

Acne cure – Is it possible?

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Acne (syn. pimples, zits)

What causes acne?

Acne develops around hair follicles and sebaceous glands on the skin. The glands on the face, chest and back are most prone to forming acne. The skin oil called sebum begins its active production at puberty, and therefore acne problem usually starts during the teenage. However there are those who only begin to have acne problem in their 20s or even 30s.

The activity of the sebaceous glands is driven by our hormone levels, namely the male hormone. At puberty, there is a hormone level surge and acne can sometimes erupt fast and severe. Some individuals have more sebum production than others are possibly genetically determined. Therefore it is not surprising to find acne problem runs in the family. Elevated hormone levels through the consumption or injection of hormones can similarly aggravate acne problem.

The second important mechanism contributing to acne formation is blocked pores. This will lead to the formation of comedones (syn. whitehead and blackheads) (Fig. 2.1). Some acne will not progress beyond this stage.



Fig.2.1 Comedones on the cheeks



Fig 2.2 Large inflamed nodules and cysts.

Bacteria in the hair follicles and chemicals released in the skin are subsequently responsible for causing inflammation, resulting in red bumps commonly known as pimples. In severe inflammation, pus may develop to form pustules and nodules, and cysts (Fig. 2.2). The more severe the inflammation, the more likely it is to result in scars. Scars can be either depressed, sunken or bulging, or a mixture.

What should I do about acne?

The best option is to visit your doctor early. Acne problem may come and go eventually but scars left behind are unfortunately permanent. It is therefore a mistaken notion to wait to “outgrow” acne problem since there are some very good treatment available for acne nowadays. On the other hand, scars are generally permanent and difficult to treat.

What are the treatment options for acne?

1. Topical (application) treatment

The simplest and most convenient way is to use topical treatment. This includes benzoyl peroxide, salicylic acid or sulphur-based products which are available in most pharmacies. Preparations containing antibiotics (eg. clindamycin, erythromycin) and Vitamin-A derivatives (adapalene, tretinoin or isotretinoin) are available only through your doctors. Some degree of dryness or flakiness of skin may be expected on applying these preparations to your skin. Check with your doctor if you have excessive irritation or redness from applying these.

2. Oral treatment

If topical treatment fails to control the acne situation, your doctor may prescribe oral medications for you. These would include oral antibiotics or oral birth-control pills. Your doctor would explain the potential side-effects to you and you would possibly be put on it for at least a few months. For very severe and stubborn acne problem, you doctor may prescribe oral isotretinoin. This is however not to be taken during pregnancy as it may cause severe harm to the unborn child.



Fig. 2.3 Patient in Fig. 2.2 after oral isotretinoin treatment

3. Procedural treatment

Those with drug allergy or other medical issues with taking oral medications may sometimes consider chemical peel or microdermabrasion treatment to help unclog blocked pores. These procedures have to be done repeatedly every few weeks to achieve and maintain results. Some laser treatment can also help to cut down on sebum production and therefore assist in acne clearance.

Does stress cause acne?

Although stress doesn't cause acne, many believe that it can trigger flare-ups. That's because when the body encounters stress, it steps up production of a hormone called cortisol, which causes the sebaceous glands to produce more oil. Therefore the best course of action is to keep tabs on your own personal response, and to try to make time every day for the things that make you feel relaxed and happy. Exercise, meditate, get a good night's sleep, and eat a healthy diet will go a long way to help.

Does diet cause acne?

There is thus far no scientific evidence to suggest that certain food causes or aggravates acne. Some recent researchers seem to indicate that high-sugary diet might aggravate acne but this is far from being conclusive.

Can I squeeze my pimples?

It is best is to leave your pimples alone. The more frequent the squeezing, the more forceful the squeezing, the more likely it is going to result in scarring. Fortunately most pimples will clear within a week or two. For very long-lasting and big pimples, a little cortisone injection into the pimple can help ameliorate the acute situation.

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