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# MORE THAN JUST ZITS

Acne can take a toll on a teen's self-esteem. Here's how to treat the problem and the scars it often leaves behind.

BY LARA HYDE

inform

Dealing  
with Acne

**E**IGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD SAMANTHA'S JACKSON'S\* ACNE USED TO CAUSE HER SERIOUS STRESS.

She felt self-conscious. Embarrassed. Like she always had to wear makeup. "I was frustrated because I had it the worst of all my friends. It was like, 'Why me?'" says the Winnipeg-based teen.

She tried everything—Proactiv, Tetracycline, light therapy, vacuum treatments, facials. None of it worked. And with every unsuccessful treatment, her self-esteem took another hit.

"The effect that acne has on teens' self-esteem is very powerful," says Marie Bertrand, a microbiologist and skin scientist who is also the owner of the SkinScience Clinic in Calgary. "Teens are still relying on other people's opinions for their self-worth. Acne can have a profound psychological impact."

That's why it's integral that parents handle their child's skin problems. "When dealing with teen acne, it's important that parents don't just tell their kids that they'll grow out of it, especially if the acne is severe or it is affecting them emotionally," says Bertrand. "If acne is not put under control, it can lead to scarring, which can have much more far-reaching consequences." Here's what else you should consider when your teen is facing acne issues. ►



“TEENS WHO HAVE BAD ACNE OFTEN BECOME WITHDRAWN. BUT AFTER SEEING RESULTS FROM PROPER TREATMENT, THEIR PERSONALITIES CHANGE.”

### EMOTIONAL SCARS

Not only should you, as the parent, be sensitive about your child's skin—the specialist you choose should be too. “Teens with acne are often shy. They feel ashamed,” says Mia Liefso, a medical skin therapist and owner of Bradford Skin Clinic in Bradford, Ont. “Kids pick and squeeze trying to rub off their depression. We let them know it's completely normal, and that it's not the end of the world, even if it feels like it.”

Several months ago, for example, a 19-year-old female with severe acne and scarring walked into Bertrand's SkinScience Clinic with her parents. It was the first time she'd left her house in seven months. Her acne made her feel so self-conscious that she'd dropped out of school.

It's an extreme case, but Dr. Minuk, a Winnipeg-based dermatologist and owner of Dr. Minuk's SkinClinic and Laser Centre says, “Teens who have bad acne often become withdrawn. But after seeing

results from proper treatment, their personalities change. They become different people. The kid who was sitting in my office six months ago with a baseball cap over his head because he didn't want to show his face? Now he's got a girlfriend, his back is clear, his face is clear. Can you imagine how he feels? How his parents feel? He has come out of his shell.”

While most acne in teens is hormonal, the other causes are clogged pores, bacteria and inflammation. In some people, certain foods can trigger breakouts (chocolate milk is one well-known culprit). This is why Bertrand emphasizes that everybody is different, and what works for one person might not work for another.

### ACNE TREATMENTS

Thankfully, acne treatments have come a long way in the past couple of decades, and there are now many options depending on cause and severity.

Some people's acne can be

controlled with one type of treatment but some need approaches that work on all four causes. The popular, celebrity-endorsed acne treatment, Proactiv, for example, contains benzoyl peroxide, which only works on bacteria, says Bertrand, while chemical peels can help fix clogged pores. If the problem is hormonal, women can sometimes be put on the birth control pill, adds Bertrand.

“When teens come to us, we start by asking them how they wash their face,” says Liefso. “Some teen boys will tell us they use Axe body wash. Using a body wash to clean your face will dry out your skin and the perfume in it will possibly cause more acne, it is for the body not the face.”

Liefso recommends washing one's face twice a day with a gentle cleanser. “Don't overdo it,” she adds. “Overcleansing a face will strip the skin causing pores to develop more oils and clog the pores. It also causes irritation and more inflammation.”

Zyderma HS is a relatively new over-the-counter product

that has proven effective at treating mild to moderate acne. “People like it because it's natural—there's no harsh, toxic stuff in it,” says Bertrand. The active ingredient in the topical treatment is MicroSilver BG™, which is known for its antimicrobial properties. For many, the non-drying clarifying cream is a welcome alternative to antibiotics like Tetracycline. It also works as an anti-inflammatory, so it helps with redness and scarring.

“Ninety-five per cent of teens just need to use a gentle soap, Zyderma HS and a salicylic acid product (for clogged pores) to control their acne,” says Bertrand.

Although effective, Accutane comes with its own set of risks and side effects. While reactions are rare, officials warn the public to immediately stop taking Accutane and see their doctor if they develop a rash, particularly if it's associated with fever, malaise or irritated eyes, blisters or sores on the legs, arms or face, as well as sores in the mouth, throat, nose or eyes and peeling skin.

“People tend to focus on the negatives of Accutane,” says Dr. Minuk. “But this is the drug that revolutionized acne care. When given with proper instruction and monitored closely, it can have a hugely positive impact.”

### DEALING WITH SCARS

Even after acne has stopped, pimples ►



## ACNE ACTION

To learn more about acne, go to [WWW.ACNEACTION.CA](http://WWW.ACNEACTION.CA), a new website created by the Acne and Rosacea Society of Canada to provide people with facts about this common skin condition.

“There are many myths about acne,” says Dr. Ben Barankin, Toronto dermatologist and medical director of the Toronto Dermatology Centre. “Things like ‘you just have to get through it’, it's ‘just pimples’, or ‘there's nothing you can do about it.’ These myths can hold people back from getting treatment, make them feel bad and result in lifelong acne scars for some. As acne can last for years, these harmful effects can go on for a long time. As experts, we felt compelled to set up [ACNEACTION.CA](http://ACNEACTION.CA) to let Canadians know they can take steps to get their acne under control.”



can leave a legacy. Severe acne as well as constant picking or squeezing can result in ice pick-looking scars, most commonly found along the jaw line, cheeks and temples.

Dr. Minuk says scarring can be improved with various treatments such as Co2 and Fraxel laser resurfacing. The laser penetrates the skin below the dermis and physically removes the scars by paring down, smoothing out the edges and allowing the area to heal from the surrounding skin.

“This removes as much of the scar as we can by ablating it or removing skin. It also stimulates collagen to contract the skin and make the scar smaller,” says Dr. Minuk. “The results can be fabulous. It can really be a difference between night and day and take patients’ complexions to a place where they haven’t been for years.”

### PREVENTING BREAKOUTS

Bertrand has one final tip for keeping acne at bay.

“Watch what you put on your face,” she says. “Oil-based makeup is a major cause of clogged pores. People with acne shouldn’t put any oils on their

face. It’s also important to remove makeup at night to prevent clogged pores.”

Just because a product claims to be oil-free doesn’t mean there’s no oil in it—just no mineral oil, Bertrand warns. “BB creams, CC creams, and primers are especially bad as they contain silicone, which can clog pores. If it says ‘For All Skin Types,’ it’s not for acne-prone skin,” she says.

“Be careful of anything high-coverage, high-definition or long-lasting. These products contain more waxes, silicone, more

ingredients that can clog pores,” adds Bertrand.

As for Jackson, she finally found success with Accutane. After enduring four months of the aggressive anti-acne drug, she now rarely experiences breakouts, and when she does, they go away faster than before. Her complexion is clear, her skin tone is even. “I feel great now. I have my confidence back,” she says. “It’s the best feeling in the world to know I’ll never have to go back to that again.” ■

\*Name changed for confidentiality

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