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ingredient, you have a wider range of options, many of which are inexpensive. One cream often cited for its efficacy and affordability: **ROC Retinol Correxion Deep Wrinkle Night Cream** (\$23 at drugstores), which is meant to be applied before bed.

CLEANSING BRUSH: Rogers and Robyn Gmyrek, M.D., of Union Square Laser Dermatology, in New York City, both agree that those with combination skin, in particular, will reap big rewards by incorporating a brush into their regular routines. Why? Combination skin has a split personality, and the regimen outlined on these pages is geared more toward the normal half. Deep cleansing the T-zone with a brush two times a week can help keep that combination area clear of clogs. Then use the brush a third time each week, over the whole face, to remove dead skin cells. This will leave your skin smooth and pave the way for antioxidant and retinoid products. Try the **Olay Professional ProX Advanced Cleansing System** (\$35 at drugstores).

YOUR SPECIALTY PRODUCT

ANTIOXIDANT SERUM: No matter your skin type, you should use an antioxidant product at least once a day, because it's one of the first lines of defense the body uses to fight free radicals caused by environmental assaults, like ultraviolet (UV) rays and pollution, says Hale. (It's the damage from sun and smog that can cause fine lines and sun spots.) But not all antioxidant serums are created equal. Unlike cleansers and basic moisturizers, effective antioxidant serums are probably going to cost more than \$30. "Antioxidants are pricey and

Get the most for your money

One key to economical skin care is learning how to use products properly. That means not slathering on a quarter-size dollop when a dime-size drop will do—or layering products in the wrong order, preventing penetration of whatever lands on top. So what's the right approach? Read on.

DON'T OVERDOSE.

To minimize waste, heed these guidelines from dermatologist Elizabeth Hale: You need no more than a nickel-size squirt of cleanser and facial moisturizer; two pea-size drops of an antioxidant serum; one pea-size drop of retinoid cream; a dime-size dollop of eye cream (half a dime per eye); and about a quarter-size pump of facial sunscreen.

"Using sunscreen now helps you avoid major spending on age-reversing treatments, like lasers or surgery, later on," says Elizabeth Hale.

APPLY IN THE RIGHT SEQUENCE. Think thin to thick—serum, lotion, cream. The exception: If you're using a chemical sunscreen, that should go on first, before any other product, since the sunscreen has to be absorbed to be effective. Applying anything else first may prevent that.

DRY YOUR HANDS...

Warm, wet skin quickly absorbs anything you put on it, so make sure your hands are clean and dry before massaging in any facial products. Otherwise your fingertips may end up being the best-treated skin on your body.

...BUT DAMPEN YOUR FACE.

It's helpful to apply an antioxidant serum after washing, because damp skin is very absorbent, and this will accelerate penetration. Exception to the rule: Don't apply a retinoid to wet skin, since quick absorption in that case can lead to irritation.

hard to stabilize," says Tina West, M.D., the director of the West Institute, in Chevy Chase, Maryland. "Finding an antioxidant for \$10 is no bargain, because it's unlikely to work." So for this product, you'll need to step out of the drugstore and splurge online. One formula doctors swear by: **SkinMedica Vitamin C + E Complex** (\$98, skinmedica.com), which leaves skin with a slightly matte finish—good for shine control.

JUST SKIP IT

MOISTURIZER: "Most women with normal or combination skin don't really need a hydrating lotion in addition to a hydrating sunscreen," says Gmyrek. An inexpensive, SPF-laced lotion: **Aveeno Absolutely Ageless Daily Moisturizer Broad Spectrum SPF 30** (\$20 at drugstores). Same goes for your nighttime routine; choosing a retinoid with a richer base means you don't need to spring for a separate moisturizing lotion. The exception: During the winter, you may want an extra layer of moisture to prevent or combat chapping. In that case, a simple drugstore formula will do. Try **CeraVe Facial Moisturizing Lotion PM** (\$14 at drugstores), which can be applied as needed. Note: If your under-eyes are feeling dry, too, the CeraVe lotion can be safely tapped on that area; no need to buy a separate eye product.

SKIN TYPE

Oily/acne-prone

"Many women with oily or blemish-prone skin use too many products," says Waibel. The motivation is obvious: You're trying to stem relentless oil production and prevent annoy-