

Reading *Your Skin*

Stinging, flaking, breaking out? How to tell normal adjustment from a real reaction — and exactly what to do.

When you start actives, some response is normal and some isn't. Knowing the difference is the difference between pushing through and pulling back. Here's how to read what your skin is telling you.

THE THREE VERDICTS

KEEP GOING

Normal adjustment

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

- A mild tingle for a few minutes after applying
- Slight dryness or fine flaking the next day
- Skin feels a touch tight, settles by morning
- A little pinkness that fades within the hour

WHAT TO DO

Carry on as planned. This is your skin acclimatising. Keep hydration up, don't add anything new, and it eases within a week or two.

EASE OFF

Too much, too soon

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

- Persistent flaking that makeup clings to
- Tightness or rough patches that linger
- Redness still there the next morning
- Skin stings when you apply your serum

WHAT TO DO

Slow down. Drop a retinal night, buffer your active, and double down on barrier repair — recovery nights only until it calms. Then rebuild more gently.

STOP & REPAIR

A real reaction

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

- Burning or stinging that doesn't settle
- Raised, hot, itchy or swollen skin
- Rash, welts, weeping or blistering
- Tightness with a shiny, angry red look

WHAT TO DO

Stop the active completely. Strip back to gentle cleanser + plain moisturiser only. If it's severe or spreading, see a GP or pharmacist — this isn't adjustment.

THE ONE THAT CONFUSES EVERYONE: PURGING VS BREAKING OUT

Is my skin purging, or is this product wrong for me?

Actives that speed up cell turnover — retinal, acids — can bring congestion to the surface faster than usual. That's purging, and it passes. But a genuine breakout from an ingredient that doesn't suit you looks different. The tells are where and how long.

Likely purging

- Appears **where you normally break out**
- Started after a turnover active (retinal, acid)
- Small bumps that come to a head and clear quickly
- Improving within **4-6 weeks**
- Skin overall looks better between spots

Likely a real breakout

- Appears in **new places you don't usually break out**
- Started after a rich cream, oil or new fragranced product
- Often with itching, redness or small rough bumps
- **Not improving after 6 weeks** — or getting worse
- Skin feels irritated overall, not just spotty

The simple rule of thumb

Purging is faster, in your usual spots, and improving. A reaction is in new places, often itchy, and not settling. When in doubt, give a turnover active up to six weeks — but stop anything that burns, itches or spreads straight away. Your skin should be trending better, not worse. If six weeks pass and it's still unhappy, that product isn't for you, and there's no shame in swapping it out.