

Is Acne the Nightmare of Your Life?

Treating Teenage and Adult Acne

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For teenagers acne is a part of life since most of their classmates and friends share this problem. However, in adults it is something more difficult and embarrassing.

Adult acne is becoming more and more common. If you are beyond your teen years and still struggling with skin breakouts, you probably have adult type acne. While a large percentage of acne patients in my practice are teenagers, I also see many adults still experiencing skin breakouts, or adults that never had acne during the teen years but are starting to face acne for the first time in their twenties, thirties, forties and even older. Acne can be disfiguring and very upsetting to the patient, affecting self-esteem and social life and even causing clinical depression. When left untreated, acne can leave permanent scars which - although they can be improved by using laser treatments - are best avoided by treating acne promptly when it starts.

Types of Acne and Cause

The cause of acne is hormonal. Testosterone, a hormone present in both males and females, stimulates sebaceous glands of the skin to produce more sebum, plugging the pores. During the teen years hormones are disorganized and acne is common, usually getting better approaching the twenties. Adult acne starts later in life and it is caused by hormonal fluctuations. Nearly half of all women experience acne flares and increased oiliness during the week preceding menstruation. The number of acne cases in adults is on the raise; it is important to recognize it and to look for professional help to control it. During the perimenopausal years and pregnancy, hormonal changes are also responsible for acne. Acne can range from very mild, just a few white and/or black heads, to the most disfiguring cystic acne with painful and disfiguring cysts that lasts for many months and leave large scars.

Treating Acne

Acne should be treated from the inside out. First of all, other associated signs and symptoms should be evaluated. For instance, the presence of adult acne and excess facial hair (hirsutism) could be a sign of increased



Before Levulan® Treatment



After Levulan® Treatment

androgen production, common in conditions like polycystic ovaries and adrenal hyperplasia. In addition, women with acne can also experience irregular menstrual cycles, obesity, infertility and diabetes. It is crucial to consult with your primary care physician or OBGYN.

The treatment of acne involves several points: reducing bacteria, decreasing oil production, unplugging the follicles and decreasing inflammation. The treatment can include oral and/or topical medications and laser treatments, depending on the severity of the disease. I usually evaluate the severity of the case, age of the patient, past treatments used and type of skin. In many cases, a combination therapy is necessary, including all modalities described above. I usually approach each case depending on what type of lesions the patient has, the type of skin and the age group. If the patient has oily skin, I put them on an oral regimen of vitamin A. When there is cystic acne, which creates painful, red nodules under the skin and which also leaves more scars, the patient needs to be treated with oral antibiotics. When there are only white and black heads with only minor inflammation, topical therapy is enough most of the time.

Topical Therapy

Stay away from bar soaps. Start with a non-comedogenic liquid cleanser to be used twice a day. Over the counter, the best option is Cetaphil, or if you want a medical grade product you can get it from the doctor's office. I like Botana Gel cleanser by Dermamed USA, since it contains green tea.

A toner containing salicylic acid should be used twice a day. I like the Acne Toner by Skin medica; it contains 2% salicylic acid

which decreases inflammation. The daily routine should also include an oil free sun block; I prefer the oil free Daily Eclipse by Dermamed USA.

Topical prescription antibiotics are very helpful to decrease bacterial proliferation. Topical retinoids are extremely effective to unplug pores, and they are essential to treat acne. The most common side effects of topical retinoid are redness, irritation, sun sensitivity and extreme dryness. There is a new prescription formulation of retinoids called Atralin® which produces less dryness and irritation since it contains moisturizing ingredients.

Most cases of mild to moderate acne respond well to the treatment modalities previously described as long as patients are compliant. I always tell my patients, "I tell you what to use and what to do but the treatment is in your hands."

When a hormonal cause is suspected - in female patients, for instance, when acne gets worse before the menstrual cycle - I like to use oral contraceptives if there are no contraindications. I like Yasmin® or Yaz® since they contain a unique progesterone component that acts like an antiandrogen. Spironolactone, a water pill also used to treat hypertension, is another hormonal regulator that blocks androgens, and it has been proven to improve hormonal acne. I use it extensively in my practice with great results.

When all the medications mentioned before have been used and no improvement is seen, many dermatologists use oral retinoids such as Isotretinoin (Accutane®). This is a very powerful medication to treat severe acne by decreasing oil production by the sebaceous gland. However, Isotretinoin carries serious potential risks related to birth

defects if the patient gets pregnant, as well as numerous side effects including depression, suicide, dry skin, nose bleeds, muscle and joint stiffness and increased triglycerides. I use Isotretinoin only as the last resource when all the other treatments fail. For severe cystic acne, I also use corticosteroid injections to diminish large inflamed acne cysts. With the injection, the cysts get better in just a couple of days.

Latest Procedures

There are new treatment modalities that are highly effective to treat acne and prevent scars, also improving scars that are already present. Photodynamic therapy with Levulan® is one of the newest treatment modalities that I use in my office with excellent results. It involves the topical application of aminolevulinic acid (Levulan®). This is a natural compound found on the body. After incubation of this product, we use a laser to activate it. This treatment has three different mechanisms of action: number one inactivates the bacteria that causes acne, number two shuts down sebum production decreasing oiliness, and number three exfoliates the skin. There is down time; the skin will be red for two to four days. Photodynamic therapy treatments are done once a month, usually in series of three

treatments. Sometimes maintenance treatments once per year are required. The bottom line is that Photodynamic therapy will make your skin clear faster than medications, with fewer hassles and side effects. Another treatment modality for mild acne is microdermabrasion. This procedure exfoliates the skin opening white and black heads. Microdermabrasion can be done as often as every other week.

Since acne patients have oily skin, it is always best to choose oil free make-up and skin care products. Just by using the wrong make-up, your acne can get worse. Learn to read the labels and look for oil free and non-comedogenic products. Acne can be effectively treated as long as you visit your physician and follow carefully his or her recommendations. Do not put the products in the drawer of your night stand; if you want to get better you need to be consistent. Don't stop the treatments if you see improvement; acne recurs if left untreated. Don't miss your follow-up appointments since in many cases change of medication is required.

When patients are left with scars after many years of suffering with acne, there are also treatments to improve the appearance of scars. Microlaser peel along with the use of topical treatments can get great results. Don't hide behind your pimples and scars.

Acne can be treated.

Skin Diagnostics Laser and Rejuvenation offers Medical and Laser treatments to improve acne, call us for an appointment at 513-631-0059 or visit our website at www.cincinnatiaskinlaser.com. Dr. Porras is the Medical Director of Skin Diagnostics Laser and Rejuvenation. She is a member of the American Academy of Dermatology, the American Society of Cosmetic Dermatology and Esthetic Surgery, and The American Society for Laser Medicine and Surgery.

