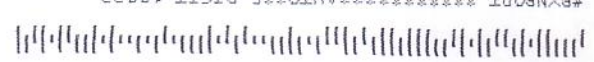


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Breakout Busters

Just when you thought you had securely packed away all the remnants of your teenage years—embarrassing yearbook photos, cassette mix tapes, love letters to Johnny Depp—acne, the most treacherous memory of all, comes creeping back. A landmark study in 1999 found the median age for acne to be 26.5, and our derms have noticed that the age of new sufferers continues to increase. Plus, “more women have breakouts in adulthood than men do,” says UCLA dermatologist Jenny Kim, MD, PhD. The jury is still out on why breakouts are on the rise, but dermatologists speculate it’s linked to an overall increase in hormonal fluctuations. Read on to learn how to put an end to your acne for good.—MAURA LYNCH

+ HEAL BETTER

What’s worse than a zinger of a pimple? The spot or indentation it leaves behind. “That’s why retinoids are great for acne—they slough off the damage and boost collagen to fill scars,” Kim says. Salicylic or glycolic acid creams and lighteners such as hydroquinone can help remove dark spots; for deeper scars, “certain lasers such as Fraxel repair more severe damage,” Kim says.



+ CHEMICAL WARFARE

As women age, estrogen drops, which can lead to increased sebum levels and acne. “That’s why birth control pills, which slightly raise estrogen levels, effectively clear skin,” says derm and Proactiv cocreator Katie Rodan, MD. NYC-based dermatologist Anne Chapas, MD, says she sometimes prescribes androgen blockers such as Spironolactone to patients with serious breakouts who don’t want to take birth control. The hormone cortisol is the likely culprit in stress breakouts. Consider it a medical reason to take all of your vacay days.

+ SPOT COUTURE

Look for salicylic-acid-infused concealers such as Neutrogena SkinClearing Blemish Concealer (at left) to “cover and treat a pimple all at once,” Kim says. A heated compress, such as a washcloth or the Zeno Hotspot (near right), “can bring down swelling,” says Chapas, who adds that sulfur, a main ingredient in Ren ClearCalm3 Anti-Acne Treatment Mask (far right), “reduces inflammation and kills bacteria fast.”

+ FIX IT FAST

MINOR THREAT

The most basic of blemishes, whiteheads (closed comedones) and blackheads (open comedones) are simply clogged pores. “Sometimes we are not able to shed dead cells, and clogs result,” Kim says. These noninflamed bumps are best treated with topical acids or vitamin A derivatives. “Topical retinoids work very well to increase cell turnover,” Kim says. Chapas regularly gives light, in-office salicylic and glycolic acid peels to help keep patients’ skin clear and radiant. Don’t pick, push, or pop—you’ll risk scarring: “Sit on your hands if you have to,” Rodan says.

BIG RED

Irritated pimples are the immune system’s response to trapped bacteria. In addition to topical or oral antibiotics, Chapas recommends using antimicrobial benzoyl peroxide: “Using multiple topicals reduces the chances that the bacteria will develop resistance to antibiotics.” Sensitive skin, however, may do better with something less drying—NYC-based derm Dennis Gross, MD, has developed a line using farnesol, “a gentler, botanically derived version of benzoyl peroxide,” he says. (And it really works—practically erasing a few ELLE editors’ fashion-week breakouts overnight.) For moderate acne, derms also use in-office sessions of Isolaz: broad-range IPL to kill bacteria and gentle suction to declog. But for very painful cystic acne, the consensus seems to be that the controversial oral drug Accutane (side effects can include depression and birth defects) is still the most effective.



Clockwise, from above: Clinique Even Better Clinical Dark Spot Corrector reduces hyperpigmentation; Proactiv Repairing Treatment zaps bacteria with microcrystal benzoyl peroxide; Chapas says the bacteria-busting blue light in the TRIA Skin Clarifying System “is as powerful as the one in my office”; salicylic acid and retinol in Neutrogena Healthy Skin Anti-Wrinkle Anti-Blemish Cream keep pores clear and fight fine lines; Dr. Dennis Gross Skincare Trifix Acne Clearing Lotion uses natural versions of salicylic acid, sulfur, and benzoyl peroxide to treat acne without causing irritation.

