

Getting Your Actives Back

How to restart retinoids and acids this fall without undoing three months of progress.

The product didn't stop working. Your skin changed.

Every September, people pull the retinol back out of the drawer, use it the way they used it in March, and wake up two days later with a face that feels like it's been scrubbed with sand. Then they assume the product went bad, or that their skin has become "sensitive."

Neither is usually true. Tolerance is not a permanent trait you earn once. It is a current condition, and a summer of sun, heat, sweat, more frequent washing, and probably a simpler routine has changed it.

ONE

Why restarting where you left off backfires

If you stopped at four nights a week, four nights a week is where your skin was in June, not where it is now. Going straight back to that number is the single most common cause of a September flare.

And on melanin-rich skin, a flare is rarely just a flare. Inflammation is what triggers pigment. A week of irritation can leave marks that take months to clear, which means you can spend the whole fall undoing two days of impatience.

TWO

The reintroduction ladder

Slower than you want. Faster than starting over in November.

WEEKS 1-2 · ONCE A WEEK, BUFFERED

Moisturizer first, then a pea-sized amount of your active on top. One night only. Buffering is not wasting the product — it is what lets your skin accept it at all.

WEEKS 3-4 · TWICE A WEEK

Only if week two passed with no burning, no lasting redness, and no new marks. If it didn't, you stay where you are. Repeating a week is normal and costs you nothing.

WEEKS 5-6 · THREE TIMES A WEEK

Same rule. You are allowed to move up only from a calm baseline, never from a skin that is still recovering from the last application.

WEEK 7 ONWARD · HOLD WHERE YOUR SKIN IS COMFORTABLE

Not where you used to be. The goal is the highest frequency you can maintain without reaction, indefinitely. For a lot of people that is two or three nights a week, forever, and it works.

One new active at a time. Never two. If something reacts and you introduced two things, you have no idea which one did it, and you have to stop both.

THREE

Tolerance or damage?

Some discomfort is part of the process. Some of it means stop. Knowing the difference is most of the skill.

	Expected — keep going	Stop and tell me
How it feels	Mild tightness that's gone by morning	Burning or stinging as you apply it
How it looks	Light flaking days three to ten	Redness that lasts more than a day, or swelling
Your moisturizer	Feels good, absorbs normally	Suddenly stings on bare skin
Pigment	Nothing new appearing	Any new dark marks — stop immediately

FOUR

That is probably not a purge

“Pushing through the purge” is advice that gets repeated far past where it applies. A genuine purge is your skin surfacing congestion that was already forming — so it shows up where you normally break out, and it settles within about four to six weeks.

If the breakouts are in places you don't usually get them, or it has been going on longer than that, it isn't purging. It is irritation, and on melanin-rich skin irritation you push through becomes pigment you live with.

FIVE

While you're reintroducing

- Sunscreen every day without exception. Actives make you more photosensitive, and pigment triggered now shows up in spring.
- Nothing else new. No new serums, no new cleansers, nothing you saw online this week.
- No scrubs, brushes, or exfoliating tools on top of an active.
- Tell me what you're actually using — all of it, including what you tried for a week and stopped. I can only plan around what I know about.

Not sure where to restart?

Bring me what's in your cabinet and we'll build the ladder together. It takes one conversation and saves you a season.

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Provided by [YOUR BUSINESS NAME], a member of the Melanated Skin Registry — the standard of care for melanin-rich skin.
melanatedskinregistry.com

This handout is general education, not a diagnosis or a treatment plan. Your practitioner will build the plan that fits your skin.