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Ask a Dermatologist: Can You Hydrate Your Skin Without Moisturizer?

This year, in a survey conducted by Statista, over 13 million people in the United States claimed to have not used a drop of moisturizer in the week prior to the assessment. We know; we clutched our pearls too. But to offer a bit of solace, 60 million people said they used it seven times, and over 24 million skin all-stars used it 14 times. As skincare junkies, we shudder to think that anyone would forgo nourishing the largest organ in their body, but we've certainly heard friends and colleagues express their grievances with cream moisturizer. The general consensus is often that it breaks them out or makes them feel greasy—a fair point, to be sure. (If you're interested, we've found a host of formulas that won't leave you feeling like an oil slick.)

Turns out "how can I hydrate my skin without moisturizer?" is actually a well-Googled search term, too, so we deemed it useful to tap a few skincare experts for their take. Is cream moisturizer truly a necessity, or can you use other alternatives to quench your skin's thirst? Their thoughts, below.

If you're cream moisturizer–averse...

First, the rub: If a greasy sensation is what turns you off about cream moisturizer, each of our experts listed oil as the best keeper of hydration. But the common misconception with oils is that they'll all leave you feeling like you just ran a marathon in 90-degree weather. Not so—many are light, easily absorbed, and noncomedogenic.

Paul Jarrod Frank, MD, says oils are even *better* than creams at hydrating the skin. "Water dries skin, but oils and ointments are the most hydrating," he tells us. "Lotions go on easy but still don't hydrate as well as an oil."

What if you only want to use one product?

Frank surprised us, too. When we asked him what his sole choice would be, he actually recommended a drugstore staple: "I always recommend using Aquaphor often, as it provides an extra layer of protection for your skin. It's especially great in the winter and helps protect skin from the wind."

Aquaphor Healing Ointment Advanced Therapy Skin Protectant ($12)