



# Big-Day Beauty

## Your *Panic-Free* Plan

A MILESTONE birthday party. A wedding. A school reunion. Events like these (or any other where you'll be photographed or come face to face with people whose opinion you value) require a take-no-chances plan for looking as GREAT as possible. So we asked hair, skin and makeup pros to devise prepping strategies for four timelines: SIX MONTHS, SIX WEEKS, SIX DAYS—or (silent scream) tonight. *The goal?* Whether you have months or mere hours to get ready, you will *look amazing*

*{ By Jennifer Laing }*

PHOTOGRAPHED BY GENTL & HYERS



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## YOU'VE GOT

# 6

## MONTHS

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# W

HEN A *More* senior editor received an invite to her 20-year college reunion, she joked that while she didn't have time to impress her former classmates by winning a Pulitzer, she did have a few weeks to get her hair, skin and teeth in better shape. So she mapped out a pre-event prep plan that included a haircut and color, a light chemical peel, at-home teeth whitening and, closer to the date, a manicure, pedicure and light spray tan (to leave her looking relaxed and healthy). "I didn't do much that I wouldn't normally have done"—except the peel and the tan, which were the beauty director's idea—"but I timed it to all come together right before the reunion," she says. The result? "That weekend I felt as if I looked like me, but on my best day."

How good we feel about ourselves may be an important component of how good we look, says Judith Sills, PhD, a Philadelphia psychologist. Pre-event primping instills confidence, she explains, enabling us to show up at a potentially nerve-racking occasion with our best face on (literally). "Confidence just comes easier when your roots aren't showing, your middle isn't sagging over your jeggings and your hairstyle isn't the same as it was in 1972," says Sills. So to look—and feel—great on a day that really matters, choose the strategy that best fits your time frame.

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SURE, it's early in the game, but if you're super busy, super organized or just someone who lives by her Outlook or iPhone calendar, it's never too soon to get started.

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### YOUR SKIN

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You can improve your complexion a lot in half a year, says Cheryl Karcher, MD, a New York cosmetic dermatologist and consultant for Avon. In the hands of a skilled doctor—equipped with an arsenal of lasers—fine lines, uneven skin tone, acne scars, broken blood vessels, leg veins and even sunspots can all be virtually erased in four to six months. For best results, most of the aforementioned conditions require four to six sessions—at \$500 and up per session—so you need six months to prep. Go to [plasticsurgery.com](http://plasticsurgery.com) or [aad.org](http://aad.org) to find a certified plastic surgeon or dermatologist with a specialty in lasers. For subtler skin improvement (with a lower price tag), you can also up the ante on your daily skin-care regimen and incorporate vitamin A (aka a retinoid) if you aren't already using it. It will take three to six months to see the skin-rejuvenating results. Ask your dermatologist for a prescription-strength retinoid like Retin-A or Renova, or pick up an over-the-counter formula such as SkinCeuticals Retinol NightCream in 0.5 (\$54; [skinceuticals.com](http://skinceuticals.com)).

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### YOUR HAIR

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Give your stylist the heads-up on your big event so together you can figure out how to use your time well—by growing out a cut you dislike, for example, or getting unhealthy hair in better condition. If you want to experiment with a major color change, like going from dark to light or swapping a warm tone for a cool one, this long

lead time is ideal, because it allows you to get used to the new look while also giving you a chance to reverse course if the new color is not for you, says Kyle White, senior colorist at the Oscar Blandi Salon in Manhattan.

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### YOUR MAKEUP

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It's a bit early to decide on cosmetic specifics, especially if you're working to improve your complexion (which may mean you need less makeup down the road). But if you think you may want to hire a professional for the day of the event or just for learning some application tricks, begin looking for the right one now, says Sonia Kashuk, celebrity makeup artist and creator of an eponymous makeup line sold at Target. Where to start? Get referrals from friends and your hairstylist. Then meet with a few artists and ask to see photos of their work to make sure their aesthetic suits yours. You can also head to your favorite makeup brand's beauty counter. Most offer free makeovers, which is a great way to test the products and possibly find an artist you trust. And since you have time to tackle major issues, consider your eyelashes. If you've noticed they're getting sparser, think about beginning a course of lash-growth-accelerating Latisse (available only by prescription); it gives full results in 16 weeks. A nonprescription option is Peter Thomas Roth Lashes to Die For Platinum eyelash treatment (\$125; [sephora.com](http://sephora.com)), a lash conditioner shown to boost growth. Finally, if you've never had a makeup artist or brow specialist shape your eyebrows, this may be the time. "It can take up to four months to get neglected brows in good shape," says Robyn Cosio, brow specialist at the Sharon Dorram Color at Sally Hershberger salon in New York.

Once you've cherry-picked the advice you want to follow for your six-month strategy, stay the course until six weeks before your event. At that point, continue with the following line of attack.

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## YOU'VE GOT

# 6

## WEEKS

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WHETHER you have been following the six-month strategy or are just starting, there is still ample time to get your hair and skin in tip-top shape.

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## YOUR SKIN

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If you are already investing in injectables (Botox, Restylane or the like)—or you feel ready to take the plunge—now is the time to schedule the appointment, since most injections require one to two weeks to take effect, with results lasting three to six months (for muscle-relaxing Botox or Dysport) or six months or more (for fillers such as Restylane, Juvéderm and Radiesse). “Scheduling a visit now gives you enough time to recover [from any bruising or swelling], evaluate the effects and tweak or top off as necessary,” says Elizabeth Tanzi, MD, a dermatologist based in Washington, D.C. Cost: \$500 and up per treatment. You may also want to consider splurging on a professional peel (\$50 and up) at a doctor’s office or spa to slough off dead skin and reveal a brighter, smoother complexion. This can be done now, and again two weeks before the event. You may look red and flaky for up to a week post-peel, so plan accordingly. If the in-office route doesn’t, ahem, a-peel, give yourself a weekly at-home treatment (six in all) using a kit such as Dr. Dennis Gross Skincare Extra-Strength Alpha-Beta Peel (\$28 for 10; [dgskinicare.com](#)). The peels will reveal fresher, more radiant skin over time, guaranteeing you’ll be glowing by the big day.

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## YOUR HAIR

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Have you booked an appointment with your stylist to test-drive various ‘dos? If not, please do so, especially if you’re going for a look that’s different from your everyday one. The condition of your hair is also important now. “Healthy hair reflects more light, and shine is a must-have for those Kodak moments,” says White. Besides the basics, like investing in a good shampoo and conditioner for color-treated hair and using a deep conditioner weekly (moisturizing for dry hair, strengthening for weak hair), White suggests adding a water filter to your showerhead to reduce the presence of the shine-zapping chlorine and heavy metals present in most tap water. For your shopping list: Pantene Pro-V Daily Moisture Renewal 2-Minute Masque (\$7; [drugstores](#)), for hair that needs moisture; Aveda Damage Remedy Intensive Restructuring Treatment (\$31; [aveda.com](#)), for strands that seem fragile and breakage-prone; and the Slim-Line Universal Shower Filter (\$25; [bedbathandbeyond.com](#)), for all hair types. It is also time to get your strands cut in the style you intend to wear for the event. (The week before the date, schedule a clean-up trim to be sure the style looks fresh, but don’t do anything major inside of the six-week mark, advises celebrity stylist Oscar Blandi.) Tip: If you’re interested in adding density or a little length, discuss extension options with a stylist soon. Two popular versions: Bonded extensions (like GreatLengths; [hairuwear.com](#) for salon locations) can take four to six hours to apply and will last up to three months. Cost: \$700 to \$4,000. A less expensive alternative is long-term, tape-on extensions like Hotheads Hair (800-327-7971 for salon locations), which can be applied in one to two hours and will last up to eight weeks. Cost: \$30 to \$1,500.

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## YOUR MAKEUP

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If you’re planning to hire a makeup artist, schedule a consultation or lesson. If your lashes are looking skimpy (and you aren’t already using a growth-boosting serum like Latisse), you can consider getting lash extensions.

“They’re ideal for sprucing up your look for a special occasion and can shave off a few years by creating the illusion of an eye-lift,” says Courtney Akai of Courtney Akai Lash Boutique in New York. You should know in advance, however, that extensions—in which individual synthetic lashes are fused with glue onto your natural lashes—can take one to two hours to apply and will last six to eight weeks. So if you love the effect, plan to schedule a touch-up appointment a week before your event. If you’ve had extensions before and already know that you like them, arrange to have them applied within two weeks of your occasion. To find a salon near you that does lash extensions, go to [novalash.com](#). Cost: \$125 and up.

Once you’ve selected some tips from the six-week strategy, you’re in good shape until six days before your event. At that point, transition to the six-day countdown, below.

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## YOU'VE GOT

# 6

## DAYS

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OK, let’s get down to business. To up the odds that your hair and makeup will look stellar, follow as much of the routine below as you can.

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## YOUR SKIN

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A light peel at home (skip the in-office version—you’re a bit too close to your event to risk the potential redness and flaking) will help remove dead cells and even out the texture of the skin, says New York and Miami dermatologist Fredric Brandt,

MD. Try the Dr. Dennis Gross Skincare kit mentioned in the six-week strategy or Philosophy Microdelivery Mini Peel Pads (\$35 for 60 pads; [sephora.com](http://sephora.com)). If your skin is not overly sensitive, Tanzi says you could also go deeper with an in-office microdermabrasion treatment, followed by a skin-calming LED (light-emitting diode) treatment. Average cost: \$150 for microdermabrasion, \$275 for the LED. “The microdermabrasion gives skin a healthy glow, and the LED helps calm skin down,” she explains. (Neither produces the redness and flaking of a peel.) A dermatologist can help determine which treatment is best for you at this point, but to be on the safe side, schedule anything stronger than the at-home peel early in the week to allow for plenty of recovery time.

You may also want to apply self-tanner or, even better, have a professional do it. We’re not suggesting you aim for that bronze look you achieved during spring break back in the day—just the kind of subtle, healthy glow that makes almost anyone look fresher. Plus, even the lightest tan hides a host of problems, such as uneven tone, broken capillaries, arm cellulite and acne scars. Our favorite at-home formulas: Bare Escentuals Faux Tan Sunless Tanner (\$22; [bareescentuals.com](http://bareescentuals.com)) or, for a very sheer, understated glow, Perricone MD No Sun Tanner (\$69; [sephora.com](http://sephora.com)).

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## YOUR HAIR

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It goes without saying: This probably isn’t the time to try a dramatic new style. But do try to squeeze in a trim early in the week, since it often takes a few days to get used to even the most minor cut. “Be very clear with your stylist: You’re just dusting the ends,” says Blandi. If you’re able, freshen your color, too, especially if you like the look of just-highlighted hair. If you don’t have time for a cut and/or color, you can at least boost

your hair’s sheen with a salon or at-home gloss treatment such as Oscar Blandi At-Home Salon Glaze Shine Rinse (\$27; [oscarblandi.com](http://oscarblandi.com)).

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## YOUR MAKEUP

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If you plan to it apply yourself, do a test run or two and have your husband, partner or friend snap a picture. “It’s easier to look at yourself objectively in a photograph than in a mirror,” says Kashuk. (While you’re at it, ask your photo snapper to weigh in as well.) If you are itching for a little more drama than you get from your everyday makeup and you aren’t already wearing lash extensions, you may want to have a professional artist apply false lashes the day of the event. Tip: Individual lashes applied at just the outer corners will give a more natural effect than a full strip of falsies will. Now is also the time to think of your nails: painted or no? Your call, but get them groomed (professionally or at home) within three days of your event. Tip: If you are woefully inept at DIY manis (and most of us are), stick-on nail strips like Sally Hansen Salon Effects Nail Polish Strips (\$9; [drugstores](http://drugstores)) make it easier to appear polished. And don’t overlook the cosmetic value of whiter teeth. They can brighten your whole face and boost your confidence about smiling. The fastest, most effective at-home whitener we’ve found is Crest 3D White Two-Hour Express Whitestrips (\$55; [drugstores](http://drugstores)). Finally, if your brows are looking a little unruly, schedule a brow shaping at least two days before the event. “You don’t want to risk redness, a rash or an allergic reaction to brow wax any closer to the big day,” says Cosio.

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## YOU’VE GOT

# 6

## HOURS (OR LESS)

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WE’RE keeping this section short because you have work to do. Read quickly—then do some power primping.

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## YOUR SKIN

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An at-home mask can plump and lift in little time, helping your complexion look the way it does on the last day of a (one can dream) month-long vacation. Some of our favorite at-home treatments: Peter Thomas Roth Instant FirmX (\$48; [sephora.com](http://sephora.com)), a 10-minute mask that tightens tired, lax skin, leaving you looking refreshed for up to 12 hours; and StriVectin’s Dermal Infusion Mask (\$69; [sephora.com](http://sephora.com)), which soothes red, dry or irritated skin and makes even the most parched complexion look and feel plumper and softer. You can also do a quick, gentle peel to brighten the skin (for best results, do the peel first, mask later). A new one we like that’s safe for all skin types: M-61 Power-Pro Peel (\$28 for 10 peels; [bluemercury.com](http://bluemercury.com)).

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## YOUR HAIR

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You probably have a salon appointment scheduled for today—assuming you knew about your event in advance. If, however, you’re on the Hail Mary plan, head to a walk-in salon or blow-dry bar for a professional blow-out. One reasonably priced (\$40 per service) national chain to try if it’s in your neck of the woods: the Drybar ([thedrybar.com](http://thedrybar.com) for locations). “A blowout with body [as opposed to one that is super straight and sleek] is always a safe choice, because it helps you look polished and never goes out of style,” says Blandi. But to be certain you and your stranger-stylist are on the same page, bring along a picture of a style you would like to

emulate (or, better yet, a photo of yourself with your hair looking its best). If the event came as a total surprise and you're just doing the best you can with hair that hasn't even been washed within 24 hours, spritz some dry shampoo into your roots. This will revive the hair and add a bit of volume. Try Suave Professionals Dry Shampoo (\$3; *drugstores*). If your hair is truly beyond repair, a ponytail (even a stubby one) or a simple knot at the nape of the neck is fail-safe and age appropriate. (This is why Grace Kelly's signature chignon is called a classic style.)

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## YOUR MAKEUP

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Doing your own makeup but haven't had time for a trial run? Experts strongly recommend you keep things simple. Smooth on your favorite foundation or tinted moisturizer, brighten your complexion with a touch of bronzer or blush, apply a gray or brown eyeliner to your top lash line (then smudge), swipe on mascara, fill in sparse spots in your brows—and add a creamy lipstick in a looks-good-on-everyone, bright berry color. Our favorite lip colors for fall: Dior Rouge Nude 683 (\$32; *dior.com*), a brownish berry and Chanel Rouge Allure in Exaltée (\$33; *chanel.com*), a vivid strawberry. Tip: If you're hitting a salon for your hair, ask if there's a makeup artist on staff who can apply a simple, natural face and, if there's time, add a few extra lashes to the outer corners of your top lash line. “A few falsies really pack a punch and can transform your face without adding any extra color,” says Kashuk. If time is too tight for a pedicure or even a manicure, use a sheer base coat like Deborah Lippmann Turn Back Time Base Coat (\$18; *beauty.com*). It disguises ridges, imperfections and discolorations in the nail and dries in seconds. Finally, if you aren't already sporting a subtle glow, consider

smoothing on a faux-glow lotion like St. Tropez One Night Only Instant Glow Body Lotion (\$18; *sephora.com*). This goof-proof DHA-free formula gives skin a natural-looking, transfer-proof sheen that shows up instantly and is easily washed away with soap and water. Last piece of advice? Smile—and be sure someone takes photos. Who knows when you'll look this gorgeous again! ✨

