

"What to Stop Buying" Checklist

Every ingredient category the evidence does not support, organized by claim type so you can evaluate products at the shelf.

How to Use This Checklist

Before buying any skincare product, scan its ingredient list against the categories below. If the product leads with these ingredients as its primary actives, the evidence does not support the claims on the packaging.

"Anti-Aging" Claims Without Evidence

X Collagen in topical creams

Collagen molecules are too large to penetrate the dermis. Topical collagen does not rebuild skin collagen.

X Plant stem cells

Plant stem cells do not survive formulation and cannot interact with human skin biology.

X Oxygen-infused formulas

Skin does not absorb atmospheric oxygen through products. No clinical evidence of benefit.

X Gold, pearl, or diamond particles

No peer-reviewed evidence of functional benefit. Pure marketing material.

X DNA repair enzymes (OTC)

Enzymes are unstable in most formulations and cannot penetrate far enough to reach the nucleus.

Misleading "Firming" and Hydration Claims

X Tightening peptides (immediate effect only)

Many create a temporary film that tightens on drying. The effect disappears when washed off.

X Retinol in opaque, non-airtight packaging

Retinol degrades rapidly with light and air. It may be inactive before it reaches your skin.

X HA in heavy occlusives in very dry climates

In low humidity, HA can draw water out of the skin rather than into it if not sealed properly.

"Natural" / "Clean" Labels to Question

- [X] Fragrance (natural or synthetic) - primary skin sensitizer, no benefit to skin function
- [X] Essential oils as actives - high irritation potential, weak evidence base
- [X] "Chemical-free" labels - all matter is chemical; phrase signals marketing not science
- [X] Detox or purifying claims - the skin does not detox; the liver and kidneys do

The Shelf Rule

If a product's marketing focuses on the ingredient story rather than a clinical outcome, pause. Ask: is there a published, peer-reviewed trial measuring the effect of this ingredient, at this concentration, on this skin concern, in this age group? If the answer is no, the benefit is not established.

