

UNDERSTANDING ACNE:

CAUSES, CURES, & MYTHS



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Chapter 1: What Is Acne?

What is acne? Certainly, most of us know what it is, simply because we have had to experience it at one time or another in our lives. But, in case a definition is needed, here is a short one. Acne is a dermatological term that includes clogged pores, pimples and lumps or cysts that occur on the face, neck, chest, back, shoulders, and upper arms. Acne occurs most commonly in teenagers, but is not limited to any age group, afflicting even adults in their forties. This disease has many varieties, and although none are life threatening, the more severe cases of acne can be disfiguring, leaving permanent scars on effected areas.

The physical changes in body tissue - or lesions - which acne causes are described in five ways: *comedos*, *papule*, *pustule*, *nodule* and *cyst*. Further, these terms denote range or severity with comedo (also known as [blackheads](#) and whiteheads) at one end and nodules or cysts at the other.

As stated above, acne is most common among teenagers, affecting teens between the ages 12 and 17. Usually, these mild cases are cleared up with over-the-counter treatments

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and the acne goes away by the early twenties. It also should be noted that although acne affects both girls and boys equally, there are some distinctions. Young men are more likely to have severe, long-term acne while women can have reoccurring or intermittent acne well into adulthood due to hormonal changes and cosmetics.

Now that we have summarized just *what* acne is, we can move on to the subject of this book. A guide to acne: what types are there, how to treat it, and current myths circulating about it. The hope is that the reader will come away having gained a clearer understanding of acne in its various forms, and how it can be combated against and to reduce its impact upon the lives of those suffering from it. This is by no means an exhaustive guide on the subject nor is it a clinical journal, but is at the very least, an introduction and a source upon which to do further study into the causes and cures of acne in all its forms.

Chapter Two: Acne Myths

Many of the problems facing those who are trying to deal with acne are the pervasive sources of misinformation out there regarding the causes of acne. Despite the numerous valid sources of information on and about acne that are now available, these myths persist and are passed on by word-of-mouth to those unfortunate enough to suffer from the disease.

Rather than finding solutions and treatments to alleviate the symptoms, problems are often compounded. Ill-advised treatments based off these myths can have less than effective results and can often do further damage in the case of severe acne.

In light of the influence that these myths can have on both understanding acne in general and the courses of treatment in particular, it would be wise to start with a quick overview of some of the more common myths that are out there, dispelling the misinformation with the truth about them. After this we can move on to the question of what the actual causes of acne might be.

Myth #1: Acne is caused by poor hygiene.

It doesn't matter how often, how ritually, you scrub your face and other areas affected by acne; this has no bearing on either the status of current a breakout or the creation of new problems. In fact, this sort of rigorous regimen of washing and scrubbing can actually irritate skin and make the acne worse, not better.

Though you may have heard so from well-meaning parents growing up or some other misinformed person, acne is not caused by poor hygiene. This doesn't mean that hygiene isn't important. In fact, good hygiene can help reduce the effects of acne if used in conjunction with acne treatment products. Rather than frequent, harsh washing, it is generally recommended that you wash your face twice to three times a day with mild soap and then pat it dry - don't scrub dry.

Myth #2: Acne is caused by diet.

"Don't eat chocolate, it will give you pimples!" "They say that eating greasy foods can give you zits." Most of you have heard these and other similar statements before, right? What they are saying, in effect, is that what you eat can cause acne. But, what they are saying isn't true. It is a myth, one of the more popular ones actually, about the causes of acne. Extensive scientific research has been conducted, searching for possible correlations between one's diet and a possible cause of acne, and have not found anything conclusive.

However, each of us is different. Some people notice that breakouts are worse after eating certain foods--and the kinds of food differ with each person. For example, some people

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may notice breakouts after eating chocolate; while others have no effects with chocolate. Instead, they notice breakouts occurring after they drink too much coffee or caffeine. These are just examples but they might be worth heading. If there is some sort of food or drink that might be affecting your acne, then cut back and see if that helps.

Myth #3: Acne is caused by stress.

Stress is not a direct cause of acne but it is true that some types of stress can cause the body to produce a hormone called *cortisol*, which can irritate existing acne. Indirectly, some medication that we take to alleviate or control extreme stress or emotional problems like depression can be factors in the production of acne. In fact, some medicines have acne listed as a possible side effect.

Myth #4: Acne will go away on its own.

This is generally not true and acne needs treatment in order to be cleared up. With the selection of acne treatment products available today there is no reason not to investigate and find what has the best results for those concerned. In some cases, a dermatologist should be consulted and other forms of treatment can be pursued.

Myth #5: Tanning clears up skin.

In fact, this has the reverse effect. At first it may seem that the latest bake in the tanning bed or sunbathing has improved your complexion, but in fact the tan may only have masked or covered the acne. In reality, the sun can make the skin dry and irritated and this can lead to more breakouts. On another note, if you do tan, make sure that you are using a sunscreen that doesn't contain oils and other chemicals that might clog up your pores and cause acne to get worse. (Look for *noncomedogenic* or *nonacnegenic* on the label.)

Myth #6: Popping Zits Will Make Them Go Away Faster

Again, though this seems true, it is another myth. Rather than speeding up the process of healing, this action actually prolongs the situation as popping the whitehead caused the bacteria inside to be pushed deeper into the skin, which allows more infection to grow, and ultimately leads to scarring.

Myth #7: Only Teenagers get acne.

The truth is that about 25% to 30% of *all* people between the ages 25- 44 have active acne. So the idea that acne is only a problem for teens is yet another myth.

After covering these myths, it is important to note, that these are not all of the myths that are out there, circulating in the popular health magazines and on the Internet. No, not by a long shot. There are dozens more where these came from. The reason for their inclusion in this book is to help you, the reader, understand that the topic of acne has grown more complicated as new sources of information, both good and bad, have become available and that one must be very careful about researching the topic and deciding what sources to trust.

Chapter 3: For the Parents of Teens with Acne

Acne has affected all of us at one time or another. If you are a parent with teenage children you will be reminded of what a toll dealing with acne can have on their lives. Acne can affect your child's self image as well as overall social life and in severe cases can lead to depression and withdrawal. You should let your teenager know that you are available and that you are willing to help him or her with their acne. Talking about your own

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experiences may help them relate and quite possibly, give them a broader perspective on the condition. Even if they don't want to talk about it, dealing with acne is one of their major concerns. Consequently, your teenager is trying everything he or she can to control the acne.

As adults, we know that acne will not last forever, that it will usually clear up in time if given attention and treated appropriately. Yet this is only a small comfort to teenagers who are currently suffering from embarrassment and discomfort from breakouts of acne. Talking with your teenager about acne can be difficult because they might be embarrassed by their appearance and would sooner just pretend it wasn't an issue. The key is to be supportive and understanding. At the same time, parents must be more than moral support to their children. They need to be a source of information and advice about how to treat acne as well.

One of the most effective ways is to learn as much as possible about the various types of acne and how it can be treated. Simply doing this can go a long way in providing more effective guidance for your children when confronted with decisions related to their acne treatment. You will be able to help them in the selection of acne medications and perhaps determine whether or not it is an appropriate time to consult with a dermatologist.

Do not assume that just because you happened to have acne as a teen that you know everything about it. Things have changed since then. Advances in scientific research on acne related matters continually unearth new information. Also, new medications as well as new methods of acne treatment have been developed so that the most common acne conditions can be remedied quickly. Because there are such a variety of approaches, knowing what is available will aid you in deciding what the best option may be for your child.

Chapter 4: What Really Causes Acne?

It must be stated at the beginning that an exact cause of acne is unknown. Despite the endless research that has been done to date, nothing has ever been isolated as a primary cause for the development of acne. Keeping this in mind though, doctors and researchers have at least come to some conclusions as to what sort of risk factors are involved and ultimately contribute to acne's development. According to some researchers, the primary causes are hormones and genetics, but this cannot account for every case.

No, in some instances, factors like medication, types of cosmetics, and certain aspects of personal hygiene (i.e. methods of cleansing skin) are more likely to create the conditions for acne's formation. Environment, too, can be a catalyst. Those working with chemicals or who are exposed to oils and greases, have a greater chance of getting acne because the materials themselves can clog pores.

Hormones

With the onset of puberty, the human body starts to produce hormones called androgens or male sex hormones, increasing in both boys and girls. These androgens cause the enlargement and over stimulation of the *sebaceous glands* which are found in the hair follicles or pores of the skin. The extra sebum or oil that the sebaceous glands produce mixes with dead skin cells and bacteria on the skin's surface and this blocks pores. Within the blocked pore, the bacteria multiply and cause inflammation. All of this leads to the lesions that are associated with acne.

Teenagers are the most common sufferers of acne, purely because of the hormonal shifts that are associated with puberty. Current figures indicate nearly 85% of people will develop acne at some point between the ages of 12 and 25.



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It is also important to note that the hormonal changes associated with both the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, and even menopause have been shown to be culprits in the creation of acne. Also, when women are either beginning or ending their usage of birth control, the hormonal fluctuations that can occur at this time can cause acne in some women.

Furthermore, fluctuations in the hormones of adults, both men and women, can cause spikes in the production of sebum in the sebaceous glands. This opens wide the range of those susceptible to acne, due to hormonal changes.

Genetics

Another factor is heredity or genetics. Many researchers now believe that the tendency to develop acne can be inherited from parents. In studies conducted by a number of scientists, links have been found between those presently suffering from acne and the presence of acne in their family history. Strictly speaking though, acne is not an inherited disease, at least not in the medical sense of the word. However, it is also true that acne is much more common in children of parents who have had or still have acne than those who do not. While the research is still ongoing, there is no doubt the research will continue to yield new results and perhaps, deeper genetic causes might be unearthed.

Other Factors

Medication

As was stated before, the side effects of certain drugs can cause acne. Examples can include: barbiturates, anti-depressants, anti-anxiety medication, lithium and certain forms of steroids.

Heavy or oily cosmetics

In the case of certain cosmetics, their ingredients can affect the structure of hair follicles and lead to over-production of sebum, which in turn clogs the pores.

Over-abrasive cleansing

Astringent facial products can dry the skin out and also causes the body to overproduce sebum to compensate. The use of harsh exfoliators can damage existing spots and spread infection.

Flare Up Factors

There are also a number of other factors which can cause existent acne to flare up and create more problems. A small list of some of these factors is included in the following pages so that our picture of acne becomes clearer and we shall, hopefully, obtain a greater understanding of the causes and elements that make this disorder such an inconvenient and uncomfortable thing to endure.

Pressure from helmets or hats, backpacks, tight clothing

If there is pressure against the skin, as is the case when wearing hats, and helmets, or when a backpack is pressing down against shoulders, then the potential for irritation and acne breakouts are real. Either friction, as is true when someone is wearing tight clothing, or pressure as in the aforementioned hat or helmet, can go a long way towards affecting the pores and causing acne to flare up.

Environmental irritants



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If a person works in a garage or in a factory, certain chemicals present in such environments can actually cause acne flare-ups, if not lead to its appearance. Oils, for instance, when brought in contact with skin over a long period can clog up pores, or at least irritate the skin.

Pollution can have much the same effect upon the skin, clogging pores and creating infections.

Heavy scrubbing of skin

Picking or squeezing [blackheads](#) and/or whiteheads can cause the infection to move deeper into the skin and which will lead to scarring.

Diet

While no foods actually have been linked to the cause of acne, it is proven that certain foods can be responsible for acne flare-ups.

Chapter 5: Types of Acne

Acne Vulgaris

Acne vulgaris is another name for common acne. This is the type of acne that mainly affects adolescents but may persist and become more severe as one reaches adulthood.

Mild to Moderate acne vulgaris is characterized by the following lesions:

Whiteheads

Whiteheads result when a pore is completely blocked, trapping sebum, bacteria, and dead skin cells, causing a white appearance on the surface. Whiteheads have a shorter life span than [blackheads](#).

[blackheads](#)

[blackheads](#) result when a pore is only partially blocked, allowing some of the trapped sebum, bacteria, and dead skin cells to slowly drain to the surface. The dark color associated with its appearance is not caused by dirt. Rather, it is a reaction of the skin's own pigment, *melanin*, reacting with the oxygen in the air. As a whitehead has a short life cycle, a blackhead is a firmer structure, and can often take a long time to clear.

Papules

Papules are inflamed, red, tender bumps with no head.

Pustules

A pustule is similar to a whitehead, but is inflamed, and appears as a red circle with a white or yellow center. (This is what is commonly called a "zit.")

Severe acne vulgaris can be distinguished by the presence of nodules and cysts:

Nodules

As opposed to the lesions mentioned above, nodular acne consists of acne spots which are much larger, can be quite painful and can sometimes last for months. Nodules are large, hard bumps under the skin's surface. Scarring is common. Absolutely do not attempt

to squeeze such a lesion. You may cause severe trauma to the skin and the lesion may last for months longer than it normally would have left untouched.

Cysts

An acne cyst is often similar in appearance to a nodule, but it is pus-filled, and has been described as having a diameter of 2 inches or more across and is often very painful. Again, scarring is common with cystic acne. Squeezing an acne cyst may cause a deeper infection and more painful inflammation which will last much longer than if you had left it alone.

Adult Acne

Adult acne is a form of acne vulgaris that can affect adults over 30 years of age. Those who had no problems with acne as a teenager have found that they are having breakouts. But because acne is normally associated with the hormonal fluctuations that occur during puberty, its appearance in an adult should be investigated to determine the underlying causes--especially if it appears for the first time in adulthood.

The following are at least three reasons why acne appears after 30 years of age:

- Often the acne that one had as an adolescent resurfaces later in adulthood. It is not always clear why this happens, but it is one reason for its presence in adults.
- In women, acne often reappears during pregnancy where there had been no activity for months, if not years. This could also be true in the case of woman during their menstrual period.
- Thirdly, acne can appear in adults for the first time who have never had it before. Now with this third reason, it might be more obvious that something unusual is going on and it might be wise to talk to a dermatologist or at least your family physician.

With some reasons established, we can now mention some of the possible causes of adult acne:

- Medication. As has been stated previously, some medications can induce acne. Anabolic steroids, anti-epileptic medications, anti-tuberculosis drugs *rifampin* and *isoniazid*, lithium and medications that contain iodine.
- Chronic physical pressure on the skin. Whether chaffing from wearing a helmet or carrying a backpack, such pressure against the skin can lead breakouts. (See acne mechanica)
- Chlorinated industrial chemicals. Working in certain types of industrial environments can cause acne-like symptoms or even *chloracne*, an occupational skin disorder caused by prolonged exposure to chemicals like chlorinated dioxins.
- Metabolic changes. With changes in the body's hormonal balance, such as those present during pregnancy or menstruation can produce acne in adults.

rosacea

Though often misdiagnosed as acne, [rosacea](#) is, in fact, not acne. [rosacea](#) affects thousands of people in the U.S. alone, mostly those over the age of 30. It generally appears as a red rash confined to the cheeks, nose, forehead and chin. This redness is often accompanied by bumps, pimples, and skin blemishes--the reason it is so commonly

mistaken for acne. Further, this redness is also linked to the fact that blood vessels may become more visible on the skin. [rosacea](#) has been shown to be more prevalent in women than in men, but often if found in men it tends to be more severe. If you are seeking treatment and you think it may actually be [rosacea](#), you need to be aware that the treatments differ quite a bit from those used in the care of acne vulgaris.

Acne Mechanica

This form of acne is caused by external mechanical forces like constant pressure, constant and repeated friction, covered skin, and heat. For those involved in sports, in the military or in high-activity jobs, this is nothing new as the condition is common with many athletes and in professions where factors like tight-fitting, even restrictive clothing is worn for extended periods of time. These sort of jobs may include certain kinds of factory work where an employee may be busy with repetitive tasks that may irritate the skin and lead to break outs.

For soldiers who must wear uniforms much of the time and may be carrying backpacks with straps that bite into the skin and cause friction with each step or straps on weapons that can also rub again the body this can become a real issue. Operating in the extremes of temperatures that these soldiers often do can also often complicate existent acne by causing inflammation and further breakouts.

Further examples of possible causes may include:

- Wearing head bands that can rub the forehead and irritate the skin
- The kind of friction caused by physical contact with musical instruments for extended periods of time
- Wearing tight clothing period; whether it is blue jeans or types of undergarments made with synthetic materials
- Even bra straps if they happen to fit snugly against the skin

Acne Cosmetica

Often women who regularly wear make up or cosmetics find that they are getting breakouts on the forehead or cheeks. It may be what is called acne cosmetica. This form of acne is generally caused by the type of cosmetics that a person is using.

Pomade Acne

When hairstyles change, it is not uncommon for teenagers and young adults to adopt new styles. But, sometimes a new style requires the use of a thick, oily hair cosmetic called pomade. Pomade is generally used when a hairstyle requires that curly hair be straightened or hair be molded into various shapes.

One of the undesired effects of pomade use may be pomade acne. Pomade acne occurs on the scalp, forehead, and temples where pomade comes into contact with the skin.

Most, if not all, pomades fall into the category of comedogenic – or pore clogging - cosmetics. The heavy oils used in pomades can clog skin, setting the stage for the formation of comedones. In addition, some of the other chemicals in pomades may irritate the skin, contributing to inflammation.

Excoriated Acne

The term *excoriated* means to scratch or abrade the skin. Now when we bring this term into the context of acne we have what is called *excoriated acne*. This type of acne is defined by

the behavior of the person suffering from it. When such a person obsessively picks and scrapes at every pimple and blemish on their skin, they are said to have excoriated acne. Because of the excessive nature of the attention given to the sufferer's skin, deep irritation can result as well as scarring.

Though it may appear to others as a mild form of acne, without pustules or nodules, to the person dealing with it, this condition may be intolerable. This almost psychological urge to get rid of one's skin lesions or blemish can become very damaging. As such, it is recommended that a dermatologist be sought for treatment.

Infantile Acne

This form of acne occurs in newborns and is concentrated on the nose and cheeks. It is caused by the hormonal changes that have occurred while the fetus was developing in the womb. Typically, the acne clears up in matter of weeks without treatment.

However, infantile acne has a serious aspect that must be considered. If simple cleansing with mild soap and water will not clear the acne up then a mild topical agent (such as a prescription form of benzoyl peroxide for infants) helps both the current situation and prevents scarring. If this does not help, then a dermatologist may need to be consulted.

Things to note:

- Family History. Genetics might be a factor in the development of acne in the infant. Do the child's parents or siblings have acne or did they have it in the past?
- Early hormone production. It may be that the infant has a condition that causes early production of sex hormones--especially androgen which is linked to acne. If this is the case, then medical help should be sought to avoid problems with the child's development.
- Growth and developmental abnormalities. Acne at such an early stage in the child's life could indicate developmental problems that might not show up until later. A pediatrician should be consulted to find out if this might be a possibility.
- Drug-induced acne or acneiform eruption. It could be that the child has been exposed to certain medications that can cause acne or *acneiform* lesions. Examples of such drugs include *corticosteroids* and those that contain iodine.

Chapter 6: Severe Acne

There are at least four types of acne that are recognized by many dermatologists and others in the medical field as severe regarding both the type of lesions that it produces on the body and long term effects it can have for the sufferer including scarring. This extreme acne affects more than just the body; it can affect every aspect of a person's life. The pain and heartache of dealing with these potentially disfiguring forms of acne cannot be overemphasized but this does not take into account the emotional and psychological aspects that can lower quality of life and permanently destroy self-esteem.

Acne conglobata

Acne Conglobata is the most severe form of acne vulgaris. This form of extreme acne, generally characterized by the appearance of large and numerous nodules, often interconnected, along with widespread [blackheads](#). Because these lesions can become ulcerated, they can cause severe, irrevocable damage--even disfiguring scarring--to the skin. Acne conglobata is commonly found on the face, chest, back, buttocks, upper arms, and thighs.

The age of onset for acne conglobata is usually between 18 and 30 years of age and it is more likely for males to get the condition than it is for females. It should also be noted that acne conglobata can stay active for many years, lying dormant until something causes it to resurface. As is true with all types of acne, the cause of acne conglobata is not known.

Acne fulminans

This type of severe acne is actually an abrupt onset of acne conglobata that typically afflicts young men. The symptoms of the severe *nodulocystic*, often ulcerating acne, are readily apparent. As with normal cases of acne conglobata the lesions cover large portions of the extremities and the facial region, including the disfiguring scars that can eventually develop. Yet what makes acne fulminans unique in that it also includes fever symptoms, aching of the joints, particularly the knees and hips, and varying degrees of weight loss that depend upon the individual.

Gram-negative folliculitis

Gram-negative folliculitis is a form of extreme acne caused by an inflammation of the follicles that is caused by bacterial infection: This condition is characterized by pustules and cysts. It has been determined in some cases of the disorder that its development is caused by a complication resulting from a long-term antibiotic treatment of acne vulgaris.

The reason that this form of acne is called “gram-negative” relates to the fact that gram is a type of blue stain used for laboratory testing for microscopic organism. Bacteria that do not stain blue are referred to as “gram-negative.”

Like other forms of extreme or severe acne, gram-negative folliculitis is a rare condition, and we do not know whether it is more common in males or females as it has been documented in both.

Pyoderma Faciale

This type of severe acne affects only females, usually between the ages of 20 to 40 years of age. It is characterized by large painful nodules, pustules and sores that may leave scarring. Forming abruptly, pyoderma faciale may occur on the skin of a woman who has never had acne before. Generally, this type of extreme acne is confined to the face, and though it usually does not last longer than a year, it can cause a great deal of damage in a very short time.

Chapter 7: Natural Acne Remedies

The subject of natural or homegrown acne remedies is a broad one to cover as one must be able to separate the effective options from those that really amount to little more than old wives' tales. Yet, with this said, someone searching for successful remedies for acne would be foolish to overlook the benefits of those natural remedies that have been passed on in families. These sorts of remedies based upon common sense practices or herbs are typically successful for most mild cases of acne. It is when these cases grow more severe that one should consult a physician or dermatologist.

For centuries, civilizations relied exclusively upon herbal and natural remedies for the treatment of every ailment. No, there were no convenient drive-up pharmacies to get a prescription for manufactured medications. In order to find ways to help treat sickness one had to venture into the woods and search for cures there. And for the most part, nature provided for these needs through the various herbs that were found to have medicinal value.

The earliest physicians were nothing more than what we today call herbalists or at a certain point in time, apothecaries. Either way, the natural remedies they discovered were the basis for scientists who later found ways to create synthetic substitutes for these herbs and distill the innate properties down into a form that can be amplified or augmented by other elements.

A List of Common Natural Remedies

Hot/Cold Compresses - A chief natural remedy that is recommended more often than not is the usage of hot and cold wet towel compresses to reduce swelling and eliminate clogged pores--the major culprit in the production of acne.

Drinking Water - This natural remedy for acne is simple enough. The premise behind it the idea that if you drink a sufficient amount of water per day, typically 7-8 glasses of water a day, your body is cleansed of elements of toxicity that can actually contribute to the development and spread of acne. It also should be noted, that many natural remedies not only recommend to merely drink plain old ordinary water, but actually adding herbal ingredients by boiling fenugreek seeds and corn into the water.

Oils and Juices - Though it can seem odd, the benefits of using natural substances like almond oil - which can actually help with the removal of acne scars - cannot be ignored. Apricot juice helps to alleviate the presence of cysts by cutting through them.

- Cucumber juice - Used as a topical application, either alone or combined with carrot juice, alfalfa or lettuce.
- Citric fruit juices - These types of juices, such as lemon juice, serve as a natural exfoliate, removing dead skin cells which might cause clogging of the pores. You should allow it to dry on the face for approximately 10 minutes before rinsing it away with cool water.

Fenugreek leaves - This remedy provides great prevention of breakouts and involves taking the fenugreek leaves, crushing them, and making a paste out of them. You should then apply it to infected areas every night, then wash it away the following morning with warm water.

Honey Mask - Because honey has naturally occurring anti-bacterial qualities it is often applied to the face as a mask, killing surface bacteria. Typically, the mask should be applied once or twice weekly depending upon the results of usage.

Distilled white vinegar - Apply the vinegar as a topical solution, letting it sit on the infected area for at least 5-10 minutes. Then rinse it thoroughly with cool water. Often the vinegar can be a little too strong so it is recommended that you dilute it, though not too much.

Make-up or Cosmetic Usage - Simply put, this is a common sense remedy for acne. Just avoid using these products because more than likely the chemicals and oils used to manufacture them will clog the pores, which, in turn, leads to more breakouts.

Further Remedies

Beyond the common natural remedies for acne, there are a few other interesting options available and worth mentioning at this time.

Diet and vitamin supplements - Unlike former days, when the diets of civilizations included only naturally occurring food from the ground, the usage of fertilizers and pesticides has taken a toll on the nutrient content of much of the food that we eat. Add to this the fact that

our food is further manipulated by chemical preservatives and you have some further explanations for the occurrences of some acne breakout. To combat this, observing a proper and balanced diet and taking a hearty multi-vitamin can actually go a long way towards preventing certain bio-chemical conditions which provide fertile ground for acne.

Echinacea and Oregon grape - These herbs are both useful for boosting the body's immune system and also combating many forms of acne-causing bacteria.

Vitamin A - Used in large quantities, vitamin A has actually been used to successfully treat some severe forms of acne. But it must be clear that if you plan to use vitamin A as a possible remedy you should consult a physician because, if used in large enough doses, it can be toxic.

Zinc - This vitamin, if added to one's diet, can actually aid in the healing of acne lesions and help in the prevention of scarring.

Chapter 8: Over-the-Counter Acne Remedies

There are many types of over-the-counter treatments for acne. When dealing with acne, most people run to the local pharmacy and buy some sort of over-the-counter medication on the basis of recommendations from their friends or perhaps even television ads. Yet despite friendly suggestions, it is a good idea to consult with a physician before using any kind of over-the-counter medication. Even though acne is generally a benign condition, a doctor or dermatologist can advise you on what the best course of treatment might be as well as provide further suggestions based on the particular kind of acne you may be suffering from.

Considering the fact that a large number of acne treatment products are available, it can be hard to choose which one to try. You should not rely strictly upon the advice of friends or family because what may work for one person may not work for another. Further, you should have some background knowledge about the active ingredients in various acne medications, so you can make a better-informed choice.

One of the most popular ingredients in acne medications is *benzoyl peroxide*. Found in gels and ointments, it helps by combating the bacteria that generally help cause acne. It is also useful for removing dead skin cells that accumulate on the surface of the skin. It is these dead skin cells which combine with sebum to create [blackheads](#) and whiteheads.

Benzoyl peroxide has been proven to be safe and effective in combating lesions. It can also be used as a means of acne prevention once a breakout has cleared up by keeping the skin free from acne causing bacteria. The only side effect associated with this ingredient is dry skin, and this can be avoided by decreasing the frequency that it is applied on the skin.

Another ingredient commonly found in a majority of acne medications is *salicylic acid*. This prevents acne by clearing up dead skin cells that are accumulating too quickly and clogging the pores. If the medication you are using contains salicylic acid you should continue to use it after the skin has cleared up to prevent future outbreaks of acne. The only side effects associated with salicylic acid are dry, irritated skin.

Other ingredients

Besides the more common ones, there are other ingredients you may see in acne medication such as *resorcinol* and *sulphur*. Resorcinol causes the top layer of skin to peel and the dead skin cells that clog the pores are similarly affected. It is often combined with sulphur. Although it is not known how exactly sulphur affects acne conditions, it has

continued to be used effectively even after more than 50 years. (Sulphur is often combined with other ingredients besides resorcinol like salicylic acid and benzoyl peroxide.)

Of all the ingredients that have been listed which are effective in fighting acne or preventing its outbreak, benzoyl peroxide is probably the most versatile. It can be used in cleansing liquids or bars, as well as lotion, cream, and gels which are applied directly on the skin. The cleansing products are used once or twice a day, while the creams and lotions can be used as needed.

They should be applied on the skin around the acne as well as the pimples themselves for overall effectiveness. Also, you should try to avoid getting benzoyl peroxide in the eyes, mouth or nose, as it will cause irritation or inflammation.

Chapter 9: Turning to Prescriptions

Generally, mild and moderate forms of acne can be treated with over-the-counter medications, but with severe cases the only recourse is to seek treatment from a dermatologist. In many cases, the doctor will recommend a prescription medicine to deal with the condition. It also should be noted that these kinds of medication can be more effective even when dealing with moderate acne than what is typically available over-the-counter.

There are two types of prescription acne medications - oral and topical.

Antibiotics

Commonly used to fight acne, antibiotics can be taken orally or as a lotion. Topical prescription medications may include ingredients such as zinc or retinoids. The most common antibiotic used for treating acne is *tetracycline*. It is used to kill the bacteria responsible for acne and also reduces inflammation. Treatment may take several weeks or even months to be effective and it is important to continue using antibiotics even after the acne has cleared up. A common side effect associated with tetracycline is increased sensitivity to sun light resulting in bad sunburns if the patient stays in the sun too long. Further side effects may include dizziness, hives, and upset stomach.

Women who are taking tetracycline may be susceptible to an increase in incidences of vaginal yeast.

Ointments and topical solutions

Antibiotic ointments actually have fewer complications than oral antibiotics. Like oral antibiotics, topical treatments are rather effective in killing bacteria that cause acne. If you use these ointments with other topical treatments like benzoyl peroxide the bacteria may not develop resistance to the antibiotics. This increases the level of prevention that you will experience.

Retinoids

Retinoids are a form of acne medication that is derived from vitamin A and can be applied directly to the skin typically in the form of lotions or creams. Topical retinoid medications are useful for treating [blackheads](#) and whiteheads by helping to open clogged pores.

Oral retinoids are used to treat the more severe forms of acne, because they have a better chance of dealing breakouts and lesions which don't respond to other treatments. Oral retinoids cause the upper layer of the skin to peel thereby opening pores. They also cause the body to produce less sebum – the substance which causes oily skin.

As with many other types of prescription strength medication, a number of serious side effects are associated with oral retinoids. They can also cause liver damage and depression, so regular medical attention is needed to make sure the patient is not being adversely affected by retinoid treatment. It is not unheard of for this kind of medication to cause birth defects if mothers are taking them when pregnant, so females should consult their doctor if pregnant, or suspect pregnancy.

Other medications

Birth control pills are sometimes effective in treating acne in women. They change hormone levels in the body and can reduce the acne causing effects of testosterone.

Chapter 10: Surgical Options

Often, when every avenue of medicinal treatment is exhausted, it becomes time for sufferers of persistent acne or more severe acne to seek alternative treatment methods. A dermatologist can help discuss the different treatments currently available including treating acne with laser therapy or acne surgery.

If you are considering the possibility of treating acne with laser therapy or surgery, you must take care to fully evaluate each of the processes, including the number of required treatments, the consequent costs, and the potential side effects of the treatment. It's also important that you select a process that is designed to deal with reducing the presence of acne - and not acne scarring.

Acne Surgery

Acne surgery involves making an incision into the affected area and draining the clogged matter. The process for [blackheads](#) and whiteheads doesn't actually involve surgery, but is often performed by a nurse, esthetician or dermatologist. A small, pointed blade is used to first open the comedone and then gently work the material out using a comedone extractor.

Severe cysts can be drained and removed by a procedure known as *excisional surgery*. The procedure should be performed in a sterile environment to reduce the risk of spreading bacterial infection and should only be performed by trained professional. If the cysts are not carefully extracted, they can develop serious infection and create scarring.

Forms of Physical Treatment

Exfoliation

This form of treatments involves removing the top layer of skin either chemically or with some sort of abrasive. Chemical peels are usually done with salicylic acid or glycolic acid. These work by destroying a microscopic layer of skin cells to unclog pores and remove the build-up of dead cells. The same effect can be achieved by using an abrasive cloth or liquid scrub.

Comedo Extraction

In this procedure, an anesthetic cream is applied to the immediate area of breakout. Then the comedones ([blackheads](#) and white heads) are extracted using a pen-like instrument which opens the top to allow the removal of dead skin cells and sebum from the follicle. The procedure is usually followed by an application of antibiotic cream.

Drainage

With many forms of severe acne, cysts can form under the skin and become very painful--even disfiguring. Often, the smaller cysts can be treated with cortisone injections which will flatten the lesion in a few days. But for larger cysts the only alternative available might be to have them drained and then surgically removed. Drainage can help relieve the pain associated with cysts and also reduce the chance of scarring. It is important not to try to drain cysts by yourself because of the risk of infection, which could lead to permanent scarring.

Using A Laser to Treat Acne

Laser treatments involve the use of varying wavelengths that are aimed directly at the affected area of the skin. These wavelengths pulsate against the skin and destroy overly-large sebaceous glands and acne lesions. Laser treatments remove the damaged outer layers of skin so that new cell growth can be initiated. The laser technician varies the intensity of the laser as necessary to effectively treat the area.

Despite all of the benefits, there is still considerable debate surrounding the effectiveness of laser therapy. Yes, it has been shown to be effective in improving the skin's appearance, but as with most of the other available acne treatments, there are some side effects. For example, patients can experience red, burned skin after treatment that can last for weeks. Individuals with dark-colored skin can end up with skin discoloration after laser treatments. Finally, the skin's appearance can be uneven if the laser is applied inconsistently.

Chapter 11: Acne Prevention

Here is a final checklist of valuable acne prevention methods:

- Find a regimen and stick with it - Pick your medication and treatment method and do not deviate from it unless you achieve measurable results or find that the condition is worsening.
- Don't use alcohol - Do not use products, like toners, if they contain heavy concentrations of isopropyl alcohol. This can do more damage than good.
- Don't over-wash - With the myth of dirt being a cause of blemishes or acne, cut down the times you wash. Two should be the limit each day. Anymore, and you risk increasing the breakouts you have.
- Choose skin products carefully - Don't get harsh or abrasive scrubs that can tear the skin and further aggravate the acne.
- Wash after exercising - Don't forget to hit shower after you've had a workout. The friction and moisture caused by clothing rubbing against the skin can create the perfect conditions for acne production.
- Avoid constant touching or picking at your face - This is pretty self-explanatory. These activities can cause bacteria to get into pores and create acne.

Companion Remedies for Natural Beauty

[ClearSkin-A Gel](#) - Promotes healthy clear skin and encourages a smooth and trouble free complexion.

[The Natural Science of Skin and Skin Care](#) - Learn about the science behind beautiful, glowing skin



The Secret to Obtaining Beautiful Skin

By the time you finish reading this page, I guarantee you will be much more educated on how to choose a quality [skin care](#) product which gives you the results you earnestly desire.

Even though I don't know you, I'll bet that if you're like me, you're sick and tired of [skin care](#) products that don't do what they claim to.

The worst part is, it's ironic that often the most expensive [skin care](#) products are the most ineffective. I don't know about you, but I'm quite tired of wasting good money on products which don't deliver what they promise.

Now, of course, there are some good products on the market which can genuinely help make your skin look smoother, more radiant, and youthful. Not only should a [quality skin product](#) help reduce bags under, and [fine lines](#) around, the eyes, it should also even out coloring inconsistencies caused by [age spots](#) and other unwanted pigment concentrations.

Now the problem is that there are literally thousands of products to choose from and unless you become a well-informed consumer, it's hard to find one of the few which actually produces real results and eliminates years of aging from your face and body.

Let's face it, people will understandably spend any amount of money to make themselves look better or younger. Cosmetic surgery is a multi-billion dollar industry as is the topical [skin care](#) industry.

It's simply a law of economics that as demand for such products skyrockets, the more products manufacturers will flood onto the marketplace in order to capitalize on this demand.

A lot of these products are rushed to market to meet demand without any real consideration to

research and development. All of the money goes into marketing – instead of where it should go – making sure the product actually works! On the surface everything looks great. The bottles and jars which the creams come in look appealing. The magazine advertisements are glossy, complete with a youthful looking model or a well-known celebrity who doesn't even use the products.

You can't really blame these companies. (Well, yes you can, I do!) When you are spending a fortune paying for marketing, whether it be on the product containers, magazine, radio, and TV ads, royalties paid to celebrities and models, you have to charge a lot of money for your products or you're going to lose money. And heaven forbid that we actually spend the money necessary to develop a product that works before we worry about taking consumers' hard-earned dollars!

On the other hand, just because most beauty product manufacturers take shortcuts to profit, this doesn't mean you and I have to fall for their marketing schemes. After all, these companies aren't going to encounter any shortage of people who will open their wallets and purses to purchase their products anytime soon. The reality is most people simply won't take any time to research products and understand what ingredients work and what ingredients are actually bad for your skin!

That's why I created this website. So, let's get right into the important stuff you need to learn in order to find the products which actually work.

Ingredients to Avoid

It seems incredible, but many [skin care](#) products are loaded with ingredients which actually harm your skin over time. In this section, we will talk about some of these.

First, mineral oil. I have seen this oil used in literally hundreds of products I've looked at (and some I've purchased). Mineral oil may also go by the names liquid paraffin, paraffin wax, and petrolatum on the product label. Mineral oil is used so pervasively in [skin care](#) products for one reason: it's cheap! (Isn't THAT a shocker?!)

However, mineral oil, once applied, prevents the skin from "breathing." Because of this, it clogs pores, interferes with your skin's natural ability to eliminate toxins, and can lead to [acne](#) flare ups. Also, it is irritating to the skin and if used for any length of time, your skin can become dependent on it, causing chapping and dryness – two of the very things we are looking to combat when we're discussing the quest for youthful-looking skin!

And finally, it can actually lead to exactly what we are all trying to avoid – premature aging of the skin. It's amazing this substance is even allowed in so-called "[skin care](#)" products at all.

Dioxane: (a synthetic derivative of coconut). This substance is widely used in [skincare products](#). It often contains high concentrations of 1,4-dioxane, which is readily absorbed through

the skin. I know this sounds crazy, but 1,4-dioxane is considered a chemical “known to the State of California to cause cancer”. To think people pay money to put this stuff on their skin unknowingly is downright scary.

Fragrances: Who doesn't like to smell nice? Well, I'm here to tell you that if you want to smell nice, use a little bit of perfume or cologne....or some body spray. Your [skin care](#) products should not contain fragrances. Many fragrances are produced from ingredients which are known to be toxic or carcinogenic.

You must remember that your skin is the largest organ of the body. Anything you put on it can be easily absorbed through the pores (which is one reason [Aromatherapy](#) can be so effective!). Now, why would I recommend you use perfume or cologne as a fragrance but to choose a [skin care](#) product without them?

The reason is simple. When you use [skin care](#) products, they are applied all over the face, neck, and body. This covers a lot of surface area and, therefore, a great deal of chemical absorption occurs through the skin's pores.

Now, I'm sure that many colognes and perfumes contain less than desirable substances too, but I'm enough of a realist to know that people aren't going to stop using these products to smell nice. However, with perfumes and colognes, you can achieve what you want by a small dab here and there or even dabbing and spraying on clothing instead of your skin.

So, in my opinion, using perfumes and fragrances is much less harmful than using [skin care](#) products which also contain potentially dangerous fragrance chemicals that are directly applied and massaged into the organ designed as your body's 'protective shell' – the skin.

Parabens: methyl, propyl, butyl, and ethyl paraben. Many [skin care](#) products (and moisturizing products) will use parabens as a preservative to increase the shelf life of the formula. The reason is purely economical (of course). However, studies suggest these preservatives may cause cancer and interfere with the body's endocrine system, as well as causing allergic reactions and skin rashes.

Alcohols: ethanol, ethyl alcohol, methanol, benzyl alcohol, isopropyl alcohol and SD alcohol. Not all alcohols have the same properties, but these, which are commonly found in [skin care](#) products, are very drying and irritating for the skin. Alcohols such as these strip away the skin's natural acid mantle, making you more vulnerable to bacteria, molds and viruses. And these are some of the very same ingredients which marketing campaigns are telling you will 'clear up' problem skin!

Now that we've looked at some of the bad, let's examine some of the good ingredients and some ingredients that sound good but, in fact, aren't.

Ingredients to Look For

Before we have a discussion of specific ingredients, it's important to educate ourselves a little bit more on skin itself and what makes a product good or poor.

The biggest reason our skin, whether on the face or the rest of the body, develops lines and/or starts to sag, is that the collagen and elastin in our skin begins to break down. This is the most technical this page is going to get, so bear with me for just a sentence or two.

Collagen is a protein that is fibrous in nature. What makes collagen different from other kinds of protein is that it possesses great tensile strength, which means, among other things, it provides firmness to the skin.

You don't need to be a scientist to understand that as collagen breaks down due to aging, the firmness of our skin becomes...well, less firm. [Wrinkles](#) appear and skin starts to sag. We see these signs of aging in areas where there is the least collagen, for example, around the eye area where the skin is thinner.

Elastin, too, is a protein that helps skin stay "flexible" and firm. If your skin is stretched, elastin is the protein that helps it return to its original position.

What all of this means for you is that you do not want to purchase a [skin care](#) product that is nothing more than a cream that fills in [fine lines](#) and [wrinkles](#), giving the appearance of temporarily nicer skin when it's on...but the illusion shatters when you wash it off. You want a product which contains ingredients that actually **stimulate new collagen and elastin production** in your skin. If you achieve this, you will, in reality, begin to turn back the clock.

Now, pay attention here because I'm going to share with you something extremely important. Some of the manufacturers of more pricey products will try to dupe the public by including some really good active ingredients. What's wrong with that, you say?

Well, here's the tactic they use. Because these active ingredients are beneficial for the skin, they include some just so that they can legally list them on the product label. This way, the typical consumer thinks they are getting a great product. But, because these ingredients are expensive, and because, as discussed before, a lot of well-known companies are already spending much of their budget on marketing, they don't put in enough of these 'active ingredients' to have any real benefit for your skin.

So, when choosing a [skin care](#) product, it's not just about selecting one with good ingredients; it's also about choosing one with a high concentration of these good ingredients.

Collagen

After my brief discussion about the importance of collagen, you would think that buying a product with collagen in it would be a great thing. And the marketers who sell products which contain collagen know this. But it's a bogus ingredient because collagen molecules are much too large to penetrate into the skin when applied topically.

To be of any benefit, you must purchase a product with ingredients that have been shown to stimulate your body's own collagen production.

Phytessence Wakame

Phytessence Wakame is an exotic kelp, native to the Japanese Sea. It works by blocking a harmful enzyme in your body called hyaluronidase. Hyaluronidase breaks down hyaluronic acid in your skin. You may think "well who cares."

Well, you should, because without hyaluronic acid, the elastin and collagen fibers lose their "glue," which leads to a loss of youthful appearance and dark eye circles.

But don't just take my word for it. If you research this on wikipedia, you will read, for example, "Hyaluronan is also a major component of skin, where it is involved in tissue repair."

Cynergy TK

This is a new exciting, cutting edge substance. Cynergy TK actually stimulates your own collagen to grow again. In fact, it is proven in clinical trials to stimulate not only the **regrowth of collagen** but also **elastin**, thereby promoting firmness and elasticity. In short, fewer wrinkles, and more youthful, healthier looking skin. It may also help improve your skin's ability to retain its needed natural moisture.

Indeed, studies show a sustained 14% improvement in skin moisture retention over 18 days. Studies on Cynergy TK also show a sustained improvement in skin elasticity of 42% over 18 days.

CoQ10

If you look at the ingredient list for some of the better skin care products, you'll often see CoQ10 listed. CoQ10 is short for Coenzyme Q10, so you may also see it listed this way. CoQ10 is a vitamin-like substance that is found in all of our body's cells and is very important for healthy skin.

CoQ10 is a powerful antioxidant. A lot of skin damage and aging comes from free radicals wreaking havoc in our body's cells. CoQ10's antioxidant ability can counter these free radicals before damage occurs.

Unfortunately, like many other vital substances, as we age, the amount of CoQ10 in our bodies becomes depleted.

Although CoQ10 is a great ingredient, not all forms are equal. One in particular stands head and shoulders above the rest. This version of it is called Nano-Lipobelle H-EQ10.

Don't let the name scare you off, though. Here's why it's different. Most of the CoQ10 you buy in a typical [skin care](#) product is not readily usable when applied topically to the skin.

Nano-Lipobelle H-EQ10, on the other hand, is a special 'nano-emulsion' form of CoQ10, which penetrates far down into the skin, thereby providing much greater benefits for skin health. In fact, Nano-Lipobelle H-EQ10 can penetrate down 7 layers deep into the skin.

Because this version of CoQ10 can penetrate so deeply, it is extremely effective at 'gobbling up' [free radicals](#) in your skin. The result is a powerful anti-wrinkle effect.

Nano-Lipobelle can also promote collagen and elastin production.

Together, these three main active ingredients are some of the most powerful anti-aging [skin care](#) compounds available, and can significantly improve the look and feel of your skin.

Where can you find all three of these ingredients in one product line?

The [Xtend-Life Natural Products company](#), that's where. This company is located in New Zealand, but ships products world-wide. I use their products daily.

The company is not a household name. It doesn't have big Hollywood celebrities endorsing their products for even bigger royalties. They don't advertise all over the radio, in magazines, and on TV.

They're one of the few companies that focuses on spending the bulk of their money on the research and production of the absolute best and **most effective** products available, not the best marketing hype.

You can think of them as your "secret weapon" the big companies don't want you to know about.

So, if you truly want to achieve younger-looking, more vibrant skin, I suggest you [visit their site](#) and read about their [skin care](#) philosophy. I think you'll be as impressed as I am. At the very least, you'll learn more about what to look for and what to avoid when it comes to taking care of your precious skin.

Nourish your skin 24 hours a day!

All the products in the [Xtend-Life skincare range](#) are designed to work together in synergy, to feed your skin with essential nutrients day and night. The same key active ingredients are included in all the products, so your skin is continuously nourished 24 hours a day.