

BREAKING BAD SKIN

Your quest for clearer skin ends here. Whether you're in your 20s, 30s, 40s or 50s, here's what you need to know about acne at every age.

BY TANIA KWONG

IT SEEMS THAT anything and everything can trigger a breakout. The jury is still out on exactly how acne is related to stress, what we order for lunch or simply our genes, but we do know that acne is individual and there is no one-size-fits-all cure. The good news is treating it at any age is easier than ever. And while a convo between you and your dermatologist is your best bet when deciding on treatment, it's never a bad idea to educate yourself on this common skin condition.



Flaunt your gorgeous skin like Salma Hayek.

40s and 50s

THE DIAGNOSIS

Dealing with acne at the same time as your teenaged daughter or niece doesn't seem fair, yet it is an increasingly common reality. A 2012 study conducted by Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston found that adult onset acne is on the rise. Of the nearly 3,000 women who participated, many experienced acne: 45 per cent of those aged 21 to 30, 26 per cent of 31- to 40-year-olds and 12 per cent of women aged 41 to 50. "There is a hormonal shift that happens around 40," says Dr. Jeannette Graf, a dermatologist in Great Neck, N.Y., and assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York. "There could be about a year when you suddenly start breaking out like you never have before. It's far less comedonal [blackheads and whiteheads] and more cystic." Perimenopause and then menopause also start to creep up, playing host to acne and dry, sensitive skin. "Once you reach menopause, overnight some people will say their skin gets really dry. As we get older, our skin also becomes more sensitive because our moisture barrier is diminished." Enlarged pores start to crop up as our skin loses collagen and becomes less firm. "There's nothing holding them together, so they're kind of like pot-bellied pores," says Graf. "They're going to look larger and material will collect in them."

GLOW PICKS



1. Clarisonic Plus Face & Body Sonic Cleansing System, \$259
2. Clarins Pore Minimizing Serum, \$46
3. Neutrogena Rapid Clear All-in-1 Facial Lotion, \$16
4. Skin Authority VitaD Fortified Topical Elixir, \$79 for 30 ml

THE RX

In addition to using an anti-aging moisturizer that strengthens the skin's barrier, treating with a retinoid and exfoliating with an alpha-hydroxy acid solution, kick your acne regimen into high gear with a cleansing system such as Clarisonic. Its spin brush may provide the extra boost your congested skin needs. "It kind of shakes the pores, removing what's inside them," says Graf. She also advises us to think beyond the beauty aisle, touting omega-3 fatty acids such as flaxseed oil for its anti-inflammatory properties, and vitamin D. "Vitamin D3 governs our antimicrobial activity and wound healing in the skin," she says.

30s

THE DIAGNOSIS

Just when you start to feel OK-ish about those laugh lines—bam!—you experience your first bout of inflammatory acne. “I tend to see more cystic acne in the 30s,” says Graf. “It’s hormonal, and whether you’re pregnant or not, there are peaks and troughs.”

“A sign that acne is hormonally driven is if the acne gets worse before or around their period,” explains Dr. Anatoli Freiman, a dermatologist in Toronto and medical director of the Toronto Dermatology Centre. Also, check your jawline. “That tends to be where we see the hormonal acne,” says Graf. To rule out eruptions related to hormonal imbalances, consult your doctor.

THE RX

If you’ve been looking for a reason to finally jump on the retinoid bandwagon, acne is it. The vitamin A derivative is the ultimate youth elixir because it smoothes lines and promotes clear skin. “It helps prevent the initial clogging of the pore,” says Graf. Since vitamin A derivatives can be irritating, those with dry or sensitive skin should start with an over-the-counter version, like retinol, which tends to be gentler than some vitamin A varieties.

It’s also important to moisturize when using vitamin A products for acne, says Freiman. He likes formulas with skin-plumping ceramides to reinforce the skin’s moisture barrier. For those with sensitive skin or rosacea, try gentle cleansers and moisturizers that have soothing ingredients, such as mineral-rich thermal water, known for its skin-healing benefits.

With age comes slower skin renewal, meaning it’s time for serious exfoliation. “It’s a very important part of acne, because you don’t want a layer of dead skin clogging the pores and causing a cyst or comedones,” says Graf. Exfoliators can be physical (micro-beads or fruit seeds) or chemical (alpha-hydroxy acids, such as glycolic acid). Physical formulas can irritate acne further if overused, so the latter is a better bet.



Get Alicia Keys’ glowing finish.

GLOW PICKS



1. Erno Laszlo Anti Blemish Beta Purifying Mask, \$60
2. Avène High Protection Mineral Cream SPF 50, \$26
3. NeoStrata Skin Renewal Peel Solution, \$74 for 50 ml
4. Aveeno Clear Complexion Foaming Cleanser, \$14

ACNE SCARS CAN HAPPEN AT ANY AGE

Here’s how to leave them (and the emotional baggage they carry) behind.



1. Know the difference between scars and post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation. “Inflammatory acne [red, deep, painful bumps] causes inflammation in the skin and can damage the collagen structure under the skin, leaving behind a mark or scar,” says Dr. Lisa Chipps, a dermatologist in Beverly Hills, Calif. “People who have a darker skin colour are prone to post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation or brown marks that are left over from their acne. Those areas of hyperpigmentation do fade over time with good skin protection.” For scars, she recommends starting with a topical retinoid, such as retinol, which helps rebuild collagen, and consulting a dermatologist. We like [A] RoC Retin-Ox Correxion Instant Wrinkle Filler, \$58 for 30 ml, and [B] StriVectin-AR Advanced Retinol Eye Treatment, \$83.
2. Don’t pick or squeeze. For extra insurance, opt for a protective product like [C] Vichy Normaderm Hyaluspote, \$21. Using hyaluronic acid to form a film-like bandage, it acts as a bacteria shield that combats infection and inflammation, and minimizes the potential of scarring because it promotes faster healing.
3. If serious scarring or hyperpigmentation are concerns, ask your dermatologist about a laser treatment, such as fractional resurfacing lasers. “They make thousands of micro-wounds in the skin [like aerating a lawn] and each of those causes a wound that heals quickly, and in doing so, builds new collagen and removes hyperpigmentation,” she says.



Keep your complexion looking flawless, like Megan Fox's.

20s

THE DIAGNOSIS

If you've ever wondered why the pimples from your teens didn't go the way of your prom date (straight to the memory vault), you're not alone. Chances are, if you had an oily T-zone and zits in high school, you're still dealing with bothersome bumps well into your 20s. "In your teens, your sebaceous glands are developing and in your 20s, they're operating full force," says Graf. Knowing what type of acne you have is the best way to form your plan of attack. Comedonal acne is the most common type for this age group.

THE RX

If you haven't done so already, now is the time to commit to a basic skincare regimen (for instance, no more sleeping with your makeup on). "For any type of acne, patients need proper cleansers, so we often use something with salicylic acid, which peels off the top layers of the skin and can help open up the pores," says Freiman. Benzoyl peroxide is another gold-standard ingredient, popular in spot treatments when you have a sudden flare-up. "It's an antibacterial preparation, but it can be irritating, so you need to be careful when applying it, especially around the eyes," adds Freiman. While newer formulations are less drying, Graf notes that you can still get away with using a stronger spot treatment in your 20s because your skin tends to be on the oilier side. To test your tolerance, start with a concentration of 2.5 per cent benzoyl peroxide and work your way up to five per cent, which is the maximum amount you'll find in over-the-counter treatments in Canada.

Clean skin begets clear skin. If you're active, stash facial cleansing wipes in your bag. "If you appropriately time when you wipe it away—after working out or sweating—you can prevent material from drying up and clogging, which is the beginning of a comedone," says Graf.

GLOW PICKS



1. Spectro Blemish-Prone Skin Cleanser, \$9
2. Clean & Clear Makeup Dissolving Facial Cleansing Wipes, \$9
3. B.Kamins Blemish Gel 5%, \$29
4. Cetaphil Dermacontrol Oil Control Moisturizer SPF 30, \$23 for 120 ml