

Bar Soap vs. Body Wash: Dermatologists Breakdown the Difference and How to Know Which Is Best for You

They both cleanse, but they're not created equal.

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this packaging usually consists of a paper or cardboard wrapper—some are even made of recycled goods. "They also are more cost-effective and last longer," Dr. Arora adds.

Simpler Ingredients Lists

Dr. Lal says bar soap often has fewer ingredients than liquid versions. If a pared-down ingredient list is more suitable for your skin, then a bar soap may be a better choice.

Bar Soap Cons

Prone to Bacterial Growth

Bar soaps are often made without preservatives. This means they can harbor bacteria if not stored properly. "Plus, most people use bar soaps everywhere (yes, everywhere!), and using one on the face and in private areas could potentially spread bacteria."

May Dry Out Skin

Bar soaps can contain skin lipid-removing sulfates and surfactants, which are known to dry out skin. And Dr. Lal adds that some bar soaps are even antibacterial, "which could mess up the skin microbiome." After all, it is known to leave it feeling squeaky clean. Dr. Arora adds that bar soap is easy to overuse, which may lead to disruption in the skin's barrier function.

Different pH Level Than Skin

Bar soaps get a bad rap for drying on the skin, mainly due to their alkaline nature. And some skin types notice this more than others.

"The natural pH of skin is slightly acidic, around 4.5 to 5.5, while bar soaps typically have a higher pH, resulting in removing the skin's natural

Body wash has been the go-to cleanser for some time now. It's transportable, stores well, and is easy to share. However, bar soap has recently been making a comeback. And it's not just your classic Dove for cleansing sensitive skin. In fact, bar soap formulas and offerings have expanded to address skin-care concerns and even to shampoo hair. So, in the battle of bar soap vs. body wash, which one will come out on top?

To find out everything there is to know about these common cleansers, InStyle tapped skin-care formulator and entrepreneur Mary Berry, as well as dermatologists [Navin Arora, D.O.](#), and [Karan Lal, D.O.](#), for their expertise. Not only did they share the

pros and cons of solid and liquid soap, but they also provided product recommendations so that you can figure out which is right for you. For the ultimate breakdown of bar soap vs. body wash, keep reading.

The Difference Between Bar Soap and Body Wash

The most significant difference between body wash and bar soap lies in their formulation and texture. Bar soap is solid and usually more concentrated, and as [Dr. Arora](#) shares, is formed through a

saponification process, usually consisting of fats and oils. On the other hand, body wash is a liquid cleanser that doesn't go through the same formulation process. Instead, it incorporates water, conditioning and moisturizing agents, and sometimes oils or active ingredients. "Both bar soap and body wash combine with oils and dirt on the skin, allowing them to rinse away with water. The surfactants in these products help to break down the oils on the skin," Dr. Arora says.

Bar Soap Pros

Eco-Friendly Packaging

Bar soaps are often more eco-friendly due to less packaging. Additionally,

oils and disrupting its protective barrier. This can lead to dryness, irritation, and even exacerbate conditions like eczema," Dr. Arora explains.

Body Wash Pros

Hydrating Formulas

Body wash is more hydrating than bar soap, especially since many formulas contain skin-loving ingredients like hyaluronic acid and aloe. "Body washes typically contain added moisturizing ingredients such as emollients, humectants, and oils to help replenish moisture in the skin," says Dr. Arora. "It is easier for a brand to incorporate these ingredients in body wash, which is why they are so beneficial." Since you usually dispense body wash through a pump or squeeze bottle, you don't run as big of a risk of using too much and drying out your skin.

Skin-Like pH Levels

Most popular body washes have a pH level more aligned with the skin, so there's less risk of disrupting the skin barrier and microbiome.

Targets Specific Skin Concerns

Body washes can be more versatile and user-friendly, catering to different skin types and concerns than bar soap. Modern-day body washes can also target other skin concerns, like breakouts, discoloration, and even keratosis pilaris—which are those little bumps you may feel on your arms, thighs, butt, or cheeks. "There are so many varieties of formulations, tailored to different skin types and preferences too, resulting in a more personalized and effective cleansing experience," Berry says.

Body Wash Cons

Longer Ingredient Lists

Unlike freestanding bar soaps, body washes are housed in plastic, glass, or metal bottles and tubes, which aren't as eco-conscious but lend a far more hygienic product with limited potential for bacteria to grow. However, the amount of preservatives and additives used to stabilize the formula can be higher. This is perfectly fine, so long as you are not sensitive to any of these ingredients. If you are sensitive to certain ingredients, it's best to check out product labels before you buy so you can avoid them.



Some Wasteful Packaging

Sustainability is atop many beauty brands' minds these days, so there's much less needless packaging. But because the soap is in a liquid state, it needs to be stored in a plastic container. This is harder to recycle than bar soap's cardboard packaging. That said, many brands use recycled material to soften the environmental blow.

How to Choose

The choice to use bar soap or body wash mainly depends on personal preference and skin type. While body wash is usually the go-to for more sensitive and dry skin types due to its moisturizing properties, Dr. Arora says bar soaps can be better for oily skin types or those who prefer a more straightforward cleansing routine without added ingredients. Also, if a simpler ingredient list is more suitable for your skin, then a bar soap may be a better choice.

The Bottom Line

While the decision is ultimately up to you, body wash is best for sensitive and dry skin types thanks to its moisturizing properties. However, bar soaps can be better for oily skin types or those who prefer a no-frills, yet effective, cleansing routine.

There's no right or wrong product to use to cleanse the skin on your body. At the end of the day, always consider the ingredients in a bar soap or body wash that you choose to use, and avoid ones with ingredients that irritate your skin.

