

The TV Series

HEALTHY BODY HEALTHY MIND

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OVERCOMING ACNE

In a world where magazines are filled with beautiful, flawless faces, it's no wonder most teens feel the pressure to look their best. But this on-going pressure can take its toll when acne is a constant part of life. Some people think of acne as nothing more than a superficial condition. But, in reality its effects can go far beyond superficial and with consequences that are much more than skin deep. Acne can scar physically and emotionally. For many people mild acne will eventually disappear over time. But for some patients, if left untreated, acne can cause immense suffering. It is not life-threatening but it certainly is emotionally devastating for patients no matter what age. Acne can occur on the face, as well as the neck, chest, back, shoulders, and upper arms, anywhere pores produce oil. If left untreated severe acne can leave permanent scarring.

Acne happens when oil (sebaceous) glands come to life around puberty, when these glands are stimulated by male hormones that are produced in the adrenal glands of both males and females. The oil glands, which are located just underneath the skin, continuously produce and secrete oil through openings in the skin. The oil lubricates and protects the skin. Under certain circumstances, cells that are close to the openings of the oil glands block the openings. This causes a buildup of oil beneath the skin. Bacteria, which live in everyone's skin feast on this oil, multiply, and cause the surrounding tissues to become inflamed. If the inflammation is right near the surface, a pustule (a red circle with a white or yellow center) occurs; if it's deeper, a papule (small, red, tender bumps with no head) occurs; deeper and it's a cyst (cystic acne). If the oil breaks through to the surface, the result is a "whitehead." If the oil becomes oxidized the oil changes from white to black, and the result is a "blackhead."

Acne is a common disorder affecting people of all races and ages. In fact, more than 90% of Americans will get acne at some point in their lives, and at different degrees of severity. Although most teenagers get some form of acne, adults in their 20's, 30's, 40's or even older can develop it as well. Acne is most likely to happen during hormonal changes. Women entering menopause; women who have started or stopped taking birth control pills; and teenagers... all are potential candidates.

What Causes acne?

There are several factors associated with acne; hormones, genetics and stress are the most common and not everyone is affected by them in the same way. People mainly develop acne during adolescence and is most prevalent in those aged 16 to 18 years. Some reasons are:

Oil - Oil is the number one cause of acne. In teens, there are higher levels of sex hormones at puberty. These hormones are converted in the skin to dihydrotestosterone (DHT) which stimulates oil glands to enlarge. The oil glands, called sebaceous glands, produce sebum (oil from sebaceous glands). The more sebum, the more likely it is that acne will be troublesome. If sebum and keratin (dead skin cells) block the skin pores, the wall of the follicles may rupture.

Bacteria

Some people have particularly severe acne. This may be because of:

- ▶ Genetic factors (family members have bad acne)
- ▶ Hormonal factors
- ▶ Pressure from hats, headbands & chin-straps
- ▶ Environmental factors
- ▶ Petroleum oils
- ▶ Psychological stress and depression
- ▶ Dietary factors such as excessive dairy products
- ▶ Reaction to certain medications

TREATMENTS and OPTIONS

If patients are finding little to no results with over the counter products, it could mean their acne needs more specialized attention. For many patients, a trip to the dermatologists' office can bring about the first real results in dealing with the problem of acne. If caught early it can essentially be cured or controlled with the right treatment strategy.

Generally **topical treatments** are the first line therapy for mild to moderate acne. Topical vitamin A.'s, topical benzoyl peroxide, and topical antibacterial work in different ways primarily beginning at the pore level. Some medications keep the bacteria from multiplying while others actually open up the pore and allow the sebum to come out (not clogging underneath the skin). If topical treatments aren't effective, doctors might prescribe **oral antibiotics** like tetracycline, doxycycline, minocycline or erythromycin that are designed to decrease inflammation and decrease bacteria from inside the body.

Birth control pills may also be used to treat acne. They are known to significantly improve acne by decreasing the presence of excess androgen hormones. Along with a dermatologist, women should speak with their gynecologist about possible side effects before starting this treatment.

In cases of unresponsive or severe acne, isotretinoin may be used. But patients will need to have periodic blood work done, and be carefully monitored with follow-up visits with their doctor.

Skin Care - There's a whole multitude of choices for people in terms of skin care; procedures such as microdermabrasion, chemical peels, and laser abrasion treatments are recommended for those with acne. These procedures can be done in either a dermatologist office, a salon, or even at home. Before acne becomes a problem, however there are a few basic skin regimens a person can do on a daily basis to keep their skin free of dirt and oil, but be sure to consult a physician prior to beginning any type of treatment.

Reduce Oil - Oil is normal; you can't stop your oil glands from producing it, but what you can do to get rid of oil on the surface of the skin, and reduce that embarrassing shine is to:

- ▶ *Use a gentle astringent/toner to wipe away oil.*
- ▶ *Use products containing glycolic acid or one of the other alpha-hydroxy acids.*
- ▶ *Apply masques containing sulfur and other ingredients draw out facial oil.*
- ▶ *Antibacterial pads containing benzoyl peroxide are useful to help wipe away oil.*
- ▶ *Use a light skin moisturizer and an oil-free makeup.*

Open Pores - Cleanse with a 5% benzoyl peroxide wash. An alternative for those who are allergic to benzoyl peroxide is 2% salicylic acid.

▶ *Use Exfoliating cleansers and masques. These products contain either fine granules or salicylic acid in a concentration that makes it a very mild peeling agent. These products remove the outer layer of the skin, and thus open pores.*

▶ *Apply a gel or cream containing 5% benzoyl peroxide. An alternative is sulfur or resorcinol.*

Kill Bacteria - Use antibacterial cleansers: The most popular ingredient in over-the-counter antibacterial cleansers is benzoyl peroxide.

▶ *Topical (external) applications: These products come in the form of gels, creams, and lotions, which are applied to the affected area. The active ingredients that kill surface bacteria include benzoyl peroxide, sulfur, and resorcinol.*

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q Why is it important for people with acne to be patient during treatment?

A It is important to give each regimen or drug enough time to work before giving up on it and moving on to other treatments. Otherwise, treatment becomes a merry-go-round going nowhere. With patience and perseverance medications will work!

Q What is the real psychological impact of acne?

A The physical and emotional aspects of acne can be devastating. According to a survey conducted by the American Academy of Dermatology, acne causes one out of ten teenagers to experience low self-esteem. Early treatment is the most effective way to help ward off what could be acne's lasting effects.

Q Is it harmful to pick or squeeze a pimple?

A Yes. In general, acne lesions should not be picked or squeezed by the patient. In particular, inflammatory acne lesions should never be squeezed. Squeezing forces infected material into the surrounding skin, causing additional inflammation and possible scarring.

Q With more than 90% of the U.S. population being affected by acne, what percentage actually seek medical help?

A Studies show just over 10% of people with acne seeks the help of a doctor for treatment.

Q When should you start to treat acne?

A Since over 90% of Americans get acne at some time, there is no "correct" time to treat it. The best advice is to take action when you begin to feel uncomfortable about it.

Q Is it important for patients with acne to use sunscreen?

A Experts agree sunscreen is extremely important to lessen scarring for all skin types. Sunscreen and most acne treatments can cause patients to be more sensitive to the sun.

Q Is it true that poor hygiene has little to do with acne?

A Surprisingly, dirt deposits in our pores aren't the cause of acne. Poor hygiene has little to do with it. In fact, excess washing and vigorous scrubbing could possibly cause the skin to over produce oils, causing even more problems with acne.

Q What role does diet play in acne?

A Acne is not caused by food. Following a strict diet will not clear your skin. While some people feel that their acne is aggravated by certain foods, particularly chocolate, colas, peanuts, shellfish and some fatty foods, there is no scientific evidence that suggests food causes or influences acne. Avoid any foods which seem to worsen your acne and, for your overall health, eat a balanced diet--but diet shouldn't really matter if the acne is being appropriately treated.

DATA, RESOURCES, HOTLINES, PUBLICATIONS and MEDIA CONTACTS

American Academy of Dermatology

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American Society for Dermatologic Surgery

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www.asds-net.org

American Osteopathic College of Dermatology

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American Society of Dermatology, Inc.

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www.abderm.org

University of California San Diego Pediatric and Adolescent Dermatology

9500 Gilman Dr
La Jolla, CA 92093
(888) 534-2230
www.ucsd.edu

For a DVD copy of a 30 minute documentary
style program on "Acne"
call 1-888-380-6500 or visit.

www.healthybodyhealthymind.com

To watch on television,
consult your local public television station
for air-times in your area.

