



Acne: Treating the Inside and Out

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Acne can be one of the most difficult trials of adolescence. Each of us who has passed into adulthood likely has a yearbook photo or vivid memory of the “zit” that would not die. For some unfortunates acne is not only socially damaging but also damaging to the skin and underlying tissues.

Acne is an infection and must be treated as such. However the cause of these infections is not completely understood. The follicles and sebaceous glands that are affected by acne are delicate systems. The relationship of hormones, oils, bacteria and skin cells combine to create a harmonious or destructive scenario.

Dermatologists often prescribe a combination of antibiotics, topical antiseptics and hormone replacement to counteract acne. While effective, these combinations can lead to unwanted side effects including weight gain, skin rashes and may also become less effective over time. This conventional model fails to recognize that skin health is greatly affected by our internal health too.

An effective acne treatment must take into account some basic elements. I do my best to use these elements in my practice.

First is hygiene. Basic instructions for keeping your face clean include: using a gentle face cleanser (like Purpose or Cetaphil) at least once a day, avoid repetitive touching of your face through out the day (especially picking of existing acne), and changing pillow cases often.

Second, the internal systems which involve acne must be addressed. Acne may be a result of poor dietary habits and poor digestion, deficient liver function, food allergies or food intolerance. Hormone imbalance is a known cause of acne which involves the entire body. There are several treatments to be considered and often when tried in conjunction get the best results. Avoiding foods that can aggravate acne in some individuals is the first step. While different foods can irritate different people, I find that dairy is often responsible for acne. In some cases physician led food elimination diets and specific blood tests can find foods that your body may be intolerant to.

Increasing essential nutrients for skin health like zinc, beta-carotene and omega 3 fatty acids help to ensure that the body has what it needs to function well. I have found that by using a combination oil which contains flax, evening primrose and borage I am able to reduce skin problems including acne within weeks. These omegas can also be found in foods such as fish, nuts and seeds as well as in the liquid form oil combinations here at the Coop.

The skin is also major organ of elimination and it is important to consider that during the treatment of acne. Sweating is the main way that the skin helps us detoxify. By sweating regularly either through exercise or ambient heat therapy (such as sauna or steam), one can ensure that they are optimizing their overall health as well as the health of their skin. Important factors to consider when engaging in sweat therapy: adequate hydration and regular exfoliation through showers and skin brushing.

With the belief in mind that optimal health is a result of recognizing how systems in the body are connected, it helps to remember that acne, can be helped dramatically if we remember to treat the whole person, inside out and outside in.

Dr. Vespignani practices Naturopathic Medicine and is the Director of Restorative Health at the Institute for Restorative Health.