

# Skincare Is My New Favorite Coping Mechanism

**When people massage their face, stroke their neck, or hold their skin, they're self-soothing without even realizing it.**

The following is excerpted from the article, "How Skincare Became My New Favorite Coping Mechanism in an Increasingly Stressful World" by Zoe Weiner.

You don't need me to tell you that we're all a little on edge right now. Most days feel like they're one notification away from pushing me into a full-blown panic spiral, and never have I ever been so aware of just how much is out of my control.

One thing I can control, though, is my skincare routine. And whenever my anxiety feels like it's on the brink of boiling over, that's exactly where I turn.

I spend a full minute massaging cleanser into my face in slow, circular motions. I rinse it off with a steaming washcloth, then wait exactly thirty seconds between serum layers. I pat (not rub!) moisturizer into my skin and press eye cream beneath my eyes. It's not that I believe ceramides can fix my life or that having glowing skin will miraculously make me feel better. It's that these small steps give me something structured to focus on when everything else feels chaotic.

In taking those moments for myself, I'm able to transform what was once a chore into a full-blown ritual, which calms my brain in a way that the usual methods have never been able to manage. While meditation and breath work have always amplified my thoughts, the act of applying skincare has somehow become the *only* thing that helps me quiet them.

Over the last few years, skincare has quietly transformed into something more than cosmetic maintenance; it has become a cultural reframing of skincare as emotional care.

In an era defined by chronic stress, it's started to function as a tool for nervous system regulation. These days, skincare isn't just about how you look—it's about how you feel.

Cortisol, the stress hormone, is pro-inflammatory. One of the most effective ways to lower that is—quite literally—at your fingertips. The face is densely packed with nerve endings that connect to the **vagus nerve**, a key pathway in calming the nervous system. “When you're touching, massaging, or slowly applying products, you're sending signals of safety to the nervous system. Those nerve endings stimulate the ventral vagal part of the nervous system, bringing the body into its most regulated, calm state.

As the body shifts into a parasympathetic state (AKA the nervous system's rest-and-digest mode), stress levels decrease, skin becomes calmer, and healing can take place.

While many of these nervous system–regulating effects can happen at home, having someone else perform the ritual introduces a different dimension. If someone else is giving you a facial, your eyes are closed, you're getting a massage, you're tuned out, and you're relaxing, and that lowers stress levels and cortisol. At the hands of a professional, the experience shifts from caring for yourself to being cared for, which allow for physical touch and connection that are often unmet.