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Caring for your skin includes knowing what products are, and how they can help you. It helps to start by formally defining cosmetics, **drugs**, and cosmeceuticals so we can appreciate the distinct nature of each.



Cosmetics are products applied to the body to cleanse, beautify, or alter appearance. They do not require U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval and can be purchased over the counter. Drugs are products intended for treating or preventing disease and must undergo testing to get approval from the FDA. These include products such as tretinoin cream and tazarotene (Tazorac) cream. Cosmeceuticals are cosmetics that claim the action of a drug, such as restoring **youthful appearance**. Cosmeceuticals are not subject to FDA approval, and no testing is required. Technically they cannot claim drug-like action. Examples of cosmeceuticals are creams containing vitamins, lower-strength **alpha hydroxy acids (AHA)**, and retinols. Cosmeceuticals may be sold over the counter or dispensed in a physician's office. Cosmetic dermatologists

are familiar with the studies that have been performed and can help lead you toward products that will improve your **skin**.

Patients always ask which products to use. The truth is, no one magic potion will stop aging or transform your appearance. The products that will make a difference are not glamorous. They include daily sunblock, a nightly topical retinoid, and a moisturizer.

Whatever brand, consistency and smell you prefer (and will use everyday) is the best choice for you. When choosing a product, look for ingredients proven to work and vehicles that are not irritating. For example, if you are acne-prone, make sure the product is labeled "non-comedogenic," which means it won't clog pores. Being aware of products and their ingredients will help you on your way to healthy, youthful skin.

— Dr. Paul Friedman, author of "**Beautiful Skin Revealed: The Ultimate Guide to Better Skin**"