



Nothing smashes confidence quite like acne, which affects up to 50 million Americans a year. Megan O'Neill reports on proven solutions to heal and prevent every eruption

CLEAN SWEEP

To treat the four major causes of breakouts—clogged pores, proliferating *P. acnes* bacteria, inflammation, and oil—New York-based dermatologist Arielle Kauvar, MD, suggests starting with tried and true OTC topicals that “gently exfoliate and reduce inflammation,” such as a cell-renewing glycolic acid cleanser, an allover retinol lotion for brightening, and an antibacterial benzoyl peroxide spot treatment.

When drugstore options don't do the trick, New York-based dermatologist Jennifer MacGregor, MD, prescribes antibacterial Aczone, a topical anti-inflammatory that “modulates the immune system by blocking an enzyme in white blood cells that would normally lead to inflammation and tissue damage.”

If spots are concentrated around the chin, elevated testosterone levels (which can cause oil production to spike) may

be the culprit. New York-based dermatologist Barney Kenet, MD, recommends birth control pills such as Ortho Tri-Cyclen and Yaz, or he prescribes Spironolactone, an antiandrogen medication that balances hormones. And while Kenet notes that “the single most effective agent in stopping acne” is still 33-year-old Accutane, he warns that it can cause “quite significant side effects, [including] birth defects if you get pregnant while using it.”

TECH SAVVY

An arsenal of in-office acne procedures are all designed to target the same thing: oil glands. In addition to surefire sebum-reducing treatments such as the Isolaz laser, which utilizes intense pulsed light (IPL), Beverly Hills-based dermatologist Michael Lin, MD, blasts spots with photodynamic therapy (PDT), originally used to treat some types of

skin cancer and later FDA-approved for acne. During PDT, aminolevulinic acid (ALA)—a photosensitizing chemical that becomes a potent antimicrobial when triggered by specific wavelengths of light—is applied to the skin, then activated by blue light. “It incubates for 30 minutes to an hour, killing bacteria and injuring the sebaceous glands,” Lin says. A single session of PDT can improve the complexion for up to 12 weeks.

For severe cases, Kauvar switches to red light, which “penetrates more deeply.” She also leaves the ALA solution on skin for three hours (it's usually on for an hour or less), a variation that can incur a week of intense swelling. The discomfort is worth it for some patients: After multiple sessions spaced eight weeks apart, the combo can diminish acne for up to a year.

Alternatively, radio-frequency treatments, such as Aluma or Thermage, can shrink sebaceous glands via heat. In a 2003 study published in the journal *Dermatologic Surgery*, radio frequency significantly reduced 82 percent of participants' acne in one to two sessions, spaced up to eight months apart.

When you need a spot gone in a flash, the gold standard is a quick shot of the anti-inflammatory steroid cortisol, which can shrink a blemish in under 24 hours. Postinjection, Kenet suggests dabbing on the drugstore astringent Domeboro, typically used to quell rashes, “to dry out the pimple.”

GOLDEN FUTURE

The next big buzzword in acne eradication? Nanotechnology. Company-sponsored trials of Sebacia, a nanopowered treatment currently pending FDA approval, have shown “a 70 percent decrease in acne sustained up to seven months after three treatment sessions a few weeks apart,” Kauvar says. Here's how it works: A lotion infused with gold-plated nanoparticles is driven deep into pores using a low-frequency ultrasound device, then targeted with diode-laser light for a photothermal effect. The result: Oil glands are shocked into submission. ●



1. NEUTROGENA On-the-Spot Acne Treatment's 2½ percent concentration of benzoyl peroxide is proven to kill bacteria. 2. It may sound counterintuitive, but moisturizing acne-prone skin is key, says Lin, whose DR. LIN SKINCARE Daily Hydrating Gel contains water-retaining hyaluronic acid. 3. With complexion-clearing retinol and tone-evening resveratrol, PCA SKIN Intensive Brightening Treatment clarifies and helps fade hyperpigmentation. 4. KATE SOMERVILLE EradiKate To-Go Acne Treatment stabs come presoaked with exfoliating AHAs to up cellular turnover. 5. SKINCEUTICALS Blenheim + Age Defense serum tackles breakouts with sebum-inhibiting dioic acid.