



Adult Acne

Even Teens and Adults Can Agree, Acne Isn't Cool at Any Age

TEXT BY KEITH GILLOGLY

Like curfews and awkward first dates, acne is something people hope to leave behind in their teenage years. Yet acne can carry into or even first appear during adulthood. Whether it's occasional pimples or a more persistent problem, adult acne sufferers have options to control their condition.

Teenagers get acne due to surging hormones called androgens. In women, these same hormones can fluctuate before, during or after pregnancy, or when starting or stopping the birth control pill, causing acne. Women can also experience a surge in progesterone during their menstrual cycle, which causes acne. Adult acne in women stems from these hormonal shifts. In men, adult acne resembles teenage acne that is carried into adulthood, but adult acne is generally more common in women, says Dr. Matthew McClelland, a dermatologist with Providence Medical Group-Bridgeport

Dermatology in Tigard. For women, adult acne will very often fade by menopause, if not sooner, McClelland says. Yet women do have some advantages to men. "For women, the treatment is actually easier, because we can target the hormonal imbalance that is causing the acne to occur," he says.

Spironolactone, an inexpensive oral medication that's typically used to control high blood pressure, has proven effective at blocking androgens and controlling acne in women, McClelland says. Birth control pills can also stabilize the hormones behind acne.

For men and women, certain antibiotic pills can reduce acne, but are generally used only for short time periods to control flare-ups. Isotretinoin (Accutane) is another oral drug that can result in permanent acne reduction for men or women. Treatment typically lasts six months. Isotretinoin has been linked to side effects, however, such as dry skin, joint or muscle pain, and birth defects in pregnant women. Also, women taking isotretinoin need to use two forms of birth control, McClelland says.

Some acne treatments target oily skin, which is more common in teenagers, but can leave adults with dry skin, because their skin isn't as naturally oily. McClelland

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recommends using a mild soap like Dove Unscented or a Cetaphil cleanser if dry skin results. All acne sufferers should wash their faces morning and night, he says.

Topical treatment creams can be adjusted depending on skin type and acne severity, says Tachi Dodero, an aesthetician and owner of Tachi Skin Care in Medford. When determining which creams to apply, Dodero evaluates patients for inflamed acne—characterized by red, sensitive areas with cysts, papules and pustules—and non-inflamed acne, which is marked by blackheads and rough, bumpy areas that aren’t as sensitive. Most people have a combination of both, she says.

Dodero says she’s heard from acne sufferers who have tried a bevy of natural remedies from baking soda to apple cider vinegar, but report these treatments usually are ineffective. Common pharmaceutical treatment ingredients include alpha and beta hydroxy acids, benzoyl peroxide, clindamycin and Retin-A. Instead of picking at a persistent pimple or scab, Dodero recommends icing it for a few minutes several times a day to reduce inflammation. “With acne, there’s no cure for it. What you’re doing is basically controlling it. And there are amazing ways to do that where you don’t need a prescription,” Dodero says, noting that prescription pills, and any unwanted or harmful side effects, can be avoided.

The key factors behind adult acne are hormones and genetic predisposition. Having parents and siblings who experience adult or teenage acne can indicate the likelihood of developing acne. “I like to tell people this is not your fault. This is beyond your control, but we can do something about it,” McClelland says. Environmental factors aren’t insignificant, however. Acne from occlusion, when skin oil glands become blocked, can result from simply resting your face against your hand, frequently wearing a helmet chin strap or mask, or wearing hairstyles with bangs, McClelland says.

For women, pore-clogging chemicals, dyes and other ingredients run rampant in cosmetics and facial products, Dodero says. And natural products can be no better. For example, coconut oil, a popular face wash ingredient, clogs pores, she says. “A lot of people want to do things that are natural, and I understand that. But natural doesn’t always mean better,” Dodero says. ■

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT CAUSES OF ADULT ACNE

It’s a common misconception that certain dietary items influence acne prevalence. While some studies have shown a link between acne and skim milk or high-sugar consumption, there isn’t enough evidence to claim that these factors are universal, McClelland says. Dodero notes that salty foods with high iodine and iodide levels could adversely affect those who are acne prone, however. Poor hygiene isn’t a likely contributor either, McClelland says. He says he has seen people have acne flare-ups possibly influenced by climate, such as those moving from Oregon to someplace with drier air, such as Utah or Colorado. But he hasn’t seen humid weather spur acne, as may be commonly believed. Stress also contributes to acne, Dodero says.



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