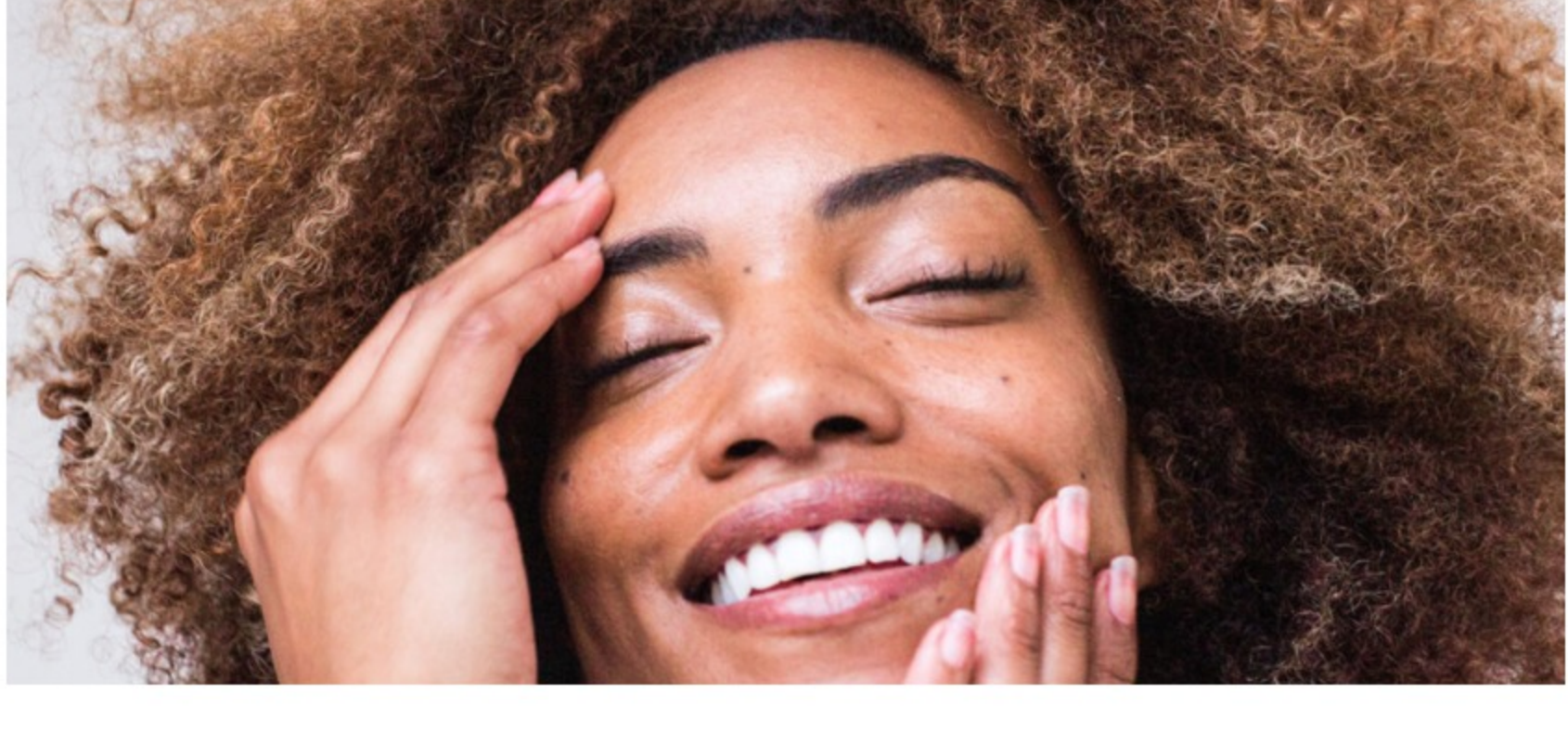


BEAUTY

# The Noob's guide to clean skincare

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Clean skincare – what does it mean? The answer changes depending on whom you ask. For the noob (or uninitiated) among us, clean beauty usually encompasses skincare and make-up that's derived from natural sources (meaning plants here), vegan, organic, 'chemical'-free, and eco-friendly.

'Natural' beauty has been around for ages, but there's natural (not)... and there's natural. Not to mention, we're becoming increasingly conscious about making considered choices regarding what we put in and on our bodies. This is leading us to choose vegan diets and clothing, ecologically responsible packaging, and avoiding using chemicals that are harsh for our body and the environment, as much as possible.

We ask **Nicole Sherwin**, founder of Eco Diva, to explain – and persuade us – why should we make the change.

### What is clean skin care?

**Nicole:** Clean skincare means different things to different people. To me, it means using ingredients that are found in nature. So it's a match between nature and our skin, which is also made from nature. And not using ingredients created in a chemically processed fashion.

For me, clean skincare means using products I know will not harm me in any way, but only add value because of the superfood ingredients they contain.

The skin needs nutrients to heal/repair itself. I ensure my products contain those nutrients, so that every time you're smearing, you're healing. You're in constant healing mode because that's what the skin does. It rejuvenates, renews, and heals constantly if it has the right ingredients.

### Don't all skincare products heal and repair?

**Nicole:** The problem with a lot of products is with the other ingredients they put in.

A lot of skin-care brands in the market need to stay on-shelf for years. So they contain preservatives like parabens that help the product to last longer, additives, fragrances, and colorants as well as ingredients like sulphates which help the product to foam and give a more luxurious feeling. But, for me, they are more toxic to our skin and to our health than anything else.

The skin is the largest organ of the body, and it absorbs absolutely everything that's applied to it – whether you're applying a hormonal cream (which has been proven to work), or whether you're applying a body lotion, or shampoo or deodorant.

Many people don't think about the ingredients or products they're applying to their own person. And when you start googling some of these, it can be really quite frightening to discover the adverse effects these can have on your health and your skin.

### What are these adverse effects?

**Nicole:** The easiest way to explain is with my own journey.

When I was living in LA, I got very, very ill – my whole musculoskeletal system just collapsed. I was doing a lot of yoga and one day I couldn't get out of bed. I was drained and exhausted and I didn't want to leave the house because I felt ugly. I looked awful and drained. So I threw away absolutely everything I had in my bathroom cupboard. And I started making very simple products in my kitchen because I knew... if I make them, I know what's in them, so I'm going to be okay.

This blew me away because I thought I was being healthy – I was brought up vegetarian and was taking good supplements. I got so sick I nearly died. It meant I had to come back to Cape Town where my dad, a renowned homeopath, treated me. I had to take volcanic ash and do a nine-month clear-out/detox of my whole system because I was poisoned.

### How did you get heavy-metal poisoning?

**Nicole:** Looking at how on earth I could have contracted this was the start of my journey.

Mercury and lead are poisonous to the body. So it's not a good thing to ingest these or put them on your skin. Deep-sea fish like tuna and swordfish have been known to have very high toxic levels of mercury. Yes, I was eating sushi, but not huge amounts.

I turned then to my make-up and skin care. I found that my lipstick contained lead, my body lotion had high levels of parabens, and also contained lead and mercury. This was insane.

From sulphates in shampoos to conditioners, to skincare, make-up, hair care, foot cream, nail polish... they say the average woman leaves her house with about 140 different chemical ingredients on her body.



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### How do these chemicals affect your body?

**Nicole:** Your body and liver don't know how to detoxify or get rid of them. They will go to certain areas of the body and start breaking down – in the liver or through the skin.

It was amazing how my skin erupted. I got weird pigmentation and eczema patches in certain areas. Then I broke out in acne – and I was in my late 30s. It was really quite scary, and I didn't want to leave the house because I felt ugly. I looked awful and drained. So I threw away absolutely everything I had in my bathroom cupboard. And I started making very simple products in my kitchen because I knew... if I make them, I know what's in them, so I'm going to be okay.

### How did that translate into creating the Eco Diva range?

**Nicole:** **Expresso** invited me onto their morning show to chat about my background, what I had been doing in LA, and the environmental space. They also asked me to create a natural product on the show the following week – a natural fertilizer. I googled it and practiced it and ended up creating an effective organic fertilizer. It was such an interesting process and I learned so much about combining ingredients. And then I had to go on live TV and demonstrate how to make it! I don't know how it happened, but two years later, I was still there as the cosmetics chef creating lots of different products.

I made over 85 different recipes of skincare, baby care, and home-cleaning products, and everything that can make you still feel beautiful, but naturally. People would tweet the show and say 'I love that body butter or that face cream you made. Can I buy yours?'

I thought, 'I'm a cosmetics chef. I'm showing you how to make your own.' I realised that people really wanted to look into more healthy skincare options, so I took my top 10 recipes and worked with two different biochemists. From my recipes, we co-created professional skin care formulations. Those formulations are now found in Eco Diva Natural.

That process took about a year. I had to make sure everything ticked the boxes from a clean environmental perspective: it had to be 100% healthy stuff. Everything about the brand needed to be environmentally friendly, cruelty-free, vegan, and 100% natural – no harm to animals, no harm to skin, no harm to humans. Just very nourishing and nutritious skincare.

## If I make them, I know what's in them, so I'm going to be okay

### How do you keep your skincare products fresh and safe if you don't use preservatives? What is the shelf life of your product unopened? And once opened, how long do they last?

**Nicole:** The products are preserved with natural oils and butters, which have incredible anti-microbial/antibacterial properties. Unopened, they will last over three years, which is a long time. But, for retailer purposes, we say 18 to 24 months, just to be safe. We make them in small batches. Once opened, they also last two-and-a-half to three years.

### Many of the products are in jars. Would you recommend using a spatula to scoop out a cream, so you don't contaminate it?

**Nicole:** I always wash my hands or use our hand purifier before I touch my skin. Otherwise, you're going to contaminate your skin with your dirty hands. So I personally don't use spatulas. But if people prefer to do that, we do have lovely wooden spatulas.

### There's a lot of scepticism around what 'natural' skincare means. How can someone embarking on this journey ensure they are getting a truly natural product?

**Nicole:** Yeah, there's obviously huge controversy around the world about what natural means. I think from an FDA perspective, you only need a minimum of 8 % natural ingredients in order to qualify a product as 'natural'. That also freaked me out when I found that out. I felt properly cheated by brands' 'claims' of natural.

Our products are made with 100% natural ingredients. I made sure of that. But if you're looking at other brands and want to know what is natural, do your own research. Google the ingredients on the ingredient label. A lot of these ingredients you can't pronounce can be quite dodgy. Google is your best friend. It really is. For me, life is about being conscious and about being present. So if you're going to eat something, know what you're eating. Don't just take someone's word for it. Similarly, if you're going to schmear something on your body, know what's in it. Educate yourself, learn what is good for you. Because that's when you'll live your healthiest, best life. Really, it's a game-changer.

### You say Eco Diva products skincare are organic. Are your sources certified organic?

**Nicole:** The ingredients are organic, but in S.A., it's quite tough to claim that every single ingredient has been certified. Unfortunately, many of the local farmers aren't certified because certification costs so much and they can't afford it. So if not certified, then we ensure that all ingredients are grown in a natural, organic environment.

Many certified organic ingredients available are imported, which is also a tough call because there's a whole [carbon] footprint there. We also want to support local producers.

### You also have Beauty Without Cruelty certification. What does this mean?

**Nicole:** For me, any testing on animals for human consumption makes absolutely no sense whatsoever. It is cruel to put an animal in a cage for humans to decide whether something works or not. And the molecular structure of their skin is completely different from humans. So it does not mean it's safe for humans. It's just archaic and barbaric, and it doesn't make sense because it does not offer the results that are needed for humans to justify doing it. Plus I'm an animal lover through and through and abhor any type of cruelty to animals in any way.

### So how do you test your products to ensure they are safe and effective?

**Nicole:** I'm the first human that will test each product, and they're tested for months. Then I'll get a panel of about 50 people who all try the products for a few months.

Each product takes between nine months and a year before I am satisfied that it is safe and works well, and is ready to launch into the marketplace.

Don't just take someone's word for it. If you're going to schmear something on your body, know what's in it. Educate yourself, learn what is good for you. Because that's when you'll live your healthiest, best life.

### OK, so I'm now persuaded and want to make the change to clean skincare. But I can't waste the investment I've made in my current products. How do I make that transition? What are the essentials I need to start?

**Nicole:** My question back to you is: how quickly do you want to be healthy? How quickly do you want to turn your skin into gorgeously glowing, healthy skin? It's up to you if you want to transition. But, for me, mixing different brands as part of a skincare routine can be a real recipe for disaster. Because there are too many ingredients from too many different brands, offering too many different things.

It's like a petri dish on your skin. It's going to erupt, it's going to create a 'skin type'. It may either become oily, dry, or combination. Or it may even become pigmented or develop acne or not. And the molecular structure of their skin is completely different from humans. So it does not mean it's safe for humans. It's just archaic and barbaric, and it doesn't make sense because it does not offer the results that are needed for humans to justify doing it. Plus I'm an animal lover through and through and abhor any type of cruelty to animals in any way.

Even though it's a tough choice – why carry on just because you've bought something? Just because you've paid for it doesn't mean you have to carry on damaging yourself.

My advice: You're obviously wanting to try clean beauty because what you've been doing isn't working for you. If you're conscious that you need to make the change, make it! Take the step! Be brave!

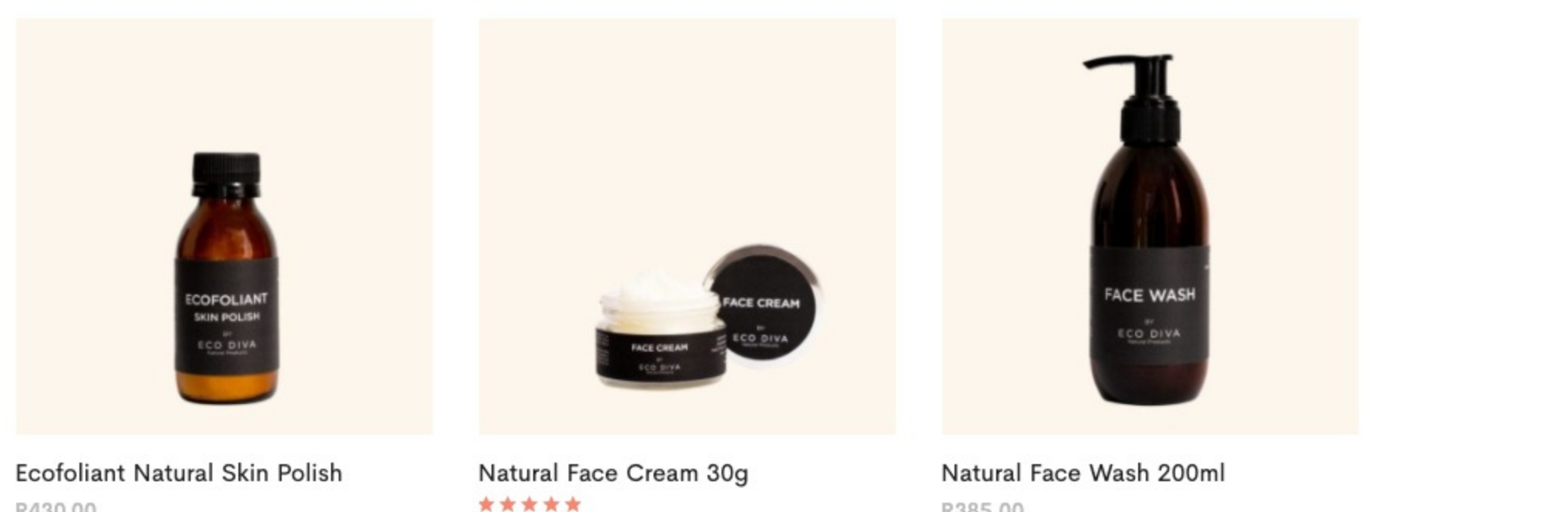
Bouust... If you feel you really can't or are too nervous to do that, the three key things you have to do are: cleanse, exfoliate and moisturise.

This is why I created **The Ultimate Trio**. The set contains our **Natural Face Wash 200ml**, which is multi-use: besides being a great face wash, it's also the most amazing eye make-up remover. And if you pump it into a bowl and foam it up with a shaving brush, you can shave with it. (3 uses in 1)

Our **Ecoflant Natural Skin Polish** is awesome. It's so natural, it's made with food ingredients. It smells like you want to eat it with some cereal. It's so gentle and it contains cranberry extract for a most incredible exfoliation. I use it every morning because it doesn't irritate my skin and it gives me that fresh glow.

Then there's **Natural Face Cream 30g**. This moisturiser contains coconut oil, shea butter and cocoa butter in a creamy, whipped, delicious hydration offering. You only need half a baby fingernail amount, and it spreads beautifully. Then, if you feel you need extra moisture, you can add a little more.

The really great thing about the products is they are enough for up to three months of use. And the full face range (all 6 products) only cost a cup of coffee per day. If you break it down. That's R30 per day for 3 months of healthy, glowing skin. It may be an initial investment, but they last. Think about it... Sacrificing one cup of coffee to have gorgeous skin isn't too shabby.



**Ecoflant Natural Skin Polish** R430.00  
**Natural Face Cream 30g** R395.00  
**Natural Face Wash 200ml** R385.00

### Help us to understand how your products work to treat difficult issues such as eczema, acne, psoriasis, and hyperpigmentation? These are challenging to treat medically and with formulated active ingredients, so how will Eco Diva address these?

**Nicole:** Will conditions like eczema and psoriasis, you want to prevent a flare-up. So you want to keep the skin well moisturised and avoid irritation or inflammation by keeping your skin, body and gut at their right pH.

To do this, I believe in combination treatment – choosing nourishing skincare that won't irritate or inflame (like Eco Diva), as well as taking care with the food you eat, taking the right **supplements**, such as probiotics that help with gut repair, and avoiding or reducing stimulants like acid-forming foods and drinks (sugar, gluten, meat, alcohol). Emotional regulation and quality sleep are also important.

I've had eczema and I've managed to keep it at bay using these principles. I've also had autoimmune disease, Epstein Barr virus, and I've managed to find my absolute health and energy and become free of any irritation. I really am a walking, talking, breathing testament to these principles.

### Is there an optimal pH for skin and gut? How does that work? And why is pH so important in your skincare?

**Nicole:** pH means the acidity or alkalinity of a substance. The pH scale ranges from 1 (very acidic) to 14 (very alkaline). pH neutral is 7 – neither acid nor alkaline.

pH balance for the body is between 7 and 7.25. That's the perfect healthy balance, particularly for the gut. Skin has a slightly more acidic balance – pH 5.5, to protect it against germs.

Unfortunately, our lifestyle choices (smoking, stress, too little sleep, what we eat and drink, chemicals in skincare) can throw our systems out, so they become too acidic or alkaline. If the skin or gut is too acidic or alkaline, it disrupts its ability to function properly. As in life, you have to find that happy balance, because when you are balanced in your gut health and skin, your whole system is balanced. The ingredients I have chosen for both my skincare, as well as the supplements I sell, help to create that balance.



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### You use active anti-ageing ingredients such as hyaluronic acid and AHA in your skincare formulations. Aren't these lab ingredients?

**Nicole:** Words like hyaluronic acid and peptides make people imagine they've been created by chemists (which they often have been). But we also find ingredients like hyaluronic acid, vitamin C, and AHAs in nature. So I only use natural sources for my active ingredients. They have wonderful anti-ageing, anti-inflammatory, anti-microbial properties.

Also, I don't like using the word anti-ageing, because it's not the truth. I prefer pro-ageing – ageing in the best possible fashion. I mean, let's not kid ourselves. None of us is getting out alive.

### Any other advice for someone wanting to take the leap into clean skincare?

**Nicole:** It's all about balance. Live consciously. Getting enough rest and hydration. Make sure you're getting enough fun and joy and laughter and proper nourishment.

My door is open for someone to talk to me online or at my store. I would love to help them find solutions that work.

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