

All About Skin Pre-Foundation Products

By Suzanne Patterson

Skin primer, anti-shine, and mattifier are terms that represent a “pre-foundation” product that is applied to skin before makeup, and are used mainly to correct or manipulate skin surface issues for more improved stability in makeup wear. These products help surface skin functions temporarily level out, such as the pH balance, and minimize excess oil before foundation products are applied. They help provide a better “grip” surface for uneven skin texture, and reduce the chance of makeup oxidation (changing color) or separation as natural skin oils come to the surface.

Formulations:

Skin preps are available in several formulations, but the most popular and effective are water based, gel based (water and denatured alcohol), or silicone based products because they are lightweight and work very well with a variety of foundation applications. Primers are designed to even out rough or dry patches and impart a smoother surface texture to skin, while mattifiers and anti-shines also work to dull down the natural sheen of skin. These corrections will help extend the wear of both liquid and cream based foundation products by providing a balanced buffer between skin and makeup, and hopefully a more flawless appearance to the overall complexion.

Performance:

Skin primers and some mattifiers are designed to dry down invisibly and act transparently on skin, whereas anti-shines go a step further to impart a dull looking texture to skin when dry. It's important anti-shines be selected and used according to the results desired on natural skin tone, as some of them used on very dark skin may have a feedback that looks ashy. This can reflect under makeup as a grayed area. For this reason some anti-shines products, particularly gel formulations, come in light, medium, and dark tones to eliminate this factor.

Skin preps can be applied directly to clean bare skin, or over a moisturizer that is first fully absorbed by skin. If using a moisturizer under a priming or anti-shine/mattifying product make sure it is an oil free formulation to prevent possible break down with the layering of products or makeup separation during wear. Foundation formulations made today are virtually oil free so an oil based moisturizer can cause makeup to spread unevenly or eventually “slide” on skin, regardless of the kind of primer used.

Skin Types:

If skin is sensitive, or excessively oily and prone to break outs or acne, a water based primer is suggested to use because of the higher water content that will not irritate these kinds of skins, and bond better with its texture. If skin is on the dry, flaky, or rough textured side then a silicone base primer will help to smooth out those areas and minimize finer lines under makeup.

Sometimes an anti-shine product is desired to layer over a skin primer if there is a combination of excessive oil, uneven skin texture, and skin reflective issues. This helps bring a smoother matte texture to skin before applying foundation products. If done so it is suggested to eliminate moisturizing the face first, and use water based primers under the anti-shine product.

Product Controversy

Primers, mattifiers, and anti-shines were designed to do a very specific job of preparing the face as a "sealed" canvas for the layering of foundation products, such as base, powder, and concealer, nothing more. However, because of fierce competition among cosmetic companies and the recent proliferation of pre-foundation products on the market, products must compete for customer attention and loyalty by playing further upon user psychological well being. By adding extra ingredients to skin prep products to hype them further as a vital "anti-aging" interface they entice the customer by making dubious claims of their ability to proactively affect the metabolism of the skin the way stand alone treatment skin care products do.

Primers, mattifiers, and anti-shines that are loaded up with extra ingredients that have nothing to do with the product's targeted function can actually lessen the product's performance ability to do the important job it was designed to do. The truth is, less is far more in this case, as non-essential active ingredients in pre-foundation products can actually conflict with targeted skin care or treatment products that may be already applied to skin.

Skin always performs better under makeup with minimal invasive ingredients. Stand alone products that have active ingredients, such as sun screens, anti-aging serums complexes, etc. are much more effective and proactive on skin when applied directly for a specific condition or circumstance, rather than to tack it into a pre-foundation product where the performance will be minimized.

Moral of the story: look for pre-foundation products with specific ingredients that target the basic need of providing a smoother skin "canvas", and makeup bonding properties, or directly inhibits skin sheen under makeup.