent of a little black dress and six inch heels. The others might be looked at as daytime or spring/summer categories: fresh, energetic, sweet, and casual. Having said that, a bright floral perfume can be unexpectedly wonderful on a late fall evening and a rich, deep, vanilla or clove can wake up a lazy spring morning. Beauty is rarely predictable and never forgettable...why should your fragrance be?

When old age shall this generation waste,  
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou sayst,  
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty," - that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

--John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn."