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Not Your Mother's Face Masks

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Masks are an important part of any skincare routine since they allow you to target specific issues and concerns. Botanical and other nature-derived ingredients are still a mainstay in the growing category of mask products, but advances in technology and innovative skincare companies (many from Asia) have expanded the offerings targeted for the face and the body.

According to Dr. Brian Biesman, an oculoplastic surgeon in Nashville, TN, “Think of masks as just another way to deliver actives into your skin, similar to a serum, cream, or ointment. Unfortunately, with many mask products, the actives may not be able to penetrate the outer layer of the skin, also known as the stratum corneum.” Many masks contain a long list of hydrating, calming and exfoliating ingredients that add to their widespread appeal.

We took a deep dive into six popular types of masks that are getting a lot of attention.

Dry Sheet Masks

Sheet masks made their debut earlier this decade. Available in options for every skin concern and at a wide range of price points, these serum-infused fabric-based masks all have one thing in common: The potential to slip, slide and drip. That’s why dry sheet masks have a distinct advantage. Rather than seeping the fabric in a skincare solution, the material itself is infused with active ingredients that are released when the mask is massaged on the skin due to the skin’s pH and temperature. This delivers all the benefits of a traditional “wet” sheet mask without the mess. Dry sheet masks can also be used up to three times and worn for longer stretches of time, which helps justify higher price points. Try the Charlotte Tilbury Instant Magic Facial Dry Sheet Mask (\$22 each) that offers hydration, brightening and wrinkle-smoothing benefits.

Rubber Masks

A Korean skincare innovation, rubber masks (also known as modeling packs) are available for concerns ranging from dry skin and discoloration to acne and loss of firmness. They are relatively fast and easy, but they come in a few variations. Some feature a serum and rubber-like sheet mask that creates a seal that helps the actives penetrate. Others require mixing powder and liquid to create a gel that takes on a rubber-like feel as it dries (and then you peel it off). Dr. Jart+ Hydration Lover Rubber Mask (\$12 each) can leave your skin softer and smoother after one application.

Silicone Masks

Silicone has been a staple in doctor's offices to promote healing for decades, but only recently has this medical-grade material been repurposed for smoothing wrinkles. SiO Beauty's first product was the Skinpad, a reusable silicone patch that comfortably adheres to the skin above and between the breasts. It creates a moisture-rich environment that also "irons out" wrinkles while you sleep so you can wake up to a divinely smooth décolletage. They recently launched versions for the forehead, crow's feet, smile lines and neck for comprehensive anti-aging results without any potentially irritating ingredients.

Clay Masks

Clay can be used as a healing agent for stressed skin prone to breakouts and redness. "Clay helps to unclog pores and soak up excess oil," says New York City dermatologist Judith Hellman, MD. "A weekly application of clay can reduce shine and keep acne lesions at bay." Some of these products, such as PCA Skin's Purifying Mask (\$58) contain ingredients like pumice for gentle physical exfoliation as well." If your skin tends to be dry, don't let the mask dry thoroughly before washing off because it can leave your complexion feeling tight and parched. Applying a face cream containing hyaluronic acid or rich emollients after using a clay mask to counteract the dryness and keep skin normalized.

Post-Procedure Recovery Masks

Less is more when it comes to compromised skin, and pure, gentle ingredients are a must. Nothing is more innocuous than water, for example. According to San Francisco dermatologist Dr. Vic Narurkar, MD, "SkinCeuticals' Biocellulose Restorative Mask (\$120 for six) is an innovative, doctor-approved way to soothe skin after laser treatments, chemical peels or sensitive-skin flare-ups. Featuring a unique, sterile fabric that evenly disperses water to alleviate the sensation of heat, it can also be used as needed to replenish moisture without risk of reaction or irritation."

Body Masks

The latest generation of masks isn't limited to the face. Products created for hands, décolleté and other body areas are also trending. Nannette de Gaspe features options for rejuvenating the hands, lifting the bust and enhancing the derriere. While the hand version is applied like a regular sheet mask as needed, the bust and buttocks masks adhere to the inside of your bra or panties and are worn for 60 minutes once a day for six days, then twice a week for three additional weeks.

The feet are another area that can benefit from masks. Amongst the first to gain widespread popularity was Baby Foot, which is an acid-based exfoliating treatment from Japan that produces significant peeling to smooth rough skin and calluses. The company recently launched a moisturizing foot mask formulated with hyaluronic acid, collagen and natural extracts that can be used to maintain skin softness between exfoliation treatments.