

Cleanser face-off

Here are the best and the worst we tested

9
TESTED
4
SMART
PICKS

The guy in your house probably uses the same soap on his face as he does on his armpits, and doesn't give it a second thought. But that's just not going to cut it for most women. We want a cleanser that's mild and leaves our skin feeling soft and clean. But finding a cleanser can turn into a major project. Walking down the aisles at drugstores and weaving through department-store beauty counters, we can come across

hundreds of products. Adding to the confusion, many brands offer different formulas for different skin types. Some are liquids that "foam" or "fizz." Newer choices include pads, pillows, cloths, and mousses. All have different fragrances and textures. And those differences can really matter. A heavy scent, for example, may not only be unpleasant but also may cause an allergic reaction.

Our panel of 25 staffers tried out

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nine popular facial cleansers from Aveeno, Bioré, Estée Lauder, Clean and Clear, Lancôme, La Prairie, Neutrogena, Olay, and Pond's. Each panelist used each cleanser for one week; products ranged in price from about \$4 to \$70. We found that most cleaned and removed makeup well and were easy to apply and remove. That old standby, Pond's Cold Cream, however, rated at the bottom of the liquids-and-creams group. Testers said it was greasy, difficult to remove, and inconvenient to dig out of the container, though it removed makeup well and they liked that it left their skin feeling moisturized.

Two other cleansers, Clean and

Clear Oxygenating Fizzing Cleanser and Neutrogena Fresh Foaming Cleanser, cleaned well, but many panelists said they wouldn't buy them because, among other things, they didn't like the fragrance or texture of the products. Panelists either loved or hated the Lancôme Mousse Clarte Self-Foaming Mousse Cleanser; some said it was good at removing makeup and rinsed off easily, but others complained it was too light, didn't remove their makeup very well, and caused irritation near their eyes.

See our "Not so hot" box at right for the worst performer, a cleansing cloth.

best liquid or cream cleansers

La Prairie Foam Cleanser

Price \$17.50 per fl. oz./\$70 per container

Why we like it Though it cost 3-10 times the price of anything else we tested, this luxuriously thick pink cleanser was the best overall. It left our testers' skin feeling fresh and clean. Also, it was easy to apply and remove. As one staffer commented, "Only a small amount of cleanser is needed and the light foaming action is just enough."

Where to get it High-end department stores and online

Estée Lauder Perfectly Clean

Splash Away Foaming Cleanser

Price \$4.52 per fl. oz./\$19 per container

Why we like it This cleanser was a close second to La Prairie at about a third the price. It did an excellent job of cleaning, and the tube has a convenient flip-top, which makes it easy to travel with or use in the shower. Panelists described this cleanser as "smooth" and "luxurious" and said it did a good job of removing eye makeup without leaving raccoon eyes.

Where to get it Department stores and online



best cleansing pads

Aveeno Positively Radiant Daily Cleansing Pads

Price 25 cents per pad/\$7 per 28-pad container

Why we like them The Aveeno pads smelled really nice and did an excellent job of cleaning, though user reviews were mixed on the pads' flip-side function. Some testers liked that they didn't have to use a separate exfoliator, but one staffer commented that the more abrasive side could work either on your face or on the bathroom sink. Another possible bummer: Although pads can be superconvenient—they're easy to carry around and are good for a quick swipe at the gym—they're not environmentally friendly in that they create waste. One panelist complained that it was easy to go through a full container of pads every week, and even if you use only a single pad each day, you won't get a full month's use out of each container.

Where to get them Drugstores and supermarkets

Olay Daily Facials, Hydrating Cleansing Cloths, Normal to Dry

Price 23 cents per pad/\$7 per 30-pad container

Why we like them The Olay pads also worked well and had a nice clean scent, but, again, they can create unnecessary waste.

Where to get them Drugstores and supermarkets

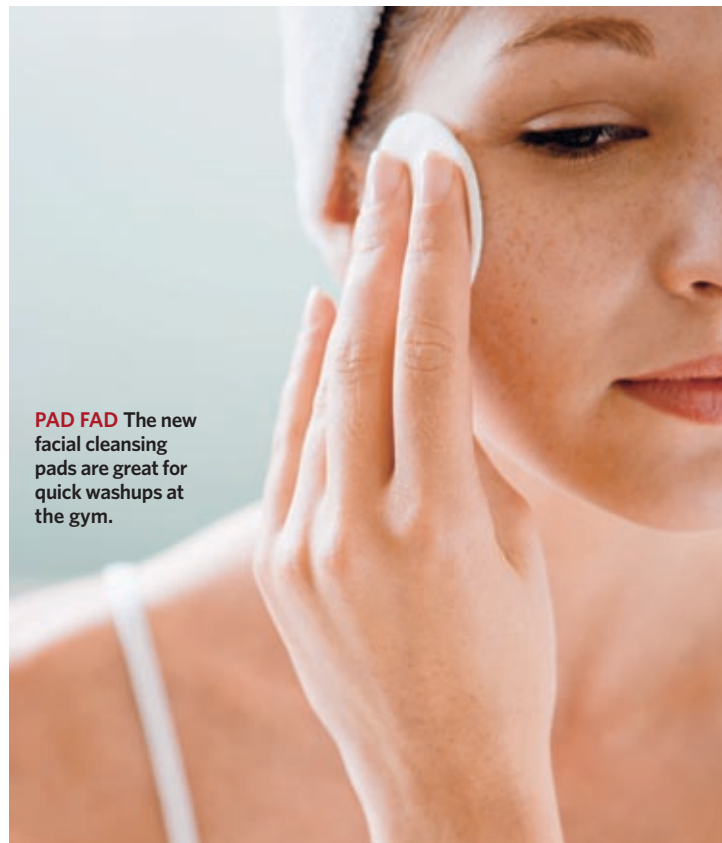
TIP
When washing your face, don't overdo it! Thirty seconds is plenty of time to get off the grime. Your cleanser should make your skin feel smooth, not tight and squeaky-clean.

:(NOT SO HOT

Bioré cleanser

Bioré Pore Perfect Daily Deep Pore Cleansing Cloths was our lowest-rated cleaner. It didn't seem to clean as well as the other cleansers, and testers had the most skin breakouts while using it, though not major ones. The label doesn't say to rinse after using the product, but if you don't, you could end up with residue on your skin. That may be why some of our testers said their skin didn't feel clean after they used the cleanser. Also, our consulting dermatologist on the project said some ingredients listed on the label could irritate skin and lead to breakouts.





PAD FAD The new facial cleansing pads are great for quick washups at the gym.

ARE YOU OILY, DRY, OR NEITHER?

Here's how to tell your correct skin type

About half our panelists incorrectly judged their skin type. Here's how to get it right: If your face gets shiny two hours after you wash, you probably have oily skin. If you can't see any pores at the end of the day, you probably have dry skin. Flakiness usually means you've got sensitive—not dry—skin, which can sting, burn, itch, or tighten after cleansing. Ask your dermatologist to make sure.

4 SHOPPING TIPS

1 BUY THE PRODUCTS MADE FOR YOUR SKIN TYPE. It's important to know whether you have normal, dry, oily, or combination skin and buy the correct cleanser, because using the wrong product could cause acne or inflammation. If a person with oily skin uses a product for dry skin, the extra layer of moisturizer could block the pores and lead to breakouts. (See our Q and A with Amy Newburger, M.D., on the next page for more details.)

2 CHOOSE THE RIGHT PRODUCT. If you barely have time to use the bathroom, you may like the ultraconvenient pad cleansers, which are quick and easy to use. They're also great for traveling and for quick cleanups after a workout. Or you might want to opt for liquid cleansers, which you can use in the shower or at the sink.

3 TAKE A WHIFF. If you can't stand the smell of a cleanser, you're not going to like using it. So if you can, open a container at the store and do the sniff test before plunking down your money. And if you have sensitive skin, look for cleansers labeled "fragrance-free." (Note that cleansers labeled "unscented" might still contain a fragrance to mask chemical odors.) Fragrances can cause more allergic reactions than any other ingredient.

4 DECIDE IF YOU LIKE IT GENTLE OR ROUGH. Some face washes, like the Aveeno Positively Radiant Daily Cleansing Pads, are dual-textured with a rougher side that exfoliates the face. Other products, like the Lancôme Self-Foaming Mousse Cleanser, are foams that give you a lighter cleaning and might be better if you have sensitive skin.

JUPITER IMAGES

What's in that bottle?

Ever read the ingredient list on a facial cleanser container? It seems as if you'd need a chemistry degree to decipher it. Well, we put a chemist and a dermatologist on the case, and here's what they had to say.

Citric, malic, and salicylic acids

These acids help rebalance your skin's pH level after cleansing your face so it doesn't feel dry and uncomfortable. Citric and malic acids are found naturally in oranges and apples, respectively.

Water

All the liquid and cream cleansers we examined list water as one of the first ingredients. That's because water, when combined with soaps and detergents, helps the product to cleanse your skin and to remove any dirt and excess oils.

Potassium myristate, laurate, palmitate, and stearate

These increase a cleanser's effectiveness by making it easier to wash off. Pond's Cold Cream has none of these ingredients, which may explain why it's more difficult to remove.

Natural ingredients like licorice and green tea

Licorice and tea claim to reduce inflammation, but, in general, natural ingredients don't make much of a difference since they aren't in contact with your skin for very long, especially if you use a toner to wash away any cleanser residue.

Parabens, such as methylparaben and propylparaben

These are preservatives used in many products to prevent bacteria from growing and to extend shelf life. They may disturb the body's hormone system, but they're tough to avoid, even if you choose products labeled organic.

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CLEANSER COURSE

With ShopSmart's dermatology expert, Amy E. Newburger

Q Are there certain ingredients that you should look for or avoid in cleansers?

A Don't worry too much about specific ingredients because the products are so complex, and the overall makeup of a cleanser has a lot to do with the proportions of the chemicals and the manufacturing conditions. Instead, go by what skin type the cleanser is made for. But if you have sensitive skin, avoid grainy exfoliators, heavy fragrances, and irritants like sorbic acid and alpha hydroxy acids, such as lactic acid.

Q What if you use the wrong product for your skin type?

A It won't cause any damage. But, if you have oily or normal skin and use a cleanser for dry skin, which lays down an extra layer of moisturizer, you could end up with blocked pores and inflammation. They don't feel good and they don't look good.

Q Should you change your cleansers as you age?

A As we age, the oil glands become less active. So you may need a gentler, less-drying cleanser.

Q Should you use a toner after your facial cleanser?

A You don't need to use a toner unless you use an oily cleanser, like Pond's Cold Cream. And even then, you can use a little plain soap and water to rinse your face. I think toners are a way for cosmetics companies to sell more products.