



## Acne- Setting the Record Straight

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Acne is the most common skin condition in the United States. Although it's common, accurate information about acne can be scarce. This can make it difficult to get clearer skin. When a woman cannot find ways to combat acne, it can lead to avoidance of dates, social events, and overall poor self-esteem. In the quest to fight acne, many women inadvertently do the wrong things. **Aurora DeJuliis, MD, is a skin care expert and owner of the Aurora DeJullis European Medical Spa in Montclair, New Jersey.** She helps to set the record straight in the “war against acne.”

### Why treat acne?

Myths about acne are as common as the skin problem. One common myth is that you have to let acne run its course. Dermatologists know that letting acne runs its course is not always the best advice. Here's why:

- Without treatment, dark spots and permanent scars can appear on the skin as acne clears;
- Treating acne often boosts a person's self-esteem;
- Many effective treatments are available;
- More women are getting acne; and
- Not just teens have acne. A growing number of women have acne in their 30s, 40s, 50s, and beyond. Dermatologists are not sure why this is happening. But dermatologists understand that adult acne can be particularly frustrating.

### Touching your blemishes

While most people have been tempted to squeeze or fiddle with acne blemishes, you actually shouldn't do this. Touching your pimples is probably one of the worst things to do when suffering from acne. Serious consequences that result from touching acne include the worsening of inflammation, spread of infection and a longer healing process. When you squeeze a pimple, the risk of having an indelible scar is multiplied. The only manipulation methods recommended for skin blemishes and acne are deep cleansing techniques carried out by a facial skin esthetician or a dermatologist. Deep pore-cleansing facials are not designed for severe acne, but rather removing blackheads and other impurities. They are designed for people with oily skin or those who have mild acne. What to do? See a licensed esthetician/physician. Only a licensed physician can address severe acne with cysts, the "buttons" of inflammation under acne blemishes.

### You sleep with your makeup on

That you can't wear makeup when you have acne is a myth. Not removing your makeup before bedtime ... now that's a mortal sin! Makeup left overnight hinders skin renewal and clogs your pores, and when your pores are clogged bacteria can build up and cause inflammation.

TIP: Always keep a stash of makeup remover wipes by your bedside table. They'll come in handy on nights you're too tired or sleepy to wash your face. But don't make them your nightly go-to.

## **Cleansing your skin excessively**

To treat acne, washing your face every morning and night may not be helpful. Sometimes people think "more is better" when it comes to skin cleansing and will scrub excessively. They use specially formulated gels, products for oily skin and harsh or abrasive cleansers. Cleansing the skin excessively is a mistake because it only aggravates the skin, without addressing the problem. The main cause of acne is an overproduction of sebum by sebaceous glands located at the root of hair follicles. Your sebaceous glands produce sebum mainly to protect the skin from environmental assaults. Skin that is irritated by too many cleansing products will start producing more sebum, not less, creating an environment conducive to acne.

What to do? It is actually more effective and less harmful to use a single cleansing product, once or twice per day at most. You should also use an acne cream or spot-drying treatment once daily.

## **Using only topical treatments**

When suffering from acne, it is common to focus on affected areas by cleansing or using various daily treatments, while ignoring other factors and possible causes. Acne triggers include excess sebum, stress, high levels of progesterone, tobacco use and high blood sugar—as well as many others.

What to do? A comprehensive treatment is recommended in the fight against acne, no matter what your age. This includes not only skin care but also living a healthy lifestyle, managing stress and avoiding destructive behaviors like overindulgence in alcohol, drugs or junk food.

## **Your skin care products are doing more harm than good**

Certain ingredients in your skin care products—moisturizer, toner and sunscreen—can be irritating your skin and causing you to break out. Mineral oil, petrolatum, lanolin, perfume and artificial colors are the usual offenders, but it's not just that. Even alcohol can overly dry your skin and cause your skin to overcompensate by producing more sebum. To be sure, read the labels of your skin and body care products as well as your makeup. Here are some of the keywords you need to look for: "non-comedogenic" (does not clog pores), "oil-free," "fragrance-free" and "alcohol-free."

## **You're not cleaning your makeup brushes**

Sometimes, it's not the makeup that's exacerbating your acne; it's your bacteria-laden makeup brushes and sponges. To keep your skin clear, wash your applicators at least once a week with a gentle cleanser designed for that purpose.

## **You're not applying your spot treatment correctly**

It's not enough that you know what spot treatment is best for acne. Knowing when to use it, how often to apply and how long to wear it is absolutely just as crucial.

"Benzoyl peroxide, an ingredient commonly found in acne treatments, has a 1–3-hour working time, and any cream that comes in contact with it before it has completed its work will likely inhibit the active ingredient from working properly," explains DeJuliis. "It is best to wait at least an hour before applying moisturizer and/or sunscreen for best results."

## **You're spending too much time in the sun**

Frequent sun tanning doesn't just increase your risk of developing skin cancer; it also triggers breakouts on those with acne-prone skin. "Sun, heat and humidity can cause oil glands to become overactive, which can lead to acne breakouts," says DeJuliis.

Another skin sin that you're probably guilty of? Not applying sunscreen! To make sure you don't break out, choose an oil-free, non-comedogenic product.

## **You're not changing your pillowcase regularly**

This may seem irrelevant, but consider the fact that your face spends eight hours a day (assuming you're getting a good night's sleep every night) pressed firmly on your pillow. And if you're not changing your pillowcase, you're basically lying on accumulated dust and dead skin cells. And it's not just the pillowcase, your bath towel could be harboring as much acne-causing bacteria!

## **Using too much medication**

Everyone wants their acne to clear up quickly, so you may be tempted to slather on your treatment products several times (or more) per day. Over-using topical medications can't hurt, right? Besides, won't your acne clear up faster if you apply your medications more often.

You may be surprised to learn that applying too much medication, or applying too often, won't clear acne up any faster. But it will most definitely cause excessive drying, redness, peeling, and irritation. Using your medications exactly as directed is the best way to clear acne, without harming your skin.