



RINSE CYCLE

No-wash micellar waters may clear up acne and dryness, and even slow down aging. **NING CHAO** investigates

COULD YOUR BATHROOM sink be standing between you and great skin? “Sweetie, we don’t let tap water touch our faces above the neck,” says well-connected Parisienne turned NYC publicist Marie-Laure Fournier of her Gallic sistren’s cleansing habits. The minerals in the local water—the same ones that make the baguettes so deliciously crusty—wreak havoc on complexions, so French women reach for micellar waters instead. Clear and practically odorless, these cleansing liquids look and feel like water, but they seem to magically remove every last trace of oil, dirt, and makeup (even waterproof mascara) without any rinsing, rubbing, or greasy residue. Just soak a cotton pad, wipe your face, and you can apply moisturizer (or a fresh face of makeup) right on top.

Tapped out

If you think that faucet-induced skin problems are just a foreign affliction, think again. Highly mineralized “hard water” exists across the United States (especially in Texas, New Mexico, Kansas, Arizona, and Southern California), and any water that contains chlorine or minerals like phosphorous can be drying, according to Dr. Jeannette Graf, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York. She says

micellar waters contain micelles: molecules that lift out and trap the dirt, debris, and impurities in pores. “They’re great for all skin types and as effective as using a regular cleanser and rinsing with water, but they’re less drying because they contain fats and lipids that are moisturizing,” Graf explains. That’s why models and makeup artists have been smuggling home bottles of the stuff from French pharmacies for decades.

Acid wash

If you’ve recently installed a fancy new alkaline filtration system in your house, you may be doing a disservice to your complexion. While some health experts believe alkaline water can calm inflammation inside the body, the surface of your skin actually needs to be acidic (pH less than 7) to keep bad bacteria at bay. “Don’t use alkaline water to wash your face,” says Graf. Your complexion’s pH is around 5.4, and that skin can be vulnerable to rashes and breakouts when pH is imbalanced.

If the water flowing from your faucet contains iron and mercury leached from your pipes, it may even speed up skin aging, says New York-based makeup artist and aesthetician Mary Schook. “Because micellar waters help to keep the skin’s pH at the right level, they feel soothing—and they’re still gentle enough to use around the eyes,” explains Schook, whose favorite formula is Koh Gen Do Cleansing Spa Water.

Water conservation

Many French skincare brands (Clarins, Caudalie, Avène, Vichy, Orlane) have their own versions of micellar water cleansers, but Bioderma Créaline (now sold as Bioderma Sensibio in the States) is the gold standard. “I was doing a lot of [fashion] shows in Paris back in the late ’90s, and we would stock up on Bioderma Créaline backstage at Dior and Versace,” recalls Schook. “The models would have to remove their makeup so many times, their skin would be raw if we didn’t use it.”

While micellar waters help streamline cleansing into one step and leave skin feeling soft and moisturized, they shouldn’t replace your entire regimen, warns Beverly Hills dermatologist Dr. Harold Lancer, who counts Victoria Beckham and Sofia Vergara among his celebrity patients. He recommends daily exfoliation with a gentle scrub that also contains enzymes and anti-inflammatories (his Lancer The Method Polish uses a combination of refined quartz crystal, pumpkin enzymes, and calming brown sea algae). Lancôme, Orico London, and Simple Skincare may have recently launched new versions of micellar waters—supercharged with ingredients such as soothing rose de France and antioxidant vitamin C—but “you still need to polish the skin so it can absorb nutrients,” Lancer says. “Otherwise, you can put every antioxidant and anti-inflammatory on top and they won’t go anywhere.” **mc**

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2. **Orico London** Orange Micellar Water, \$24.
3. **Simple Skincare** Cleansing Micellar Water, \$7.
4. **Dior** Instant Cleansing Water, \$38.
5. **Bioderma** Sensibio Solution Micellaire, \$35. For information on where to buy, see Shopping Directory.

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