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## BEAUTY REPORT

Overuse of skincare products can lead to both the epidermis (the upper layer of skin) and the dermis (the deeper layer) becoming lazy, weakening communication between the cells. Removing outside elements (make-up included) allows your skin to regulate moisture on its own and, in theory, normalise itself. Dr Loong recommends fasting for three weeks because this is roughly the time it takes for our skin to go through a complete renewal cycle. Here goes (literally) nothing...

### THE TESTERS

My skin is temperamental, and I want to know why. It could be my skincare routine, the make-up I use or my hormones that create excess oil and spots, but right now, I have no way of knowing the culprit. Working in beauty, it's important to have good skin, but constantly reviewing new products doesn't seem to be doing mine any good, which is why a fast appeals. ELLE Picture Assistant Lucy Johnston, on the other hand, has incredibly dry, dehydrated skin that can often flare up, leading to redness, sore spots and flaky patches. Her regime is already far simpler than mine, but she is a serial moisturiser, keeping an emergency pot in her handbag at all times. She would like to be free to leave the house without double-checking for her cream along with her keys.

### THE SCIENCE

Interestingly, it's the removal of moisturiser that seems key to Skin Fast. Unlike lightweight serums, moisturisers only reach the upper layer of our skin, and this is where problems occur. 'The epidermis sends a signal to the dermis below that it has enough moisture and, in just a few weeks, the dermis becomes lazy,' explains Dr Loong. And lazy skin translates to dehydration, dullness and even spots. For skin to look its best, it needs to be functioning optimally: cosmetic dermatologist Dr Rachael Eckel explains that the epidermis needs to act efficiently as a barrier, while the dermis must 'host fibroblast cells that are active and functioning - these are the cells that produce collagen, elastin and natural moisturising factors.'

It's not just Dr Loong and Dr Eckel who advocate the avoidance of moisturiser. Dermatologist Dr Zein Obagi agrees: 'Moisturiser leads to real skin dryness, but because it provides a temporary calming effect, people become dependent, creating a vicious cycle. Frequent application also puts a halt to natural exfoliation.'

Once the epidermis becomes dehydrated, it will start to produce more sebum (oil) instead, which is inflammatory. This, coupled with a sluggish dermis and the skin's inability to naturally exfoliate itself, can lead to conditions including acne and rosacea, along with a dull, lacklustre complexion.

The Skin Fast regime encourages your skin's natural moisturising mechanisms to kick into gear. Dr Loong promises that 'while it will take a few days to adjust, persistence will pay off'. But can you really reset your skin in just three weeks?

### THE PLAN

For three weeks, Lucy and I can only use cleanser, serum and SPF. Dr Loong explains that people with problem skin are often most drawn to the idea of skin fasting, as it can help with everything from dryness, irritation and sensitivity, to excess oil production and even acne. Post-fast, you can gradually reintroduce skincare products into your routine, one at a time. This will help you identify what, if anything, is causing your particular problems. Since the Skin Fast regime is supposed to encourage your skin to work more efficiently, it should also make it more receptive to products and ingredients used post-fast, so normal skin types can benefit, too.

Because our skin can build up a resistance to the products we apply, Dr Eckel recommends switching up your routine every 12 weeks, regardless of whether you fast or not. 'No matter how outstanding your products are, your skin will eventually become bored of them. You may notice your complexion doesn't look as radiant as it once did,' she says.

**'NO MATTER HOW OUTSTANDING YOUR PRODUCTS ARE, YOUR SKIN WILL EVENTUALLY BECOME BORED OF THEM. THE FAST SHOULD MAKE SKIN MORE RECEPTIVE TO THE PRODUCTS AND INGREDIENTS USED AFTERWARDS'**



**AMY LAWRENSON**  
ASSOCIATE  
HEALTH & BEAUTY  
EDITOR

Age: 29

**Skin type:** Oily/combination, and acne-prone

**Prescription:** As well as a small number of prescribed products, Dr Loong recommends using tea tree oil on any inflamed spots. My skin produces too much sebum, so I need to reduce my intake of oily foods (I'm going to miss you, avocado) and drink lots of water to flush out toxins.

**AM:** Cleanse with water, apply iS Clinical Active Serum, from £68, followed by Heliocare Color Gel Cream Light SPF50, £28, and Oxygenetix Breathable Foundation, £45, which are allowed on the fast due to their approved ingredients, to protect against sun damage and hide blemishes.

**PM:** Cleanse with ZO Skin Health Normacleanse, from £29.38, using a muslin cloth to gently exfoliate. Apply tea tree oil to any angry spot.

**Day 1:** I head to The Organic

Pharmacy for a consultation, where the therapist measures the levels of hydration in my skin. If, by the end of the three weeks, my skin can hydrate itself without moisturiser, it will show that it's working more efficiently. I'm told my skin is free from pigmentation - any marks I do have are from previous acne scars. Interestingly, despite being oily, my skin is very dehydrated, measuring around 26 in the skin assessment (anything under 30 is classed as dehydrated, with optimally hydrated skin being 40+).

**Day 2:** The serum is the consistency of water. It doesn't hydrate, but it does give a reassuring cooling sensation. I'm finding life hard without my usual heavy-duty foundation.

**Day 3:** My skin feels tight but greasy, and at times I want to rip off my jaw - it's so itchy, dry, and inflamed around my spots.

**Day 4:** I wake up with two large, angry spots on my right cheek. My skin is also really bumpy, and feels a bit like sandpaper.

**Day 5:** I miss bronzer. I've taken to hiding my face with my hair.

## BEAUTY REPORT

I'm not sure this is ideal for the spots lingering below.

**Day 7:** Despite the lack of my trusty bronzer, I'm getting lots of compliments on my complexion - colleagues tell me it looks dewy and healthy. Annoyingly, though, the spots along my jawline are still inflamed - will they ever go?

**Day 9:** After having a little cry in front of the mirror, I dab Differin Gel (a prescribed acne cream) on to my spots, just below my mascara-stained cheeks. I've broken my fast, which makes me cry a bit more. I vow to stick to it for the remaining 12 days.

**Day 12:** My skin texture seems to be slowly improving. The dry patches are persistent, but I gently slough them daily with a muslin cloth to reveal glowing skin beneath. The spots are still there but less angry - thank you Differin, sorry Dr Loong.

**Day 17:** My complexion is definitely clearer and brighter. I have no problem going without make-up; a sentence I never thought I would write. My jawline is noticeably clearer but it's still itchy and I'm still getting the odd new spot each morning.

**Day 20:** I can see that my skin tone is more even and the large, open pores I had on my nose and chin are much smaller.

**Day 21:** Overall, my skin looks and feels better, and it doesn't get super-shiny towards the end of the day like it used to. Despite there being fewer spots along my jawline, they are definitely still there, along with some lingering inflammation.

### THE RESULTS

Dr Loong explains that my pores have diminished in size because my skin's oil production has stabilised - that explains the lack of excess shine, too. My spots are still there, which has made me realise it's most likely to be a hormonal imbalance causing the constant breakouts rather than the cosmetics I apply. I'm going to stick with this plan, but add an approved

moisturiser (see above right for Dr Loong's recommendations), because the improvement in my usually enlarged pores was quite amazing.

**Hydration result:** At The Organic Pharmacy, the therapist looks at my skin under a magnifying glass and bright light. The skin on my forehead, cheeks and nose - under close scrutiny - appears less congested than before. As for the hydration, it's quite astonishing: in three weeks my levels have jumped to 40+ (optimum hydration) on my forehead and chin, with cheeks coming in at 32.4 and 37.5 (only slightly dehydrated).



**LUCY JOHNSTON**  
PICTURE ASSISTANT  
Age: 32  
Skin type:

Dry with mild rosacea  
**Prescription:** As well as prescribing a skincare regime, Dr Loong recommends I take an omega supplement, drink plenty of water and eat lots of oily fish, olives, linseed and avocado during the fast. She warns me that my dry skin will get worse before it gets better.  
**AM:** Cleanse with water, apply iS Clinical Pro-Heal Serum, from £68. Follow with Heliocare Silk Gel SPF 30, £25.  
**PM:** Cleanse with ZO Skin Health Normacleanse, £29.38, and a muslin cloth to gently exfoliate. Follow with serum.  
**Day 1:** I'm feeling optimistic, but my skin? Not so much. It's dry, tight and feels like a cornflake. Rough patches and raised red blotches appear, making me feel self-conscious.  
**Day 5:** After too many gins on a night out, I desperately pat hand lotion on my face to ease the tightness. My skin feels better but I don't. I caved.

'AFTER A FEW NIGHTS OUT, I START TO WONDER IF MY SKIN ISSUES ARE MORE TO DO WITH MY LIFESTYLE THAN MY SKINCARE'



### SKIN FAST-APPROVED MOISTURISERS

Still don't want to give up moisturiser? Dr Loong reveals there are formulations out there that are better and kinder on the skin. Here are three options: ZO Ommerse Renewal Creme, £62.50  
Exuviance Age Less Everyday, £37.25  
Endocare Tensage Cream, £37.50



### THE RESULTS

Dr Loong says that dry skin takes longer to go through the skin-fasting process.

My skin is trying to fix itself, so the cycles of renewal are longer, which explains the days of sore, tight skin, then a few days of smooth skin, followed by sore again. She encourages me to stick to the regime but add a light moisturiser to help things along.

**Hydration result:** A test reveals my hydration levels have improved from 20 to 30 (so it's still dehydrated, but much better than it was), but my skin is hyper-sensitive and looks distressed. After speaking to both Dr Loong and Dr Eckel, and enduring the ups and downs, I plan to stick to the regime but introduce a light moisturiser (much-needed on those hungover mornings or before evenings out), as advised. Despite its sensitivity, my skin looks brighter and feels smoother, it just needs a little post-fast TLC. ●

**ELLE SEE IT** Find out how Amy and Lucy's skin is doing now (you might be surprised) at [elleuk.com/beauty](http://elleuk.com/beauty)