

## **ACNE - Don't let it get under your skin!**

If you suffer from acne or pimples, you're not alone. Acne affects 85% of people aged between 12 and 25 and many others in their 30's and 40's.

But the good news is that there are many things you can do to prevent and treat acne.



### **What is acne?**

Acne is a skin condition where the oil producing (sebaceous) glands at the base of hair follicles become inflamed. Acne is common in adolescence when surges of hormones circulating in the bloodstream causes an over-production of oil. The oil, also known as sebum, produced by the glands cannot escape because the hair follicles become blocked. When the oil in the follicle is exposed to air, it becomes black, forming what is commonly known as blackheads. When the blockage becomes infected with bacteria that feed on the oil, the body produces white blood cells to fight the infection. A build up of pus that's produced when the body fights the infection usually causes a lump that may have a white peak (known as a whitehead).

A more severe form of acne known as cystic acne requires medical attention. If you have cystic acne your acne is likely to be painful with pimples formed below the skin as cysts. If left untreated this may cause permanent scarring and medical treatment is advisable.

### **What causes acne?**

There are a number of causes of acne; some of the main causes include:

- Genetics – some aspects of acne are hereditary.
- Stress – stress often causes the body to create additional oil and sweat on the skin which can contribute to worsening acne.
- Hormones – as hormone balances change throughout your life, the severity of acne can change, disappear and re-appear. While teenage hormones can create acne, acne may appear at other times when hormone levels fluctuate including changes related to hormone altering medication and some dietary supplements (for example tribulus).
- Over washing or skin drying out – while it's important to keep skin clean to prevent acne, over washing, particularly harsh soaps can cause skin to be over dry, closing pores and sending messages to your body to produce more oil, which worsens the problem.
- Under washing – conversely not washing regularly (e.g. twice daily with a mild cleanser) may allow a build up of oil and bacteria to form that clogs pores and
- Picking at acne – picking at acne can not only inflame the existing acne, but it can also spread the acne causing bacteria to surrounding skin causing new blemishes and also potentially cause scarring.
- Make up – make up that contains oil or other substances that block pores can cause or make acne worse.

### **Busting the Myth**

While chocolate and milk are often said to cause acne, scientific studies have disproved this theory. So while chocolate should be enjoyed in moderation it will not cause breakouts.

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## Treating acne

There are a range of natural treatments for acne that include:

- [Calcium supplements](#) may treat acne if you don't get enough calcium in your daily diet.
- [Selenium](#) (200 mcg per day combined with 10 mg Vitamin E for six to twelve weeks) may alleviate acne.
- Eat plenty of foods high in potassium, as a deficiency of this mineral may cause acne. Foods high in potassium include bananas and potatoes.
- [Zinc](#) (90 - 135 mg per day) may improve the condition of acne patients in 75% of cases.
- Cold water splashed on your face can help improve circulation which helps your body fight bacteria
- Exercise helps improve circulation and reduce stress ([read more about stress](#))
- Applying tea tree oil or lavender oil on blemishes as they occur to help reduce inflammation and kill bacteria
- Drinking plenty of water will help flush out toxins, and a healthy diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables will help ensure vitamin deficiencies that may cause or worsen acne are addressed.
- Oral tablets such as [Schuessler Comb D Skin Disorder tissue salts](#).

There are also topical treatments available at healthcare stores and pharmacies that you may wish to try.

If you have severe acne, or acne that doesn't respond to the above treatments, it is advisable to visit a dermatologist. Even severe acne can usually be well treated by medications a dermatologist can prescribe. However, as some medical treatments can cause side effects, it is advisable to try gentler solutions first. Your GP will be able to provide you with a referral.

## Preventing acne

Once you've managed to treat your acne, there are many steps you can take to help prevent new blemishes, which include:

- Reducing stress levels if possible. This may be in the form of gentle exercise, reducing the causes of stress, relaxation activities or meditation.
- Washing the affected areas of your body twice daily with a gentle cleanser such as Cetaphil. Avoid using soaps or cleansers that leave your skin very dry.
- Moisturise with a light moisturizer that does not contain oil. This will help prevent skin from drying out and trapping oil in pores.
- Neem Oil (as an ingredient in Soaps and Skin creams and applied topically) may help to prevent your skin's pores from becoming infected.

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