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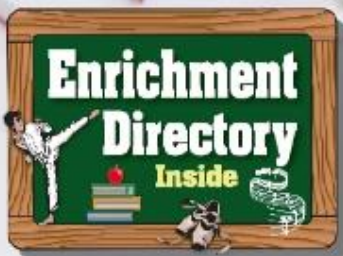
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# What Parents Need to Know About Pre-Teen and Teen Acne

As the most common skin condition in the United States, acne is familiar to nearly everyone. Typically, acne is a condition that develops during the pre-teen and teenage years, when the biological changes of puberty trigger increases in oil production. Although most teenagers who develop acne will grow out of it, severe cases can lead to scarring and can negatively impact self-esteem. To help parents and teenagers better understand acne, it is important to have a broad understanding of the condition and the many management and treatment options available.

## Spotting the Spots

The medical term for common pimples is “acne vulgaris.” Blackheads, whiteheads, and pus bumps that appear on the face, chest, and back, are caused by a combination of clogged pores and overactive sebaceous glands (glands that produce oil to keep skin from getting dry.) This is not a sign of poor hygiene. As oil production normally increases in sebaceous glands during puberty, there is an increase in the likelihood of pores clogging. Bacteria living in the clogged oil glands can trigger inflammation in the skin, thus causing acne to develop.

Acne most commonly affects teenagers, but some forms are seen in infancy. Acne in early childhood between the ages of 1-7 years could be a signal for underlying hormonal problems, so it is important to let your pediatrician know if this occurs.

## Effective Skin Care

Maintaining a daily skincare routine can be an effective way to minimize the appearance of spots. Washing the face twice daily with a mild soap labeled “for sensitive skin” can promote healthy skin and lessen pimple formation. Dermatologists also advise to avoid over-scrubbing or the use of harsh, gritty scrubs, as these can cause irritation. In general, milder soaps and cleansers are best for acne-prone skin. It is also advised to wash affected areas after exercising or sweating.

There is no good “spot treatment” for acne. Over-the-counter medications, like benzoyl peroxide or adapalene gel are available, but these must be used on a consistent basis to be effective. If the skin feels dry or sensitive with use of topical acne medications, look for a moisturizer labeled “oil-free” and “non-comedogenic” to incorporate into the daily skin care routine.

The good news—if your pre-teen or teenager has mild acne that is not causing pain or stress, a daily routine of good skin hygiene may be all that is needed to keep the skin clear and reduce breakouts.

### **Lifestyle Triggers: Fact or Fiction?**

Some lifestyle changes can be beneficial in helping to clear acne. Certain types of make-up and sunscreen can lead to breakouts, so make sure to select products labeled “non-comedogenic” or “won’t clog pores.” Some people find that stress can aggravate acne and can be alleviated by regular exercise and adequate sleep. The role of diet is controversial, and medical studies have not proven a strong link between diet and acne. Cow’s milk and foods that raise blood sugar quickly, like sweets, sodas, and processed carbohydrates may play a role, and certainly if you feel that a certain food triggers breakouts, then it should be avoided.

### **Acne Treatments and Medications**

If regular skincare and over-the-counter products are not effective in clearing acne, your teenager may need a prescription medication. Some acne medications work to stop pimples from forming by exfoliating the skin to reduce the oil and dead skin cells that clog pores, while others work to decrease irritation or inflammation of the skin caused by bacteria or other factors.

It is important to remember that there is no one “cure-all” treatment. Although acne is a common condition, many factors can influence the type of treatment for an individual. Your doctor can help you choose the best treatment.

In most cases, acne requiring prescription treatment will start with topically applied medications. It can take up to three months of consistent daily treatment before you can judge a medication’s effectiveness—so patience is key! Do not stop the medication too soon due to a lack of results after only a few days or weeks. If the acne does not clear or is more severe after a few months, oral medications like antibiotics or hormonal therapy, may be prescribed. For even more severe cases or if scarring is occurring, stronger medications that work to permanently affect the oil glands, like oral isotretinoin, may be used. Steroid injections are not commonly used for acne and are most helpful for isolated lesions that are particularly painful or inflamed.

Acne can be frustrating, but there are many ways to improve it. The first step is to adopt good daily skin care habits, but if scarring or pain is occurring, you should seek treatment early. Most pediatricians and family doctors can diagnose and treat routine cases of acne, but in more severe cases, consultation with a skin specialist such as a pediatric dermatologist may be necessary.

*–Stephanie Jacks, MD, Society for Pediatric Dermatology Committee Chair*