



Teen Health

Acne

What is acne?

Acne (pimples) is a common skin condition that often starts in the teenage years. It affects the oil (sebaceous) glands and hair follicles, mainly on the face, neck, back, chest and shoulders. Up to 80% of adolescents and young adults experience acne at some point.

Types of Pimples

- Blackheads—these occur when oil (sebum) is exposed to the air and turns dark (they are not caused by “dirt”)
- Whiteheads—pimples that occur under the skin’s surface
- Papules—small pink or red bumps
- Pustules—bumps in the skin that contain pus
- Nodules and cysts—large, painful bumps deep in the skin that can cause scarring

What causes acne?

- Blockages in hair follicles
- Hormone changes during adolescence
- Bacteria in the skin
- Inflammation (your body’s immune system reacting to skin changes)

Things That Can Make Acne Worse

- Oily creams, makeup or hair products
- Pressure or friction from clothing, sweatbands, chin straps or backpacks
- Squeezing or popping pimples with your fingers
- Emotional stress or fatigue
- Some people may be sensitive to certain foods, such as sugar, fructose, wheat or dairy (milk) products

Treating Acne at Home

- Clean skin gently with a mild soap, then pat dry. Do not scrub your skin, as this may make your acne worse.
- Try not to touch or squeeze your skin.
- Choose your makeup carefully. Look for a label that says “oil-free” or “noncomedogenic.”
- Use an over-the-counter medication that contains benzoyl peroxide or salicylic acid. Read and follow label directions carefully.
- Be patient. It usually takes one to two months to see improvement from changes in medication, diet and/or makeup.

Alternative Medicine Treatments

- Tea tree oil: This oil has an effect similar to benzoyl peroxide, but may be less irritating to the skin. Dilute to 5% strength (1 part oil added to 19 parts water) and apply once daily to affected skin.
- Omega-3 fish oils: Your body uses omega-3 fatty acids found in fish and seafood to make chemicals that can reduce redness and inflammation. Try to eat more fish and seafood or take fish oil supplements. You can take up to 2,000 mg (two gel caps or 1 tsp. liquid fish oil) a day.
- Zinc: Zinc helps heal wounds and reduce inflammation. You can take up to 30 mg of zinc by mouth daily, or you can apply zinc to your skin in the form of zinc oxide.

If home remedies do not work, you may benefit from prescription medications such as retinoids or antibiotics. Please call your pediatrician for an appointment.

Healthy Eating and Obesity

The first step in healthy eating is accepting yourself as you are, rather than trying to imitate a supermodel or “hunky” actor. It is neither realistic nor healthy for most people to look like a model or actor. Next, make good health a priority. When you are healthy, feel good about yourself and accept yourself, you will look attractive to others as well.

How do I know if I am obese?

Obesity is defined as having a body mass index (BMI) higher than 95% of others your age. Obesity is more than just the way you look. It increases the risk for long-term health problems, such as high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, sleep apnea, arthritis, depression and anxiety. You can figure out your BMI using a “BMI calculator” (one is included in the sources at the end of this sheet).

Although being overweight is far more common than being underweight, both are a problem. Maintaining a healthy relationship with food will keep your weight in a desirable range. Here are some suggestions for healthy eating and weight management.

- Slow down. Most teens eat too fast. Try to sit down and eat meals with your family.
- Do not eat in front of the TV or computer, or in the car.
- Too much time in front of a TV or computer can lead to weight gain. Limit “screen time” to 1 or 2 hours a day.

- Get plenty of sleep. Sleep-deprived teens are more likely to become overweight.
- Limit sugary beverages. Sugars and sweetened drinks can cause weight gain and liver irritation, and can put you at risk for diabetes later in life. Avoid sodas, energy drinks, sports drinks and sweet tea. Water is the best thirst-quencher. Limit your fruit juice intake to 6 ounces a day.
- Eat “real” foods. Real foods consist of meats, fish, seafood, eggs, vegetables, nuts, berries and fruits.
- Avoid processed and packaged foods, such as candies, cookies, chips, crackers, cakes, pastries and muffins. There is a reason it is called “junk food.” Nuts, berries and fruits (real foods) are healthier snack alternatives.
- Talk to your parents about keeping unhealthy food and drinks out of the home, such as soft drinks, sweet tea and processed snacks like cookies, chips and crackers.
- If you are overweight, do not try severe calorie restriction (“crash” dieting). In addition to being unhealthy, these diets do not work in the long run. You will gain back all the weight you lost—and more.
- Consider vitamin D supplements. Vitamin D is good for a number of things in your body, such as tooth enamel, bone density and your immune system. It helps prevent flu, allergies and some types of cancer. Roughly a third of all teenagers do not get enough vitamin D. Approximately 1,000 to 2,000 units a day of vitamin D is a good dose for most teens. It is available over the counter in 1,000-unit gel caps.

If you are overweight, underweight or have questions about your diet, please call your pediatrician.

Exercise

Being physically active has many benefits:

- Higher bone density, so your bones are less likely to break
- Better body composition—more muscle and less fat
- Lower blood pressure
- Higher HDL (“good” cholesterol)
- Better sleep
- Higher energy level during the day
- Higher self-esteem (feeling better about yourself)

There are two things that exercise will not do: It will not make up for a poor diet, and it will not burn enough calories to make you lose weight. Diet and exercise work together to regulate your metabolism and keep you at a healthy body weight.

Try to engage in 30 to 60 minutes of physical activity each day. It does not have to be all at once, and it does not have to be strenuous. Possible activities include walking, bicycling, jogging, skateboarding, skating, hiking, tossing a ball or Frisbee, kicking a soccer ball or playing Wii Fit. Keep it fun, so you will look forward to it. Find an active hobby, like cycling or martial arts.

Interval training (alternating intense and light activity) has been shown to promote health and fat loss more effectively than running at a steady pace.

You also can work out with weights (strength training). Start with light weights and high repetitions, and find a knowledgeable coach or trainer to supervise you.

Sleep

Most teenagers need 9 or 10 hours of sleep each night. A lack of sleep can cause daytime drowsiness, poor concentration and weight gain. Your “biological clock” has changed from when you were younger, which may make it more difficult for you to fall asleep in the evening. Here are some steps you can take to achieve restful sleep:

- Keep a regular schedule. Try to go to bed and wake up at the same time every day.
- Do not “sleep in” on weekends. Doing so can disrupt your sleep for the following week.
- Avoid caffeine late in the day. Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, soft drinks, “energy” drinks and chocolate. It is a stimulant that can interfere with your sleep.
- Get plenty of exercise. Physical activity during the day will improve your sleep quality in the evening.
- Sleep in a quiet, dark room. Light and noise can interfere with your sleep. Turn off your TV, stereo and cellphone at night.
- Avoid excessive stimulation late at night. Examples include TV, computers, video games, cellphones and texting.
- Keep daytime naps to 30 minutes or less.

If you have persistent trouble sleeping at night or staying awake during the day, please call your pediatrician.

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Sources:

Acne
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National Institutes of Health: niams.nih.gov/health_info/Acne/acne_ff.asp

Healthy Eating

Healthy Children: healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/nutrition/Pages/default.aspx
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BMI Calculator: mayoclinic.com/health/bmi-calculator/NU00597

Exercise

Healthy Children: healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/fitness/Pages/default.aspx
Interval Training: exrx.net/FatLoss/HIITvsET.html
Strength Training: hss.edu/conditions_strength-conditioning-kids.asp

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Mayo Clinic: mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/tween-and-teen-health/in-depth/teens-health/art-20046157