

Salmon sperm in your skincare? The latest K-beauty trend, explained

September 7 2022, by Jenna Ryu



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Once, there was snail mucin, the viral Korean skincare ingredient. The latest "it" product? Salmon testicle DNA.

More professionally known as "salmon pdrn," salmon testicle DNA has been found in many luxury K-beauty products, including the KAH! Wrinkle Free Multi Balm, which has been popularized in TV shows like Netflix's "Extraordinary Attorney Woo" and in Doja Cat's "Vegas" music video. As the name implies, you glide the balm across your face for a dewy, luminous look.

Coating yourself with fish genital DNA may sound questionable, but beauty experts, along with an abundance of research, support its regenerative, anti-inflammatory effects; One study found that salmon sperm was associated with increased skin elasticity and stronger collagen levels—both of which are crucial for anti-aging skin.

"Having an open mind to these different types of ingredients can be really great. There are a lot of ingredients we're not used to in North America that are very popular in Korea, and there's a reason why they do: There's a lot of evidence behind its benefits," says Kenna Whitnell, a biochemist and research scientist.

What is salmon pdrn, and how does it work?

Salmon pdrn, which stands for "polydeoxyribonucleotides," is sperm DNA most commonly derived from salmon trout or chum salmon. Whitnell, who specializes in skincare consulting, says it works by targeting a specific protein that, when stimulated, promotes wound healing.

Some may wonder: Why the testicles? Whitnell says the genital area contains a high amount of DNA, making its extraction easier and more cost-efficient.

As for why salmons specifically, "the DNA of salmon is very close to that of humans, so it has a high compatibility with our own cellular

functioning," Whitnell explains. "The extraction and purification process removes active proteins and peptides that could potentially cause immune reactions. So it is just very purely DNA and that doesn't contain (anything) that could interact with our skin in a bad way."

What are the skincare benefits of salmon testicle DNA?

Research has lauded salmon testicle DNA for its ability to restore skin elasticity, repair moisture barriers and reduce inflammation, making it a viable option for those with damaged or dry skin.

"This ingredient is great because if you have a cut, wound or acne blemish that is healing, salmon pdrn could help with that," medical esthetician Cassandra Bankson explains about the process called "cell migration." "White blood cells will attempt to fix this wound ... and (salmon pdrn) has been shown in research to help with that [cell migration](#), or bringing the healing cells to that affected area."

Who should avoid?

For most people, salmon pdrn is relatively safe with few known side effects. But those who are vegan or allergic to fish are advised to steer clear, and despite its anti-inflammatory effects, it isn't meant to treat active acne, but rather dehydrated or wounded skin.

"For salmon pdrn to work, it needs to get across the top layer of the skin, meaning the skin needs to be broken," says Dr. Rachel Ho, an aesthetic doctor based in Singapore. Most studies, she says, have only tested salmon DNA's ability to repair skin that is damaged, rather than intact.

Because of the limited scope of available research, Ho suggests other

evidence-based alternatives for repairing skin such as vitamin A, vitamin C or retinoids, which "can build collagen in the skin to treat early signs of aging or even hyperpigmentation." But before incorporating [salmon](#) sperm into your skincare regimen, experts advise patch testing any novel ingredient onto a small area of your [skin](#) to see how it reacts.

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Citation: Salmon sperm in your skincare? The latest K-beauty trend, explained (2022, September 7) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-09-salmon-sperm-skincare-latest-k-beauty.html>

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