

FASHION ALEXA

Can new high-percentage skincare creams actually reverse aging?

By Dana Wood March 13, 2020



From left: Sobel Skin Rx 27% Glycolic Acid Facial Cleanser, \$42, 30% Glycolic Acid Peel, \$46, 15% Niacinamide Gel Serum, \$75, Plant Stem Cell Day Cream SPF 30, \$75, 4.5% Retinol Night Treatment, \$105, Triple Oligo Peptide Eye Cream, \$65, Bio Hyaluronic Moisturizing Cream, \$75, and 35% Vitamin C Face Serum, \$105, all at Sephora

In the endless quest for “makeup optional” skin, many beauty fiends seek out potions jacked up with the highest levels of active ingredients available. But slathering them on can backfire, as most complexions can’t handle a mega-dose of glycolic acid, vitamin C or retinol without rebelling. Indeed, red, itchy and flaky skin is typically the result of pushing the percentage envelope too far.

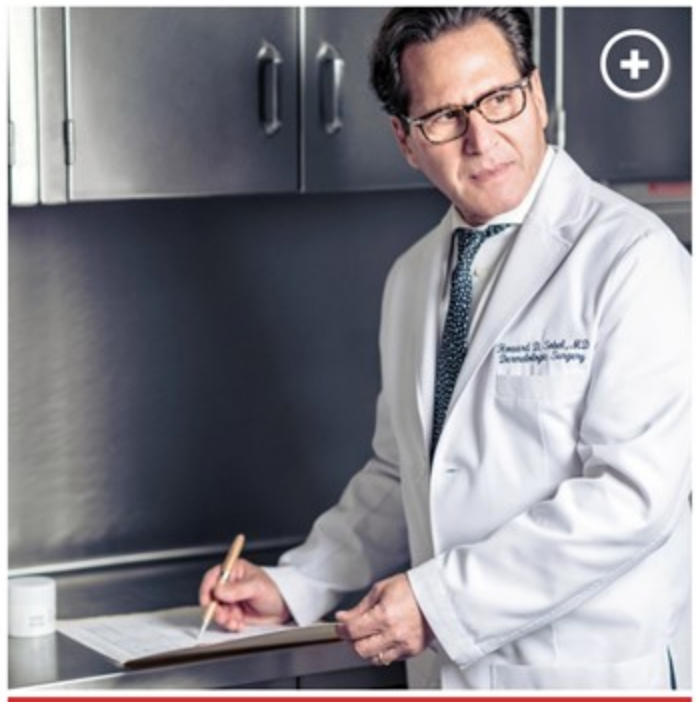
But renowned New York City-based dermatologist Howard Sobel believes he’s found a way around all that pesky irritation, thanks to the patent-pending delivery system in his new, superpotent skin-care line: **Sobel Skin Rx**.

“I’ll be honest with you, when we did the clinical trials, I was a little nervous,” he tells Alexa. “I thought we’d blow people’s faces off.”

Instead, the reaction to his new products — like 35% Vitamin C Face Serum and 30% Glycolic Acid Peel — was uniformly positive. “Every study we did had at least 30 patients and no one dropped out,” he notes. “I was surprised at that, usually at least a few do.”

He credits the success of those trials to a delivery system he'd already been tinkering with, which strengthens the epidermal-dermal barrier so that moisture and water are kept in while pollutants are kept out.

The new eight-item collection, which ranges in price from \$42 for 27% Glycolic Acid Facial Cleanser to \$105 for 4.5% Retinol Night Treatment, is Sobel's second skin-care line. His first, DDF (Doctor's Dermatologic Formula), made its debut in 1991 and is considered a pioneer in the "doctor brand" category. Sold to Procter & Gamble in 2007, DDF was ahead of its time. "That was before people even knew what ingredients were," Sobel recalls.



Dermatologist Howard Sobel
Courtesy of Sobel Skin Rx

Fast-forward to 2020, and it's a non-stop barrage of gimmicky "miracle" ingredients, many of which are useless, he argues. "Sephora approached me and asked me to fill a white space. They had all these brands saying they had the next best thing: fruits, vegetables, you name it."

But Sobel knew he wanted to stick with classic ingredients with bulletproof track records — glycolic acid, vitamin C, retinol and a handful of others — then amp up their formula percentages and deliver them in a way that was gentler to faces. ("Having said that," he adds, "these products are not for sensitive skin.")

A dermatologic surgeon who's still in the trenches 40 years after opening his first practice across from Lenox Hill Hospital, Sobel says that most of the patients at his current Park Avenue digs are taking a conservative approach to age-management and turning to powerful products and non-invasive procedures instead of the knife.

"They're putting off the scalpel surgery, the cutting," he says. "No one wants to look like a Cabbage Patch doll. They don't want to be sitting in a restaurant and have someone across the room say, 'Oh my God, look at her. She just had her face done.'"