

Standard of Care for Even the Most Sensitive Skin



BY PETER A. LIO, MD

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Good skin care should be part of all of our patients' routines. Grime on the skin from environmental exposures, from putting on makeup and other products, and from the natural buildup of oils, can be unpleasant and can irritate the skin—making it essential to cleanse the face at least once a day. Finding the right cleanser is key to good outcomes.

The goal of cleansing with something beyond water is to pull non water-soluble residues—those that are oil-based or hydrophobic—off the skin. With water alone, one would have to scrub the skin, which should be avoided, because scrubbing is irritating and can harm the skin. An ideal cleanser should help lift off dirt and oils in a gentle way and also protect the skin. The first soaps were rendered animal fat—they worked well for pulling off oily substances and were incredibly powerful at cleaning, but they were also damaging and continue to be very damaging to the skin barrier. True soaps are extremely alkaline. That alkalinity damages the acid mantle, the natural acid layer of the skin that helps keep the skin barrier strong. Historically, people were often instructed not to bathe often, particularly if they had sensitive skin and conditions like atopic dermatitis, rosacea, or acne, probably because the available soaps were so harsh.

THE ROLE OF GENTLE SKIN CLEANSERS

The advent of synthetic detergents, or gentle skin cleansers, changed everything. These are especially beneficial for patients with sensitive skin and skin barrier issues; it is becoming more evident that the skin barrier plays a role in many different skin diseases, such as atopic dermatitis, acne, rosacea, and even psoriasis. The epidermal barrier modulates immune response and is responsible for preventing the entry of microbes, allergens, and irritants. Inflammation, redness, scaling, and itching have been shown to be directly influenced by changes in the proteolytic balance of the skin,¹ and elevated protease levels have been identified in rosacea and other dermatoses.^{2,3} Transepidermal water loss (TEWL), which is a marker of barrier dysfunction, has been shown to increase protease levels.⁴

Irritated skin can make for an impaired skin barrier, so a good cleansing and moisturizing routine is important for maintaining healthy skin. Understanding that the skin bar-

rier plays an important role in so many skin conditions, I recommend that all patients use a gentle skin cleanser no matter what the condition of their skin. Cetaphil® Gentle Skin Cleanser, one of the first, and in many ways the archetype of these synthetic, non-soap cleansers, offered an option to cleanse the skin and gently remove dirt and oils without damaging the skin barrier or irritating the skin.

CETAPHIL® GENTLE SKIN CLEANSER

Cetaphil® Gentle Skin Cleanser is an effective option that can be used to cleanse the face and body and is suitable for patients of all skin types and ages, even babies. The Cetaphil® cleanser is minimalist—it is non-alkaline, non-comedogenic, and fragrance free. Its unique balance of efficacy and gentleness is the result of thoughtful ingredient selection and formulation innovation, specifically the micellar structure.

A very low concentration of anionic surfactant (less than one percent) combines with cetyl alcohol to form micelles. (See Figure 1) The cleansing efficacy of the product is not due to the ionic strength of the anionic surfactant, but instead to the micelles themselves (1). The hydrophilic part of the micelles remains free and has an affinity for the

A HISTORY OF CETAPHIL® GENTLE SKIN CLEANSER

■ Introduced in **1947** as Cetaphil® Cleansing Lotion, the Gentle Skin Cleanser was initially developed by a pharmacist for use as a compounding base.

■ By the **1960s**, the product was so popular it was introduced in many drugstores and was no longer pharmacist dispensed.

■ By the **1980s**, it was available in all major retail stores in North America. The package has had some makeovers through the years; the cleanser still uses the same innovative formula developed nearly 70 years ago.

■ Today, about **one bottle is sold per minute**.



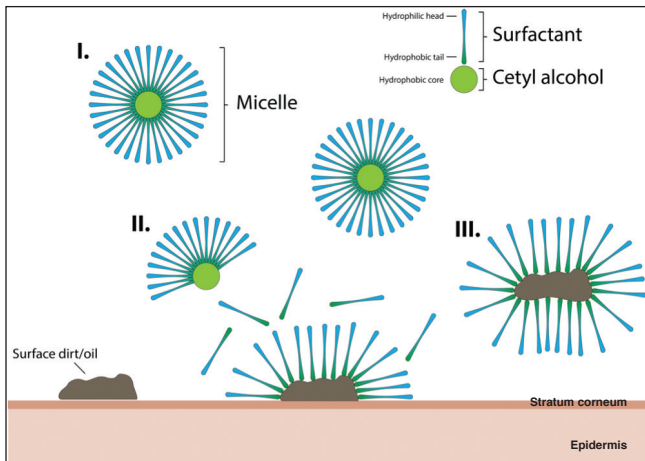


Figure 1. Micellar structure of Cetaphil® Gentle Skin Cleanser

hydrophilic part of the stratum corneum's hydrophilic surface (II); the lipophilic part of the micelles has an affinity for greasy materials on the surface of the skin (III). The micelles' formation contributes to reduced detergency of the anionic surfactant and, as a result, significantly reduces the sometimes irritating properties that are commonly attributed to this chemical group of molecules. It's worth noting, especially when educating patients, that unlike some other alcohols, cetyl alcohol is a fatty alcohol, with a more lipid-like or waxy characteristic that is actually good for the skin.

A 2006 study examined the use of Cetaphil® Gentle Skin Cleanser in 30 patients with rosacea. During the two-week study period, patients were monitored for skin barrier function through TEWL and corneometry, as well as for rosacea severity. No significant increase in TEWL was demonstrated at any point during the study, indicating that the gentle skin cleanser did not damage the skin barrier. Additionally, the cleanser was shown to maintain skin hydration. There were no increases in erythema, scaling, dryness, stinging, burning, or lack of smoothness in the skin during the study period, despite the fact that patients were not being treated for their rosacea during the study.⁵

Results of this study confirm that Cetaphil® Gentle Skin Cleanser offers effective cleansing yet is gentle enough that those with reactive, rosacea-prone skin can use it daily.

AN EFFECTIVE REGIMEN

Offering patients specific recommendations of products to use tends to make it easier for them to find the product, follow the regimen, and maintain it. More general advice—instructing patients to pick a gentle cleanser—can be overwhelming for the patient who may walk into a drug store to find 35 products labeled “gentle.” And because there are no specific guidelines on what constitutes “gentle”, it can be misleading. It's helpful to recommend some specific options, or provide patients

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

Cetaphil® Gentle Skin Cleanser was formulated for dermatologists as an effective yet gentle, non-irritating cleanser for even the most sensitive skin. Unlike soap, Cetaphil® is non-alkaline, non-comedogenic, and fragrance free. The product is formulated to soothe and soften as it cleanses, helping the skin retain needed moisture. It is intended for use on the face, hands, and entire body. It is safe and effective for all skin types, including for the delicate skin of babies.



with a sheet that lists a few choices for their skincare regimen. Instructing patients on the specifics is also beneficial: what to cleanse with (fingertips are best), when to cleanse, and how to cleanse—use gentle circles, don't scrub, rinse well, pat dry gently with a towel, and then apply your moisturizer.

Providing samples of a product in the office so they can get a sense of how it's going to feel on their skin and what the experience is going to be like even before they purchase a product is of value to your patients too. Being specific helps your patients understand what to do and increases the chance of them actually following through with your tailored recommendation. No product is going to help if it's still in the bottle. Part of our job as skin care experts is to help patients get all the way there.

It's also important to consider the price and availability of recommended products. Cetaphil® Gentle Skin Cleanser is widely available and fairly inexpensive. Many patients express concern if a product is very expensive—getting back to the basics can be more affordable while remaining effective.

The Cetaphil® cleanser was a breakthrough product when it was introduced in 1947 and continues to be the paragon of a cleanser that is mild, soothing, and gentle enough for even the most delicate skin. Many other companies have followed suit in offering gentle cleansers—a testament to Cetaphil® Gentle Skin Cleanser being such a highly regarded product that it has withstood the test of time and that others want to emulate it. ■

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