

cuticle remover

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Cuticle Remover

An alkaline liquid or gel that dissolves the dead tissue on the nail plate so it can be pushed away. It is a genuinely useful product used correctly and a corrosive one used carelessly, and the difference is a couple of minutes on a timer.

What it dissolves, and what it must not

The distinction from [Cuticle Oil](#) matters here:

- **The cuticle proper** — a thin layer of **dead** tissue shed onto the nail plate from the underside of the skin fold. This is what the product is for.
- **The eponychium** — the **living** fold of skin at the base of the nail, and a barrier against water, bacteria and fungi. This must not be dissolved, pushed aggressively or cut.

Cuticle remover is a keratolytic. It cannot distinguish dead keratin from living skin, which is why the timing instruction is not decorative.

The chemistry

Active	Typical	Note
Potassium hydroxide	2–5%	The classic; strongly alkaline, pH 11–13
Sodium hydroxide	2–5%	Same behaviour
Triethanolamine	Milder alkali	Gentler, slower
Urea	Keratolytic humectant	The gentlest option
AHAs — lactic, glycolic	Acid route	Slower and much milder

Alkali **swells and hydrolyses keratin**, breaking the bonds holding the dead layer to the plate. Left on too long it does the same to living skin, causing irritation, whitening, burning and, in extreme cases, chemical burns.

Using it

1. **Soak briefly** in warm water first — a minute is enough.
2. **Apply along the cuticle line only**, not flooded over the whole nail.
3. **Time it. Two to three minutes, or whatever the product says — not longer.** This is the whole safety instruction.
4. **Push back gently** with a wooden stick or a rubber-tipped pusher. Metal pushers used with force scratch the nail plate and damage the matrix.
5. **Rinse thoroughly.** Residual alkali keeps working.
6. **Follow with cuticle oil**, because the alkali has left the area dry and the pH raised.

Do not cut. The temptation after a remover is to trim what has lifted, and cutting the eponychium is the standard route to a nail infection. Push, wipe, and stop.

Not on broken skin, hangnails, an infected nail fold, or eczema.

Where it sits in the rules

Cosmetic in the US — FDA primary category **(10) manicuring preparations** — with **no premarket approval**. A product containing 3% potassium hydroxide is sold over the counter with a timing instruction and no further control.

Under MoCRA, facilities register and products are listed, safety substantiation records must be held, and **serious adverse events are reportable to FDA within 15 business days**. Salon practice — including prohibitions on cutting living tissue in most US states — is regulated by **state cosmetology boards**.

In the EU, **sodium and potassium hydroxide are restricted under Annex III**, with specific limits for cuticle solvents (up to 5%) and mandatory warnings including "Contains alkali", "Avoid contact with eyes", "Can cause blindness" and "Keep out of reach of children". That is a materially more explicit labelling regime than the US one.

Shelf life

12–24 months after opening. Alkaline solutions are self-preserving at that pH, so microbial spoilage is not the issue.

What does change: **the alkali reacts with atmospheric carbon dioxide** over time, gradually neutralising and weakening the product. An old remover simply does less, which tempts longer application times — the wrong response. Keep it tightly capped and replace it rather than leaving it on longer.

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- [Cosmetics](#) — what the label is legally allowed to say, and the full catalogue.
- The rest of *Care* — [Cuticle Oil](#) · [Nail Strengthener](#) · [Nail Cream and Lotion](#) · [Nail Ridge Filler](#).
- Regulatory statements here follow the FDA and EU sources listed on [Cosmetics](#), read 16 August 2026.