

MADE TO ORDER SKINCARE

Could a bespoke serum change your skin? We put
Universkin to the test

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Tailor-made skincare has taken the industry by storm in the past few years—everything from mix-it-yourself serums to mail-order haircare prescriptions are appealing to a new generation of consumer who wants a beauty fix that's perfectly suited to them. But French company Universkin takes the concept a few steps further with its personalized, pharmaceutical-grade serums that are tailored to suit your skin by a doctor. Could this powerfully potent product address my unpredictable, breakout-prone, sensitive skin, with its fine lines and other encroaching signs of being older and wiser? I decided to put it to the test.

STEP 1: THE QUIZ

Before meeting the derm who'll be customizing my serums, I fill out the SkinXs online quiz, Universkin's diagnostic tool. It's meant to help the doctor—and also me—understand my skin better, so the perfect active ingredients can be cherry-picked for me. The questions are wide-ranging, covering everything from my innate skin characteristics to my lifestyle (do I drink, exercise a lot or have a weakness for sugar?) to my "relationship with the sun." Of course, all of these factors matter for skin health.

STEP 2: THE CONSULT

I head to ICLS Dermatology & Plastic Surgery in Oakville, Ont., a sleek and expansive modern clinic where you could undergo virtually any skin treatment you want, for my face-to-face with Dr. Sheetal Sapra. "I'll tell you what I see," says Dr. Sapra, who puts me at ease right away with his soft-spoken, matter-of-fact manner. "We know that by around 29, we start aging. So that's what's happening a little bit here—but it's not much. More dramatic on you is the acne and the post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation." Check, check, check.

STEP 3: THE PRESCRIPTION

For each bespoke serum, Universkin specialists can choose up to three hero ingredients from a menu of 19 pharmaceutical-grade actives, available in a total of 57 concentrations. That means there are nearly 1,200 possible formulations. For my night serum, Dr. Sapra selects a trio that'll help keep blemishes at bay: zinc sulfate, salicylic acid and azelaic acid. Meanwhile, my custom day serum will start tackling anti-aging with niacinamide, isoflavones and madecassoside.

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STEP 4: THE FORMULATION

Armed with the recipes, Lesley, the dermatology clinical manager at ICLS, whips up my two serums on the spot. Each star ingredient comes in its own container for maximum freshness, then one by one, the actives are added to the nourishing base formula (a silky fluid packed with vitamin E, hyaluronic acid, biomimetic peptides and omega-3 camelina sativa). The bottle is shaken up by a machine for thorough mixing, et voilà. Each serum will last six to eight weeks, since you only need four to six drops per application. Also, as your skin changes (and ditto the weather), future serums can be tweaked, too.

STEP 5: THE TESTING

Dr. Sapra warned me that all acne-taming ingredients tend to be a tad drying, so I round out my new routine with Universkin Nexultra 1, a lightweight moisturizer, and Nexultra O, the new hydrating cleansing oil. But my skin needs zero time to adjust—it happily drinks up my new personalized serums. Now, after several weeks of using Universkin, my skin is noticeably softer, healthier-looking and yes, clearer—so much so that skipping foundation is NBD. Turns out that what the doctor ordered was exactly what my moody skin needed.

Universkin is available at select dermatologists, cosmetic surgery clinics and medspas. To find a location near you, visit the website: universkin.com