

Do you struggle with acne?

If so, you're not alone. People of all ages and both genders have problems with acne, whether it's low inflammatory acne with bumps and papules, or a more severe inflammation with deep, red, protuberant cysts.

Both types of acne can be stubborn to treat. Commonly used over-the-counter products are sulfur based with active ingredients like benzoyl peroxide in lower doses without alcohol. These are frequently ineffective, and tend to dry out the skin rather than cure the underlying source of a breakout. Use a wash designed for acne that says "sensitive enzyme" on the label. After cleansing, use a salicylic acid spot treatment, then moisturize with a vitamin B hydration lotion. For very oily skin, the amount of acid in your wash can be increased. If your breakouts are isolated to just the forehead or shoulders, it may be a reaction to a hair gel or spray. It may also be pityrosporum, which responds to anti-fungal treatment.

Applying witch hazel, chamomile or tea tree oil can improve your acne. Licorice, aloe, calendula and green tea extracts can also be used to desensitize and moisturize the skin. Besides vitamin B, oral nutritional supplements such as fish-oil and vitex, a plant-derived progesterone, have been found to reduce the number of inflammatory breakouts.

A microdermabrasion or a chemical peel performed by an aesthetician, is the next step, if acne is not resolving with the above measures. Both help prepare the skin by removing its surface and uncovering the follicles so that topical preparations can be absorbed and work. Plan on getting weekly treatments for one month. These two treatments can be done together for a quicker response, but the dryness and peeling will be more noticeable. Remember, though, that treating acne will usually make it worse before it gets better. Two days after a chemical peel, the skin will flake and acne will flare for about two weeks. A skin cycle is 28 days, so you won't see the full effect of any treatment for about a month.

If you have greater acne inflammation, or significant cyclical breakouts, you can try light-based therapies available in some physician's offices. This treatment uses blue light to absorb a by-product of the bacteria in the skin. The bacteria aren't killed, but its ability to cause breakouts is curbed.

Prescription topical antibiotics can be effective. Commonly used products include clindamycin and erythromycin. Azaleic acid also has antibacterial activity and can improve hyperpigmentation that sometimes occurs with acne, with less sensitivity. Topical retinoids, such as Retin-A™, Differen™ and Avage™, are also often prescribed. Oral contraceptives can regulate hormone-related breakouts. Accutane™ is reserved only for the most severe cases of acne that haven't responded to other therapies. This is a drug with potentially serious side effects, and all the facts should be considered before initiation of this regimen.

If you feel you've tried everything and nothing has worked, a new treatment may help. A medicine called Levulan is applied in a doctor's office, after which a medical blue light treats the skin for an hour. You must stay completely out of the sun for the next 24 hours. The skin will redden, then peel and flake for about three days. Acne will flare after the first treatment, but a series of three treatments usually results in permanent

changes to the skin. Physicians are also finding that this treatment is effective for cancerous and pre-cancerous lesions.

Zeno MD is a device that heats the skin without burning it, and decreases the activity of the bacteria. This is used only for occasional pimples, clearing them up in about two days.

If you have acne, it's best to avoid wearing makeup if you can. But if you must, choose a makeup with a mineral base, such as zinc and magnesium, which have a calming effect on the skin. When you buy makeup, ask if it's preservative-free, so that it soothes your skin and doesn't clog pores.

Stay focused. Your goal is within reach. That clear skin you dream of can be reached. Be patient and remember that there is help for acne today.

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