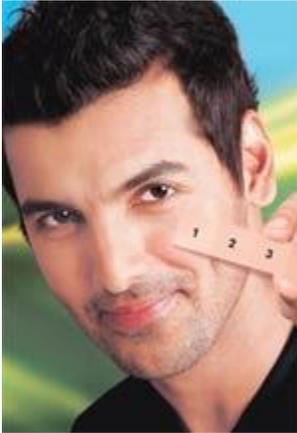


When his cream is better than her's

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The idea of a man going for a facial was laughable a decade ago. But today it is common to see men in beauty salons getting facials and pedicures. It's obvious that the modern urban male of today feels the same compulsion as his female counterpart to look good: Good grooming is no longer female domain.

The best part is that men no longer need to borrow their sister's or wife's cleanser. Today's retro male enjoys a range of beauty products made especially for him: Cosmetic companies offer products especially meant for men, claiming that these cater to men's skin and hair types and that men shouldn't be using products meant for females. From fairness creams and moisturisers to hair conditioners, men's products are more square, broader and black and white in colour. But the question really is: Are they any different from the feminine version, and do men need their own products? Or is the concept of a "male" shampoo just a marketing gim-mick?

The fair deal

Indians are obsessed with fair skin and fairness is synonymous with good looks. This is supported by the fact that the fairness cream market in India is raking in Rs 800 crore per year. Based on surveys that showed that one fourth of the consumers were men, cosmetic companies decided to come up with products especially meant to satisfy the male desire for beauty. So while Shahrukh Khan promotes Emami's male fairness cream, claiming that a guy's skin is different from a girl's, John Abraham says his skin has improved hugely after using Garnier's Men Powerlight. But do men really have to use fairness products intended just for them, or can they get away by using women's products?

This question can be answered by understanding the differences between male and female skin. To start with, a woman's skin is softer and thinner than a man's due to female hormones estrogen and progesterone. A man's skin is about 20 per cent thicker than a woman's and generally firmer too because it is richer in collagen and elastin levels. In addition, men's skin bears the brunt of environmental factors such as sunlight, pollution and the daily harshness of a shaving blade. "A 12 year old boy and girl have similar skin but as a boy grows up, the hair on his face increases and once he begins shaving his skin thickens," explains Dr. Ajay Rana, dermatologist and aesthetic physician at Berkowits Skin and Hair Clinic. Unlike female skin, male skin has larger pores, a richer blood supply, and more active oil glands, so men are more prone to sweating.

Fairness creams meant for men contain higher concentration of ingredients so that they can penetrate the harder exteriors to reach the melanocyte cells and inhibit the production of melanin, responsible for the dark tone of the skin. "Though some of the ingredients are similar to those of female fairness creams, the concentration is different. Female skin is unable to stand such a high concentration. For instance, the amount of alpha and beta hydroxy acids which are good for oily and sun-damaged skin is much higher in male creams," says Dr Hema Pant, dermatologist, Kaya Skin Clinic. While Emami's Fair and Handsome cream uses peptide as its main ingredient, Fair and Lovely Menz Active relies on vitamin B3 and zinc oxide to enter deep within the male skin. "Creams meant for men are also thinner and less greasy so that they penetrate the skin easily and don't leave any extra oil on the skin," says Dr R K Joshi, senior consultant, Indraprastha Apollo Hospital.

Manly moisturisers

Men don't need moisturisers as much as women, as their skins are more hydrated and greasy since they have more sweat and oil glands. However, men who shave daily may need a moisturiser. Dermatologists say that moisturiser should be chosen based on skin type. "You should not be using a moisturiser without knowing your skin type which can only be determined by a dermatologist. Using moisturiser on an oily skin can cause acne," says Dr Joshi.

It's acceptable for a man to use moisturisers designed for female skin, unless their skin get rough and irritated after shaving in which case they may need a heavier dose. The moisturiser should have anti-inflammatory activity. One of the active ingredients to look for is CYNERGY TK, which has been proven to reduce inflammation by blocking the production of prostaglandin E2, a biochemical that leads to inflammation. Avoid after shave lotions as they cause burning and redness. Instead it's best to go for a facial moisturiser containing witch hazel which is a natural antiseptic. It will help prevent infection in shaving nicks and cuts, without causing irritation or redness. Vitamin B5 is an important component of facial moisturisers for men because it helps repair damaged tissues. It also provides some natural protection against the sun.

Unisex shampoos

"It's not a tough job to keep your hair clean and anyone can do this using a simple shampoo. Male and female hair is similar except that since men have shorter hair, they have more elastic tissues. There is not much difference in the nature of male and female hair except the fact that men suffer from baldness more often," says Dr Joshi. Using hair colour and a blow dryer destroys the elasticity of female hair. On the other hand, there are greater chances of finding dandruff on a male head. However, a normal anti-dandruff



shampoo can help you with that. As far as conditioner goes, both male and female hair benefit from using this and there's no need for men to use specific products for this.

Gender defines your looks

Beauty might seem to be only skin deep, but there is more depth to facial differences between men and women than presumed. There's a greater contrast between the eyes, lips, and surrounding skin in female than male faces. This difference also influences our perception of the gender of a face. Regardless of race, female skin is known to be lighter than male skin. But a woman's eyes and lips are heavier than a man's, which creates higher contrast on women's faces.

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