



BEAUTY

Skin Saviours

Spots and breakouts can dent your confidence at any age, and with adult acne on the rise there are now some very grown-up spot solutions – but do they work?

When was the last time you used a spot solution? The chances are it was some skin-searing, eye-watering toner in your teens. But if, like your favourite boy band, your outbreaks have made a comeback years later, you will be relieved to hear that there are now more sophisticated solutions to the problem.

It might seem unfair, but a growing number of women – and men – are suffering from spots in their 20s, 30s and 40s – just at the age when many of us start to notice a few fine lines and wrinkles. The problem is far from rare. In fact, between 40 and 50 per cent of adults aged 20 to 40 are diagnosed with low-grade persistent acne, while each year more than ten per cent of adults consult a doctor about the condition.

Acne is an inflammatory disease of the skin that affects the tiny pores of the face, arms, back and chest. It is triggered by an abnormal reaction to testosterone in which the sebaceous glands produce excess oil. This makes skin cells sticky, leading to blocked pores that trap the oil.

If the oil solidifies in the pore it results in blackheads, while if the dead skin cells trap the oil, you get whiteheads. Bacteria can build up in the trapped oil, breaking it down to form inflammatory chemicals that cause persistent spots.

Acne is relatively common in teenagers because our testosterone levels increase during puberty, but experts are puzzled why it is now affecting an increasing number of adults.

There are four grades of spots and acne, which are important to identify because whichever grade you have will determine which products you choose and whether you might need to see your GP for prescription-strength help. Grade one consists of only a few blackheads and whiteheads, with few or no pimples, while grade two sufferers have noticeably oily skin with

whiteheads, blackheads and a number of pimples on the face. Both are relatively easy to treat. Grade three acne sufferers have whiteheads and blackheads, plus lots of pimples and cysts, which can cover the face, neck, shoulders and upper back. Anyone with grade three acne should seek the advice of a doctor or dermatologist to prevent the development of grade four, where large cysts overlap each other, forming raised, thickened areas of skin and scars.

The exact causes of adult acne remain a mystery, but several factors are involved, such as hormonal change, genetic predisposition – if

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both your parents suffered from the problem, the chances are so will you – stress and physiology. “There’s a switch mechanism that usually turns on at puberty and switches off after about five years,” says Dr Tony Chu, consultant dermatologist at Hammersmith Hospital and founder of the Acne Support Group. “But in some people the switch is delayed and turns on later, perhaps triggered by stress or having a baby – even the menopause.”

Unlike teenage acne, the adult version does not always have a definite underlying hormonal cause. Stress is thought to be a major trigger, giving rise to the term “executive acne”.

“Stress causes the adrenal glands in the body to go into overdrive,” says Dr Chu. “They then produce adrenaline, which in turn triggers the

body to produce more sebum, and in some people that can cause acne.”

To tackle the problem, dermatologists frequently use a stepped care approach, starting with the gentlest medication and adding more aggressive treatments if necessary. This is what they recommend:

Step 1 The odd outbreak can be treated with over-the-counter topical salicylic acid and benzoyl peroxide gels, washes and serums. Both dry up oil secretions and accelerate skin cell turnover, exfoliating the skin so that sebum does not become trapped in the pores.

Step 2 For persistent spots and grade two acne, your GP is likely to prescribe topical antibiotics. These usually come in miniature roll-on applicators and are available on prescription only. Clindamycin lotion and Benzamycin gel, in particular, have been shown to be as effective as oral antibiotics.

Step 3 Hormone tablets can treat any possible underlying hormonal cause, tackling the root of the problem. These include high oestrogen pills and oral antibiotics, among them tetracyclines.

Step 4 Topical vitamin A creams, gels and lotions work to speed up skin cell turnover and dry up excess sebum. However, common side-effects include very dry, irritated and inflamed skin, and extreme sensitivity to sunlight, necessitating the use of sunscreen at all times.

Step 5 The most severe cases of acne can be treated by Roaccutane, an orally administered vitamin A derivative that is available on prescription. It is proven to clear up 95 per cent of severe acne in four months, but like all similarly powerful drugs must be approached with care. It cannot be used by pregnant women or those trying to become pregnant as it can cause birth defects. Other side-effects include back and joint pain, liver problems and dry eyes. 

SPOTTED... IT'S NOT JUST US MERE MORTALS WHO CAN SUFFER FROM PROBLEM SKIN, A-LISTERS LIKE KATE MOSS, SOPHIE ELLIS-BEXTOR, NICOLA ROBERTS AND MEGAN FOX HAVE ALL BEEN PHOTOGRAPHED WITH LESS-THAN-PERFECT PORES



CLEAR WINNERS

IF THE COMPLEXION OF YOUR DREAMS IS SMOOTH, RADIANT AND FLAWLESS? THEN WAKE UP TO THE LATEST MADE-TO-MEASURE SERUMS, GADGETS AND TREATMENTS



SPOT REDUCTION These skin specialists can help with the odd spot or outbreak. They unblock pores, speed up skin cell turnover and reduce redness.

1. Dr Sebugh Breakout Spot-On, £35, from Selfridges 2. Sk:n Intense Spot Lotion, £15, from Boots 3. Estée Lauder Clear Difference Spot Treatment, £25 4. Origins Super Spot Remover Gel, £14 5. Vichy Normaderm Hyaluspot Cream, £10.50 6. Clinique Anti-Blemish Solutions Clinical Clearing Gel, £14



HIGH-TECH HELPERS These gadgets work either by heating up the skin to kill bacteria in blocked pores or bathing it in healing, soothing and antibacterial light.

1. TRIA Skin Perfecting Blue Light, £229, visit triabeauty.co.uk 2. HoMedics Tanda Zap Skin Acne Device, £59.99, from Boots 3. No!no! Skin acne treatment system, £129.99, from Boots 4. Baby Quasar Blue Acne, £269.99, visit babyquasar.co.uk 5. LMS Spotlight 24, £69.99, from feelunique.com



BREAKOUT-BANISHING BALMS These super-lightweight treatment serums and gels are formulated to unclog pores and soothe skin day and night.

1. Murad Skin Perfecting Lotion Blemish Control, £34, visit murad.co.uk 2. Clarins Pore Minimizing Serum, £26 3. Estée Lauder Clear Difference Advanced Blemish Serum, £45 4. La Roche-Posay Effaclar Duo [+], £15.50 5. Clinique Anti-Blemish Solutions Clearing Treatment, £18.50