

Acne: Causes and Treatment

Acne can and does affect skin of any age. Teenage acne is particularly devastating, leaving marks, physically and psychologically. Unfortunately, the causes of acne are commonly misunderstood and mistreated, often making the condition worse. But who would know? Slick marketing campaigns tell us that certain products will magically make acne disappear, without lifestyle changes and without addressing the actual causes of acne which are hormones, nutrition, stress, and cleanliness.

To effectively treat acne, we must consider the anatomy of a pimple. An increased flow of oil from the sebaceous glands becomes congested. As skin rebuilds itself, cells shed and become trapped, forming a plug. When this hardened sebaceous material is exposed, oxidation creates a blackhead. Enlarged pores and increased oil production support the overproduction of bacteria, which then feeds on the congested matter. Bacteria converts excess oil to free fatty acids, creating irritation, redness, and discomfort. The escalation from a simple pimple to a complex case of acne indicates an out-of-balance condition from the complex interaction of hormones, nutrition, stress, and cleanliness.

Hormones are chemical messengers governing actions and reactions in the body. Sex hormones, androgens, are a causative piece in the acne puzzle because they trigger the sebaceous glands. Androgens are responsible for male maturation, explaining why so many teenage males endure acne.

Females produce smaller amounts of androgens, but if the balance is upset, it can render a female pimple-prone due to increased oil and an inability to process this excess. Many women are blemish-free for most of the month but incur a regular pre-period pimple, in part due to increased levels of progesterone. While progesterone itself does not cause acne, heightened levels call on the stores of other substances involved in fat metabolism, causing oil to accumulate and setting the stage for the dreaded pre-menstrual breakout.

Nutrition plays an important role in treating skin conditions. A recent television ad showed images of teenagers enjoying pizza, sodas, and candy bars while the voice-over talked about the success of their acne system. The real message? "Buy our products, and you can keep eating junk." Sadly, rather than educate about the connection between food and skin, con-

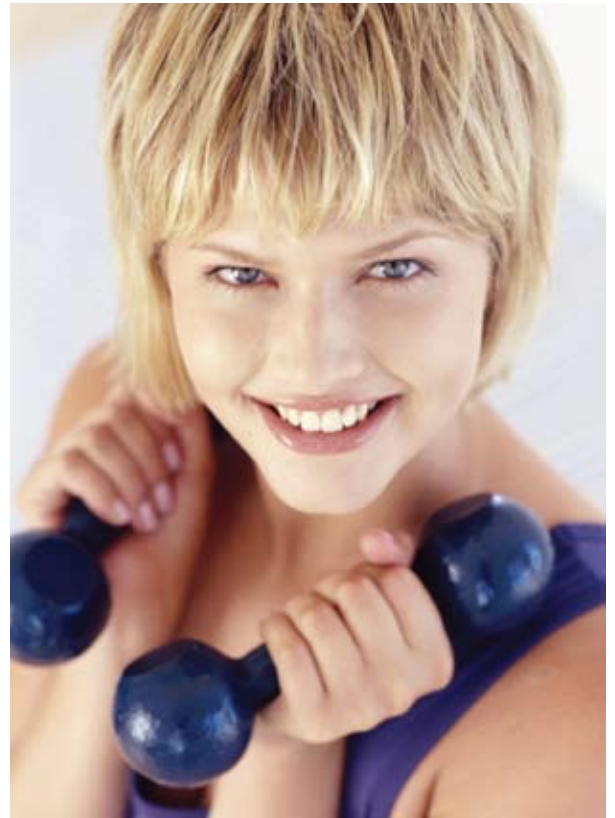
ventional skincare offers quick fixes which often create such extremely dry conditions that rebound acne, worse than the original bout, occurs.

In reality, the foods we eat have the potential to interact with reproductive hormones, setting the stage for acne. Fats and sugars contribute to conditions conducive to acne. According to Nicholas Perricone, MD, a respected dermatologist and well-known author, the problem is sugar's ability to trigger inflammatory responses. High-glycemic foods (starchy carbs like rice, potatoes, and pasta as well as some fruits and vegetables) are pro-inflammatory, pro-acne, and rapidly convert to sugar in the blood stream, creating perfect conditions for acne. Fats work in tandem with stress, further contributing to acne.

Stress also has an effect on skin. The link between stress, nutrition, and acne is found in the adrenal glands. Adrenal secretions affect the way fat metabolizes. If your diet contains excessive fat not digested properly due to an imbalance of adrenal secretions, excess oil in the sebaceous glands appears, setting the stage for the P. Acnes Bacteria and full-blown acne. Stress creates ideal conditions for acne because the skin is deprived of the vital nutrients and oxygen it requires, impeding proper elimination.

Another important factor is cleanliness. Throw out those harsh drying pads! Conventional topical drying agents strip the skin of its beneficial layer of oils, thereby stimulating the oil glands to produce even more oil, beginning a cycle of overproduction, inflammation, irritation, and infection.

Instead, following holistic suggestions, choose a cleanser without soap or harsh detergents. Almond meal provides gentle exfoliation, removing dead skin cells and reducing blackhead formation. Herbs such as anhyllis regulate metabolic activities and nasturtium balances oil production, while chamomile and stinging nettle provide anti-inflammatory qualities. High in antioxidants, pure botanical oils (morning only) such as carrot, rose, apricot, and almond assist the healing process, regulating



Even as a teenager, by treating the causes of acne, it is possible to have beautiful skin

oil production.

Conventional acne treatments vary in safety and effectiveness, often featuring drying ingredients like benzoyl peroxide or prescription therapies including Retin-A, a synthetic form of vitamin A whose exact action is unknown and Acutane, which works by dramatically slowing oil production but can raise blood fat levels to risky amounts. Antibiotics are used to destroy infection associated with inflammatory acne, but the downside is upset of the delicate flora balance which can lead to digestive problems. Increased photosensitivity is also a potential side effect, with pigment changes possible. If you choose these conventional methods, please read the labels and be aware that they are for careful, short-term use, due to their tendency to dry, thin, and irritate.

Alternative, holistic methods of treating acne consider the entire person and environment, including hormones, nutrition, stress, and daily care. Honestly examine your diet; is it processed or fresh? Do you eat sugar, caffeine, and animal or hydrogenated fats? If you do, consider eliminat-

ing to see if your skin improves. How about water? Monitor your hormone and stress levels, and be consistent about daily care. Clinical treatments are beneficial, including cleansing facials and light treatments such as LED photopulsation, which has been approved by the FDA to treat acne.

Regardless of age, everyone wants to avoid acne. Persistent breakouts, clogged, reactive, and inflamed acne conditions are usually caused by a number of factors including hormones, nutrition, stress, and cleanliness. All are equally important and often interact. Fortunately, with a little attention, some common-sense actions can avert and correct acne conditions. By taking a holistic approach, it is possible to treat the causes of acne.

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Plant Profile – Chamomile

Scientific Name: Chamomilla recutita L.
Family: Compositae/Asteraceae (Daisy Family)
Genus: Matricaria
Synonyms: Scented Mayweed, Wild Chamomile



Long used as a traditional home remedy for its profound healing properties, chamomile is anti-inflammatory, antispasmodic, sedative, and carminative. It soothes and calms, providing relief from acute digestive problems, treating wounds and healing connective tissue, providing benefits for skin, gums, sore throats, and a variety of other tissue conditions, including the discomfort experienced by teething children. Chamomile is also a nervine, providing relief from hypersensitivity, facial neuralgia, stabbing headaches, jagged nerves, and insomnia. Traditionally used throughout Europe, its native origin, chamomile is commonly used as a calming herbal tea. The Germanic peoples, along with the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, all revered chamomile. The Norse even dedicated the flower to the worship of their sun gods.

Often found along roadsides and even growing between sidewalk cracks, German chamomile does have several botanical relatives which can be hard to distinguish. Important fact: If you are collecting German chamomile, look for a hollow receptacle, found in the center of the flower head. Pay attention to this feature, as a cousin of German chamomile which looks very similar, dog chamomile, can produce allergic reactions.

The main constituent of chamomile is a volatile oil obtained by steam distillation from the yellow and white flower. The oil azulene is distinguished by its deep azure blue color. Called the "kind mother of plants," chamomile is often considered a woman's herb. The soothing anti-inflammatory qualities of chamomile make it ideal for skin care. A main healing herb found in Dr. Hauschka Skin Care, including Eye Solace, Cleansing Cream, Rhythmic Conditioner Sensitive, Rejuvenating Mask, and the Neem Hair and Neem Nail Oils.

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What you
put on your skin
 is as important as
what you eat...

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