



Best Ways for Women Over 50 to Get Beautiful Hands

Hand cream, sunscreen, and the right nail shape and polish make all the difference

Lois Joy Johnson | April 24, 2025



Hands and nails deserve the same TLC you give to your face. AARP (Getty Images, 3)

It's not fun to hear, but hands over 50, similar to necks, reveal much about our age and habits. Oftentimes it's because many women were terrific about face sunscreen but missed the boat when it came to their hands. What to do about the saggy skin, brown spots and veins that show up decades later like uninvited guests? A slew of top medical pros joined me, a beauty editor, to tell all.

Our experts include **Kimberly Lee**, a board-certified facial and reconstructive surgeon and assistant clinical professor at the Division of Head and Neck Surgery at Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center; Samuel Lin, a board-certified plastic surgeon and associate professor of surgery at Harvard Medical School; Maya K. Thosani, a board-certified dermatologist and surgeon and owner of Modern Dermatology in Scottsdale, Arizona; and Anthony Rossi, a board-certified dermatologist at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City.



(From left) Eucerin Face Radiant Tone Cleansing Gel With AHA Complex; Versed Day Maker Microcrystal Exfoliator.
 AARP (CVS, Target)

1. Update your hand-washing routine

In the COVID days of 2021, many women started a wash-and-sanitize routine ... and never stopped. That's terrific for hygiene, but not so great for mature hands and their thin, dry skin. It's time to do your own a favor and stop using hot water and liquid soaps that smell delish but do little else.

Switching to lukewarm water and a moisturizer and cleanser like Raw Sugar Sensitive Skin Simply Hand Wash, Green Tea + Cucumber + Aloe Vera (\$6, walgreens.com) is a significant first step. Top dermatologists and plastic surgeons also suggest a once-a-week face exfoliating cleanser to buff away dulling dead cells on the backs of your hands. That's because the slowdown in cell turnover that affects facial skin also impacts your hands.

Choose a refined scrub like Versed Day Maker Microcrystal Exfoliator (\$15, target.com) or a mild chemical cleanser with glycolic and lactic acid like Eucerin Face Radiant Tone Cleansing Gel with AHA Complex (\$19, cvs.com) for your hands and face. But take it easy.

"A chemical exfoliant such as glycolic or lactic acid, or a mild scrub with small, nonabrasive particles, can be useful to smooth rough patches and enhance skin radiance," says Lin. "However, it's important to avoid over-exfoliating and compromising the thin, dry barrier layer of the skin by limiting it to one or two times a week."

If you have very sensitive skin or a condition like eczema or psoriasis, opt out of the extra exfoliation to avoid irritation.



(From left) Burt's Bees Lavender & Honey Hand Cream; Peach & Lily Retinal for All Renewing Serum; Avène Retrinal 0.05% Multi-Corrective Cream.
AARP (Kohl's, Target, Ulta)

2. Choose hand care the way you choose face cream

The surprise is that your best bet may be a combination of facial products ... for your hands! For example, Lee says, "Applying skin care to the backs of the hands — like retinol to boost collagen, and creams with peptides or hyaluronic acid to hydrate — can help combat signs of aging and maintain elasticity."

If that's news to you, it's likely because those ingredients are found in face creams and serums, not hand care. Retinol, one of the lauded ingredients, has a rep for irritation, but there is a safe solution. Lin (himself a retinol fan) advises a go-slow, low-dosage approach.

"Retinol stimulates collagen production and also promotes cell turnover, which helps fade dark spots and sun damage," he explains. "However, because the skin on the hands is thinner and more prone to irritation, it's important to start with a low-strength retinol. Apply it at night and follow up with a rich, hydrating hand cream to counteract any dryness or irritation caused by the retinol."

A low-dose retinol formula like Avène Retrinal 0.05% Multi-Corrective Cream (\$50, [ulta.com](https://www.ulta.com)) or Peach & Lily Retinal for All Renewing Serum (\$55, [target.com](https://www.target.com)) is ideal. Still apprehensive? Try applying a light layer of moisturizer first, as a "cushion." A rich but nongreasy formula like CeraVe Moisturizing Cream - Unscented (\$19, [walgreens.com](https://www.walgreens.com)), with ceramides and hyaluronic acid, is great for at-home hand rehab and doubles as a face and body cream. For a stash-in-your-bag and leave-at-every-sink hand cream, choose a formula with emollient shea butter, like Burt's Bees Lavender & Honey Hand Cream (\$6, [kohls.com](https://www.kohls.com)) or Eos Shea Better Hand Cream (\$4, [walgreens.com](https://www.walgreens.com)).



(From left) Neutrogena Mineral Ultra Sheer Dry Touch Face & Body Stick SPF 50; e.l.f. Untouchable Invisi-Stick Broad Spectrum SPF 50; Kopari Beauty Pure Protect Mineral Sunscreen Stick SPF 50+. AARP (Target, 2; Ulta)

3. Protect hands daily with sunscreen

Cumulative sun damage shows up as flaky, crepe-y skin, brown spots, and, in the worst-case scenario, precancerous lesions or skin cancer on the backs of hands and fingers. Be sure to get any suspicious spots checked by a dermatologist.

“Applying sunscreen to your hands daily is the most important thing to do in preventing further UV-induced sunspots and increased breakdown of dermal support,” says Rossi. Lee agrees, adding, “Look for hand creams with SPF coverage — I prefer physical sunblock, as opposed to chemical-based ones — to protect against further sun damage, which is a major contributor to age spots and skin thinning on the backs of hands.”

Sound advice, but choosing a formula that isn’t greasy and won’t leave residue on your cellphone, laptop, keyboard, steering wheel or clothing is essential. Hand creams with an SPF are rare, but the travel-size, chemical-based Supergoop! Hand Screen SPF 40 (\$14, revolve.com) does exist.

As a beauty editor, I have always wished there were more SPF hand creams, but the growing category of nongreasy, non-gooey sheer-stick sunscreens like Neutrogena Mineral Ultra Sheer Dry Touch Face & Body Stick SPF 50 (\$17, target.com), e.l.f. Untouchable Invisi-Stick Broad Spectrum SPF 50 (\$14, target.com) and Kopari Beauty Pure Protect Mineral Sunscreen Stick SPF 50+ (\$29, ulta.com) do an excellent job for hands, and double as face protection ... even over makeup.



(From left) Vaseline Original Petroleum Jelly; Aquaphor Healing Ointment Advanced Therapy; CND Solar Oil Nail & Cuticle Treatment.
AARP (CVS, 2; Target)

4. Manage your cuticles

If you still pick or bite your cuticles, cut them with a cuticle nipper or pull hangnails — but hands off! Cuticles, the thin skin ridges surrounding each nail, protect nails from bacteria and infection. Pushing them back is the best way to eliminate pesky hangnails, keep your nails looking healthy and give nail polish cleaner, crisper, salon-like borders. This is easiest to do when the cuticles are soft and pliable after a bath, shower or a pre-manicure soak in warm water.

First, apply a conditioning oil (cuticle oil, olive oil and coconut oil are all fine) like CND Solar Oil Nail & Cuticle Treatment (\$17, [target.com](https://www.target.com)) to soften and loosen the skin. Then gently push the cuticles back using either a cotton-wrapped cuticle stick or your thumbnail. Visible hangnails? Those little strips of skin near the cuticle are extremely painful.

The quick fix is to slather them with Vaseline Original Petroleum Jelly fix (\$7, [cvs.com](https://www.cvs.com)) or Aquaphor Advanced Therapy Healing Ointment (\$7, [cvs.com](https://www.cvs.com)), and cover with a Band-Aid until you can carefully snip the excess with nail scissors.



Getty Images

5. Treat hands to some affordable TLC

Daily hand care is essential, but don't let budgeting for extra products prevent you from doing at-home boosts with basics you already have. You can improve their look with a weekly or bimonthly treatment straight from your own pantry and bathroom cabinet.

Want a cheapo version of a gentle exfoliating scrub? Add a drizzle of olive oil to a tablespoon or two of sugar to make a paste, then lightly massage it over your hands and rinse. It's a standard recipe at many fancy spas. Want to give dry hands a makeover without the cost of a splurgy salon paraffin treatment?

Before bed, apply cuticle oil or olive oil to your nails, slather clean hands generously with any rich cream (the one you use on your face or body) or even a petroleum jelly ointment, and slip on a pair of fresh cotton socks as "spa mitts." Your hands will feel silky smooth by dawn.



(From left) OPI RapiDry Fast Drying Nail Color in Haul Sass; Londontown Nude Mood Lazur Enhanced Colour Nail Lacquer Collection in Pampas Beige; Chanel Le Vernis Longwear Nail Color in 147 Incendiaire. AARP (CVS, Ulta, Macy's)

6. Give nails and fingers a more elegant look

Believe it or not, your shade of nail polish provides more than just a well-groomed look. You know how dressing in neutrals makes you appear posh and polished, and red lipstick wakes up your face? Both strategies apply to mature hands as well.

Creamy polishes in nude-beige like the Londontown Nude Mood Lazur Enhanced Colour Nail Lacquer Collection in Pampas Beige, Pearl or Chai (\$16 each, ulta.com) and Sally Hansen Miracle Gel Cozy Chic Collection in Stay Toasty or Sweet-er Weather (\$11 each, walgreens.com) are the trending update to the usual sheer nudes and make aging hands look fresh and classy. Save the turquoise and butter yellow for your toes!

On the other hand (no pun intended), a fiery-warm red like Chanel Le Vernis Longwear Nail Color in 147 Incendiaire (\$33, macys.com) or OPI RapiDry Fast Drying Nail Color in Haul Sass (\$10, cvs.com) works for every skin tone, adds a healthy glow to hands, and counteracts the hues of brown spots and veins while diverting attention away from them.

Next, address nail shape. In general, ovals and almonds (almonds have a more tapered tip) slim your hands and fingers; square nails widen them. They're also much more refined than shovel-like squares and easier for everyday life than dagger-like points. If you have wide/short fingers or prefer the neat look of short nails, try a subtly rounded square, known as a squoval, for the best of both.

And here's a word of advice: Many women over 50 love dark polish (even black or inky navy) and offbeat shades like gray, brown and olive green. Though they feel "edgy," these colors emphasize discolorations. Just say no.

7. Consider dermatological treatments

As hands age, they lose collagen and their natural cushion of fat. The skin on the backs of hands becomes looser. Veins, tendons and bones, in addition to brown spots from years of sun damage, look more prominent. It's all perfectly normal, but noninvasive dermatological fixes can restore a firmer, smoother look and improve discolorations. Rossi's first choices are fillers and laser.

"Hyaluronic fillers such as Restylane and Juvéderm work effectively on volume loss," he says. "Injected into the dorsum [backs of the hands], filler plumps up the skin so veins and tendons are less visible. Lasers address the appearance of photo-aged skin, brown spots and skin cancer. Both treatments require the skill and experience of a board-certified dermatologist or plastic surgeon."

Thosani concurs. "The best in-office procedures for eliminating brown spots from the backs of hands are Intense Pulsed Light [IPL] and lasers," she says. "Liquid nitrogen can be effective for isolated spots but requires meticulous sun protection to prevent re-pigmentation with new sun exposure."



(From left) Maybelline New York Super Stay Lumi Matte Foundation; Revlon PhotoReady Concealer; Urban Decay Cosmetics Face Bond Self-Setting Waterproof Foundation. AARP (CVS, Target, Ulta)

8. Use makeup for camouflage

Disguising discolorations with makeup is another option for hands, but not any old face makeup will work. You want to avoid obvious heavy coverage (that works for photos, film and TV, not for real life) and formulas that may leave residue on clothing, car seats and furniture.

The best choice is a face or body makeup in a waterproof, sweat-resistant and transfer-proof formula, like Maybelline New York Super Stay Lumi Matte Foundation (\$17, cvs.com) or Urban Decay Cosmetics Face Bond Self-Setting Waterproof Foundation (\$40, ulta.com). Remember, when selecting a shade, your hands may be a little darker in tone than your face due to sun exposure.

You want to create a seamless look from your hands to your wrists and forearms when wearing three-quarter sleeves or pushing your sleeves up. Use a damp makeup sponge to apply the foundation in a tap-blend motion over the backs of your hands. Think about blurring and building coverage where needed, rather than total full coverage.

For just a few brown spots, try a facial concealer crayon or roll-up with an opaque texture, like L'Oréal Paris True Match Super Blendable Crayon Concealer (\$14, walgreens.com) or Revlon PhotoReady Concealer (\$14, target.com). Apply the concealer with a brush or your fingertip using the same tap-blend technique. Make sure to feather the edges until the coverage blends with your skin tone.

<https://www.aarp.org/benefits-discounts/members-only-access/info-2025/beautiful-hands-nails.html>