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WOMEN HAVE BEEN exfoliating their skin for millennia. Sand, salt, leaves – you name it, we've abraded our bodies and faces with it. There must be some atavistic instinct to shed our skins faster than nature usually goes about it.

For the record, left alone, it takes approximately 28 days to produce baby-soft new skin cells that gradually dry out and eventually flake off, to be replaced by a new layer. Except that, as we age, that system slows down. This is pretty crucial to the whole beauty matrix: radiant skin is the foundation of beauty. By radiant, we generally mean healthy looking, smooth, toned and a bit dewy looking (ie not dry, not excessively shiny, but that juicy halfway point usually referred to as glowing). If we can achieve all that,

then we really don't need to worry too much about lines and wrinkles. Radiant skin is beautiful, regardless.

If dead cells stick around, interfering with the way the light hits our skin, resulting in that stubbornly un-glowy look, it's ageing.

The beauty industry, being the beauty industry, has come up with scores of 'solutions' over the decades, ranging from harsh astringents and plastic-filled exfoliators to dermabrasion (which generally uses an electric rotating device), lasers, lights and chemical peels that require varying amounts of 'downtime'.

These have their place if you require treatment for pigmentation and scarring, but if you're just after a little glow,

The Soveral facial brush



honestly, leave them alone, or use sparingly because exfoliators can scratch and dry skin. Lasers and chemical peels, meanwhile, in the wrong hands (and even some of the 'right' ones) may give initially exciting results – look! All these sweet baby cells – but will ultimately thin the skin.

That's not to say we shouldn't exfoliate. 'You can get thick sebaceous skin on your nose, and it's beneficial to slough it off,' says Dr Rozina Ali, a biochemist and plastic surgeon. 'But we probably don't need to exfoliate foreheads, where skin is very thin – and certainly not near your eyes.' Any method, she says, should be approached with caution.

There's a lovely recipe in *Skin Food* by Sophie Thompson (£12.99, Octopus: a good present for fans of chemical-free beauty) that uses 15 drops of lime essential oil (or your favourite essential oil), two tbsp of coconut oil, four tbsp of caster or granulated sugar and two tbsp of fresh pomegranate seeds (whizzed for 15 seconds in a blender) for two servings of an exfoliator for dead winter skin.

But all we need are a couple of facial brushes – not to be confused with the tougher, larger body brushes you can buy everywhere. Skin brushes are small, round and gentle, designed to be used dry, and, if you buy them from Alexandra Soveral, made from sustainable olive wood and goat hair, a by-product of the meat industry (£28, alexandrasoveral.com) – preferable to those teeny abrasive balls that clog up the oceans. Soveral uses hers every day, sweeping upwards from her chin across her cheeks and forehead and even – ultra-gently – across the eye area, to encourage lymphatic drainage, stimulate circulation, and send those dry, past-it skin particles on their way. She's such a good advert, I've followed her lead. Et voilà! Delicately glowing skin. ♦

Watch your cell-by date

There's only one secret to glowing skin: exfoliating. And there's a simple tool that'll help do the job

