

How to Treat Teenage Acne

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Acne is practically a fact of life for most teenagers. About 8 in 10 preteens and teens have acne. In fact, acne is so common, it's considered a normal part of the teen to adult transition.

But its prevalence makes it no easier, or less painful for teens that must contend with the red bumps, blemishes, or worse, which can definitely impact self-esteem during critical confidence building years.

About Our Children consulted with Dr. Iris Kopeloff, chief of dermatology for the Valley Medical Group, and clinical assistant professor of dermatology at New York University School of Medicine, for her expertise.

About Our Children: What is acne, and why do so many teenagers get acne during adolescence?

Dr. Iris Kopeloff: Acne is the most common skin condition that is an inflammatory condition that commonly begins in puberty and affects adolescents. Roughly 85 percent of adolescents have acne.

While the exact cause is unknown, there are many reasons why acne develops, including overactive oil glands that produce too much oil. The oil then combines with the skin cells and the pores can become plugged. Bacteria that lives on everyone's skin can then multiply and result in acne lesions. Factors that can contribute to acne include hereditary factors, hormones, and while not directly proven, emotional stress.

There are different types of acne lesions: blackheads, whiteheads, "pimples" and cysts (or deeper lumps under the skin). Acne can be located on face, neck, chest, shoulders, back. It is rare in young children and especially in children less than 8 years old. In that case, I would consider evaluation by a pediatrician or endocrinologist.

AOC: Is it more common among teenage boys or teenage girls?

Dr. Kopeloff: In the adolescent population, it is more common in boys, but in post-adolescents, it is more common in girls.

AOC: What are the best treatments for acne?

Dr. Kopeloff: The "best" treatment depends on the type of acne and severity.

Start with topical therapy for mild acne. Skin should be cleaned with a gentle cleanser once or twice a day and after sweating. Be careful. Over zealous washing/cleansing and scrubbing can irritate the skin and actually make acne worse!



Do not pick or squeeze pimples. You want to prevent scarring and permanent marks. Avoid astringents and exfoliating type products because you want to prevent unnecessary dryness.

While keeping the skin clean is important, "dirt" does not cause acne. Treatments include over the counter benzoyl peroxide products, salicylic acid products, topical antibiotics, and retinoids.

There are newer combination type acne treatments. Word of caution: Benzoyl peroxide products can bleach things (watch those sheets and towels!).

For more moderate to severe acne, oral antibiotics are the standard treatment. There are concerns about increasing bacterial resistance and therefore, duration of treatment with oral antibiotics is limited.

Other treatments may include hormonal therapy (including the OCP). Oral Isotretinoin is used for severe nodular cystic acne, severe scarring acne. Newer treatments include laser and light based treatment

AOC: Can acne be prevented?

Dr. Kopeloff: Treat early lesions. Do not pick or squeeze pimples. Be patient! Treating acne takes time and it is important to apply the prescribed regimen as directed.

AOC: How do diet, stress and lifestyle affect acne?

Dr. Kopeloff: Diet remains controversial, but there is increasing evidence that a low-glycemic diet is better for acne. Stress may play a role. Acne is not caused by greasy foods and chocolate.

AOC: What is your best advice for youngsters whose self-esteem is assailed by chronic acne?

Dr. Kopeloff: Be diligent with your treatment. Almost everyone experiences some acne during his or her teen years. Early treatment is helpful. Be careful of what you put on your face. See your dermatologist to help develop a good skin regimen.

AOC: Is there anything new in

the last decade, or is something on the horizon?

Dr. Kopeloff: There are new topical therapies, including topical treatments to reduce sebum production. There are laser and light-based treatments. And newer topical therapies that combine different products.

AOC: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Dr. Kopeloff: Keep sports helmets and equipment that may be in contact with skin clean.

Heidi Mae Bratt is the editor of About Our Children.

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