

Acne doesn't care how old you are. Even in my 30s, I was still breaking out, and in my business, that's not acceptable," says actress and singer Vanessa Williams, who endorses Proactiv Solution acne treatment. Whether you're in the public eye or not, acne never really feels acceptable. No one wants to leave the house with a face full of pimples. That's why we found out how to get rid of breakouts once and for all.

BREAKOUTS BE GONE!

Say goodbye to blemishes and hello to glowing summer skin

WASH YOUR FACE LESS

"Acne isn't caused by dirt. It's caused by excessive hormones on the skin, specifically a hormone by-product called DHT, which stimulates oil glands to produce excess oil, eventually clogging pores underneath your skin," says Dr. Alex Khadavi, dermatology professor at the University of Southern California School of Medicine and creator of the anti-DHT product Clearogen. "You can't wash away what's underneath, even if you scrubbed your face all day. In fact, chronic washing will irritate your skin by drying it out." So keep face washing down to once or twice a day.



Kelly Clarkson dealt with acne before she found the Proactiv Solution.

USE GENTLE PRODUCTS

When picking products, go for mild, non-soap cleansers that don't contain any perfumes. "Perfumed soaps are the absolute worst for your skin," says Dr. Sandy Tsao, director of dermatologic surgery at Harvard Medical School. Most dermatologists recommend brands such as Basis, Cetaphil, Neutrogena and Dove. Then, immediately after washing, apply a non-comedogenic moisturizer, which will lock in moisture without clogging pores. "Don't be fooled by mois-

turizers that simply claim to be oil-free. That doesn't mean they're non-acne-forming. You need to look for a product that says it's non-comedogenic," says Dr. Tsao.

TAKE OFF MAKEUP PRE-WORKOUT

Even though non-comedogenic makeup should not clog pores, when you work out, your sweat combines with makeup and can cause an acne flare-up, says Dr. Tsao. If you have time before you exercise, take your makeup off. If you don't, wash your face as soon as possible after exercising.

STOP SQUEEZING

No matter how tempted you are to pop those pimples, don't. "Any manipulation of pimples can make the condition worse," says Dr. David J. Leffell, professor of dermatology and surgery at Yale School of Medicine. "It prolongs the healing and can lead to scars. Wear mittens if you have to, but do not squeeze!"

EXFOLIATE OCCASIONALLY

Exfoliation (a mild sanding of the skin's top layer) helps unclog pores. "Exfoliating treatments like microdermabrasion and chemical peels can be beneficial in managing acne,"

says Dr. Tsao. Dr. Khadavi agrees: "Microdermabrasion can wipe out whiteheads and blackheads." But don't overdo it. "You shouldn't exfoliate more than once a week or you risk making your skin worse," says Dr. Leffell. Also, if you use an at-home microdermabrasion kit, follow directions carefully.

DON'T BLAME FOOD

The idea that chocolate and greasy foods cause acne is a myth, says Dr. Tsao. But if you notice that you tend to break out after eating certain foods, see your doctor. It may mean that you have rosacea, says Dr. Tsao. Rosacea is a skin condition that can look a lot like acne, but it is triggered by things like spicy food and red wine. If rosacea is the diagnosis, your doctor can help you treat it.

SEE YOUR DERMATOLOGIST

Before you go ahead and treat yourself, it's best to see a dermatologist. She will help you figure out what kind of acne you have and which treatment is best for you. If you have just a few breakouts and some blackheads, you may only need to exfoliate or use acne-specific cleansers (products that contain salicylic acid or benzoyl peroxide can help). If you have more persistent acne, you might need a topical or oral antibiotic. If you have severe acne, your doctor may want you to try Retin-A (either the over-the-counter variety or the prescription kind). "Retin-A is probably the most beneficial treatment for all types of acne. It helps exfoliate the skin, it alters the pores in a positive manner and it has anti-inflammatory properties that minimize acne," says Dr. Tsao. "But use caution — it can cause irritation and sun sensitivity." When nothing else works, doctors sometimes prescribe Accutane, which is highly effective but can have some very serious side effects. "The bottom line is that there are many treatments out there," says Dr. Tsao. "We've come a long way, and you shouldn't hesitate to talk to your doctor and get help."



Anti-acne Products

- Neutrogena Rapid Clear Acne Eliminating Spot Gel, \$6.50, drugstores;
- Vichy Peel Microabrasion Kit, \$55, vichyusa.com;
- Cetaphil Moisturizing Lotion, \$6, drugstores;
- Basis Cleaner Clean Face Wash, \$4, drugstores;
- Proactiv, \$50 for three-step system, proactiv.com



VANESSA WILLIAMS: KWAKU ALSTON/CORBIS OUTLINE; KELLY CLARKSON: DAVID J. DOWLING/SHOOTING STAR; ASK RACHEL HEADSHOT: ASTRID STAWIARZ; MAKEUP ARTIST: MICHELLE B. FOR MARK EDWARD INC.; HAIR STYLIST: MARCO MARANGHELLO FOR JOHN BARRETT; STILL: ASTRID STAWIARZ



Vanessa Williams is a spokesperson for Proactiv Solution acne treatment.

ASK RACHEL

Our health director answers your top questions



DEAR RACHEL

I use non-stick, non-fat cooking sprays. Am I getting exposed to chemicals?

A. "No need to worry about exposure to chemicals," says Leslie Bonci, director of the sports nutrition program at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. "These sprays are basically oil with air added to them, so they're perfectly safe." If you're looking to cut calories and fat, this is a sensible way to do it. Still, you may want to consider the fact that olive oil and macadamia nut oil are healthy monounsaturated fats rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which help to reduce your risk of heart disease. So you don't need to be afraid of cooking with a little bit of real oil now and then.

DEAR RACHEL

Will I damage my feet if I wear shoes that are too small?

A. You certainly might. "Many women tend to buy shoes that are about a half size too small for them. This causes their feet to jam into the front portion of the shoe," says Dr. Scott Herron, director of the Advanced Orthopaedic Surgery Center in Temecula, Calif. "Feet aren't designed to go into these tiny spaces; when they do, the pressure and friction on the feet can lead to irritation, nerve pain, corns and calluses — and it will make bunions worse." The way to avoid this is to go to the shoe store and have a salesperson measure your feet while you're standing (you can't get an accurate measurement while sitting). Once you get your correct size, pick shoes with a wide toe box, if you can, and sturdy arch support. And try to keep heel height to no more than an inch and a half, which will keep you from putting too much pressure on the front part of your feet. If you simply can't live without your six-inch stilettos with the pointy tip at the toes, go ahead and wear them, but minimize the time you have them on your feet, says Dr. Herron.

IF YOU HAVE A HEALTH OR FITNESS QUESTION, email askrachel@ok-magazine.com OR WRITE TO: ASK RACHEL, OKI MAGAZINE, 475 5TH AVE., NEW YORK, NY 10017

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