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How to Repair a Damaged Skin Barrier

Also known as the stratum corneum or the epidermis—the outermost layer of skin—the skin barrier is the body’s first line of defense. Comprising mostly lipids, including ceramides, the skin barrier protects against pollution, UV damage, and infection, among other things. “Think of the skin barrier like a rubber impervious suit covering the body externally,” says Delray Beach, FL dermatologist [Q Dr. Janet Allenby](#). “The skin’s natural barrier helps to both seal in moisture and protect skin against acne eruptions due to bacteria buildup,” adds holistic skin-care expert Tammy Fender, founder of her eponymous skin-care brand.

Unfortunately, it’s not uncommon to experience a weakened or damaged skin barrier. It’s especially prevalent these days, as most of us are using heavy-duty skin care, like acid-based exfoliators and retinol. I’ve stripped my skin barrier on a few different occasions, and it wasn’t pretty: My skin became hot, red and tight, and stayed that way for nearly a couple hours. I knew something wasn’t right—this wasn’t the warm tingle that signals a product “is working.” I immediately washed my face with a gentle cleanser, slapped on a thick layer of repair balm and followed advice from the pros.