

# TOO HARSH FOR YOUNG SKIN? TWEENS USING ANTI-AGING PRODUCTS

By Artis Henderson

Anti-aging skincare use by tweens is on the rise, and parents and skin experts are worried.

When Molly Grubbs' tween daughter Lillian asked to go to Sephora to spend the money she'd made from her bracelet-making business, Grubbs didn't think twice about it. She drove her daughter and a friend to Coconut Point, and waited on a bench outside while the two girls shopped. But when Lillian showed off her Sephora haul, it was full of anti-aging products. "Lillian, you cannot use these on your face," Grubbs told her daughter. "You're too young for this." She marched her back to Sephora and made her return everything.

Like a lot of parents, Grubbs is concerned about the recent rise in skincare routines for tweens—preteen ages 8 to 12—that focus on retinoids, acids and other anti-aging products. According to the annual Taking Stock With Teens report released in the fall of 2023 from researchers at the investment bank Piper Sandler, teens increased their spending on beauty products 23% since last year. This brought their total yearly average spending on cosmetics, fragrances and skincare to \$324. Sephora was the number one preferred beauty

destination, and Ulta was a close second.

With the spread of influence on TikTok, Instagram and YouTube, videos of skincare tutorials fill the social media feeds of impressionable tweens. Many of the products being touted, especially highly active, anti-aging skincare, are intended for an older audience, but tweens—many without parents who are as involved as Grubbs—are gobbling up these products from Sephora and Ulta, often with a heavy price tag. Drunk Elephant is a skincare brand on almost every tween's wish-list, and its most sought-after product, the company's C-Firma Fresh Vitamin-C Day serum, runs \$78 at Sephora.

But it's not the price tag that has people worried. Brittany Napior, an advanced medical aesthetician at the Naples Aesthetic Institute, said she routinely has parents coming to her and asking if these types of products are right for their tween's skin. Napior doesn't hesitate to tell them no. "Glycolic acids, retinoids, salicylics—all of these are potential irritants for young skin. They're meant for adults," she said.

Not only are these products potentially harmful to tween skin, but they're also unnecessary, Napior said. "Children have all the collagen that their little skin needs," she said. "They don't need to use retinol or any other in-

gredient to stimulate collagen."

She also worries that the most important part of any skincare routine—sunscreen—is getting ignored. "If tweens are using retinoids and glycolic acids without using sunscreen, then they're going to cause premature aging and damage their skin," Napior said. "It's very counterproductive to have these active ingredients without using sunscreen."

In addition to a daily sunblock, a gentle cleanser and a mild moisturizer with no active ingredients are both suitable for tween skin. There is one instance when heavy duty skincare products are needed, Napior said: when tweens are fighting acne. In her Naples practice, she prescribes retinoids and benzoyl peroxide as part of the institute's Acne Boot Camp. "There is a time and a place for active skincare products for tweens and young teens," Napior said. "But it's best done in a controlled environment with a medical professional overseeing it."

Florida-based beauty editor Elise Tabin has seen the rise in anti-aging products for tweens, both in her line of work and in her own household. "I've been in the beauty industry for close to 20 years," Tabin said. "I'm used to seeing people use products inappropriately." She points to social media as driving this recent

rise in tween skincare, especially during the pandemic "when everyone was bored at home and binging on TikTok."

When Tabin's tween daughter Madysen starting gravitating toward influencer-suggested skincare—especially products with retinol or harsh exfoliators—Tabin had what she calls her "lightbulb moment." That's when she decided to launch TWiiSH, a teen skincare line with ingredients made for young skin. "I wanted to create a line of skincare that was safe and effective for younger skin," Tabin said. "Skin changes as we age, and what we use at 14 is going to be completely different from what we use at 34. I wanted products that spoke to the needs of teen skin."

Tabin said it's too early to know what the long-term effects of tweens using anti-aging products will be, but she equates it to her generation, which grew up with harsh exfoliators such as St. Ives Apricot Scrub and Buf-Pufs. "It's the same school of thought," Tabin said. "We're going to have this generation of kids down the road who are going to be like, 'Remember when I used all that Drunk Elephant and ended up at the dermatologist because my face was so red?' A lot of damage can be done, regardless of your age, if you're using products not appropriate for your skin type." **NY**