

Acne Beyond the Teenage Years: Learning to Treat Adult Acne.

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For teenagers, acne is a part of life. In adults, it is something a little bit more difficult and embarrassing. 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 see many adults still experiencing skin breakouts, or adults that never had acne during the teen years and are starting to face acne for the first time in their lives during their 20's, 30's, 40's and even older. Acne can be disfiguring and very upsetting to the patient. Untreated acne can leave permanent scars that nowadays can be treated with lasers, but it is best to avoid scars 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 and plug the pores. During the teen years, hormones are disorganized and that is why acne is common during this stage of life, usually getting better approaching the twenties. Adult acne starts later in life and it is caused by hormonal fluctuations. It can be seen in women and men. 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 rise; it is important to treat it before scars are formed.

Treating Adult Acne

Since acne is hormonal it 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 signal of increased 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. If you are suspecting any of these conditions consult with your primary care physician or OBGYN. If you are just suffering



from hormonal acne or acne in general, visit your skin doctor.

The treatment of acne involves several points: reducing the bacteria, decreasing oil production, unplugging the follicles and decreasing the inflammation. Often several medications are required depending on the severity of the problem. The treatment may include topical and oral medications. In general it is important to understand that there is not a miracle cure for acne. The treatment will clear existing lesions and it will prevent new from developing, as long as the patient continues to use the medication. I usually approach the case depending on what type of acne lesions I am facing. In general I always try to decrease oil production by putting the patients on oral Vitamin A (8,000 IU) once per day. When there is cystic acne, which is the painful red nodules under the skin and also the ones that leave more scars, the patients need to be treated with oral antibiotics. When there are only open and closed comedones, which are the white heads and black heads, topical therapy most of the times is enough.

Topical Therapy

Start with a good non-comedogenic liquid cleanser to be used twice a day. You can get it over the counter. I like Cetaphil, or, if you want a medical grade product, you can get it from your dermatologist office. I like Botana Gel Cleanser by Dermamed USA. A toner containing salicylic acid should also be used twice a day. I like the Acne Toner by Skin

Medica. Topical prescription antibiotics are very helpful to decrease proliferation of bacteria. My favorite topical antibiotic is Clyndamicin which comes in different presentations and should be used once or twice per day. Topical Retinoids are extremely effective to unplug pores; they are essential to the treatment of acne. The retinoids are topical prescriptions of Vitamin A. They come under different names; the newest are Tazorac and Differin. The most common side effect of retinoids are irritation, dryness and redness.

Most cases of mild to moderate acne respond well to the treatment modalities previously described as long as the patient is compliant. When a hormonal cause is suspected in female patients, for instance when acne gets worse before the menstrual period, I like to use oral contraceptives if there are no contraindication. Yasmin is my favorite since it contains a unique progesterone component called drospiridone that acts like an anti-androgen. Aldactone is another hormonal regulator that blocks androgens and it has been shown to improve hormonal acne.

When all the medications mentioned before have been used and no improvement is seen many doctors use oral Retinoids, like Isotretinoin (Accutane). This is a very powerful medication to treat severe acne by decreasing the production of oil by the sebaceous glands. However, Isotretinoin carries serious potential risks related to birth defects if the patients get pregnant, as well as numerous side effects including depression, suicide, dry skin, nose bleeds, muscle and joint stiffness and increased triglycerides. I do not use Isotretinoin in my practice. When patients have severe cystic acne, corticosteroid injections are very helpful to diminish large inflamed acne cysts. The lesions get better in just a couple of days.

Latest Procedures

There are new treatment modalities that are helpful to treat acne and prevent scars and treat already present scars. Photodynamic Therapy with Levulan is one of the newest treatments modalities that I use in my office with excellent results. It involves the topical application of aminolevulinic acid ALA (Levulan®) on the face. ALA is a substance that is found naturally in the human body. After incubating Levulan on the face, we use a laser to activate the medication. In my office we used Intense Pulse Light. This treatment has

three different mechanisms of action; number one inactivates the bacteria that causes acne, exfoliates the skin, unplugging the pores, and shuts down sebum production decreasing oiliness. The skin will be red for 3 to 5 days which will be followed by flaking and peeling. Photodynamic therapy treatments are done once a month; usually a series of three treatments is 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 that we use for mild to moderate acne is microdermabrasion. This unplugs pores and exfoliates the skin. Microdermabrasion can be done every other week.

Since acne patients have oily skin is best to always choose oil free makeup products. Just by using the wrong makeup your acne can get worse. Make sure you read the labels and look for oil free products.

Acne can be effectively treated as long as you visit your skin doctor and follow his or her recommendations. Do not stop the treatments since acne recurs; do not miss your follow up appointments since in many cases change of medications is required. Don't hide behind your pimples. Adult 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.

