

# american spa

THE SPA & WELLNESS AUTHORITY

OCTOBER 2018

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ON TOP

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## a double-edged sword

First things first: There are two kinds of inflammation. One can be beneficial while the other is to be avoided at all costs. "Without inflammation receptors, wounds and infections wouldn't heal, so acute inflammation is an imperative part of the body's natural defense," says Rhonda Allison's Shannon Esau. But when it passes from the acute level to the chronic, things can get dicey. "Chronic inflammation is prolonged inflammation, which causes the skin not to respond to true inflammatory receptor signaling and become

**"Inflammation has good and bad qualities," says Shannon Esau, CEO and director of education at Rhonda Allison Cosmetics. "While it's easy to focus on the bad, inflammation is, at its core, a part of the body's natural defenses and healing process."**

like irritation and itchiness are the first to come to mind. But there's more to this protective mechanism than meets the eye. "Inflammation has good and bad qualities," says Shannon Esau, CEO and director of education at Rhonda Allison Cosmetics. "While it's easy to focus on the bad, inflammation is, at its core, a part of the body's natural defenses and healing process." It plays an important role in skin rejuvenation, and it's been used in spa treatments and skincare in one way or another for decades. "Inflammation occurs when tissue has been injured or abnormally stimulated, and it's a signal to the body to begin the healing process," says Lisamarie Garguilo, VP of spa sales and education for Luzern. There are five principle indicators of inflammation—pain, heat, redness, swelling, and loss of function—and each one is essential to skin regeneration, Esau says, because "during the inflammation stage, platelets release pro-youth growth factors and other pro-inflammatory molecules to heal, rebuild, and renew."

While most spa professionals prefer to harness the powers of inflammation for good, some are solidly in the anti-inflammation camp. "I don't believe it's ever okay for the skin," says Phyllis Hsieh, president of Sessa Skin Therapy. "When inflammation does occur, it's important to calm and soothe it immediately with a combination of antioxidants." For brands that prefer to take a natural approach, it's a sign of bigger problems. "Inflammation is a reaction to something that went wrong," says Genny Smith, creative trainer for boutiques and spas for Chérie. "It's really important to use

than it can be repaired, and the skin actually ages more quickly," he says.

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