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# The Root Cause of Acne Your Doctor Will Never Tell You About...

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By **Dr. Mercola**

Your teen's months of prom planning are finally in place, complete with dinner reservations, perfect gown, the dream date... and the dreaded last-minute acne flare-up! It's another blow from this notorious villain that manages to crash every momentous adolescent event. If you're the parent of an adolescent, "heartbreak by acne" is an all-too-familiar scenario, and your emotionally fragile teen wants to hide under his bed until semester's end.

Acne affects the majority of adolescents worldwide to some degree, and is a major source of embarrassment for many.

But it isn't just teens who are afflicted—one in five American adults also suffer from acne, and for whom the psychological toll is no less significant. Acne affects about 85 percent of Americans at some time in their lives and is the most common skin disorder in the U.S.A. Experts report that many people underestimate the self-consciousness and social stigma that come with having acne.

Typically, those suffering from acne feel self-conscious, embarrassed and helpless. For acne sufferers, the embarrassment can lead to low self-confidence, feelings of alienation and social withdrawal.

It's not hard to understand, then, why many people spend so much time and money trying to find a solution to their acne affliction. After trying a slew of ineffective over-the-counter products, they look to their physician for an answer. Most physicians quickly reach for their prescription acne medications, which have potentially harmful side effects, and attempt to treat acne's symptoms while completely ignoring its underlying cause.

Even though these drugs are strongly promoted and professed to be safe by pharmaceutical companies alike, I am firmly opposed to using them as a first line defense against acne. The best solution, moms and dads, is to take your adolescent to the farmer's market instead of the grocery store, because acne's biggest offender is the American diet.

## Pharmaceutical Treatment of Acne is Big Business

Acne is one of the most common skin problems for which people seek the advice of a dermatologist. For such a common condition, it is astonishingly misunderstood and mistreated by medical professionals. One of the few things authorities can agree on is that most people have a type of acne called acne vulgaris, an inflammatory bacterial condition that commonly appears on the skin of your face, neck, shoulders, back and chest, sometimes leading to painful lesions.

But this is where the consensus ends.

When treatment after treatment fails and acne keeps reappearing, it's likely your doctor has labeled your acne condition "chronic." What this *really* means is, the treatments are the wrong ones because the underlying cause of your acne problem has not been addressed...

So, instead of addressing the cause your medical provider will likely adhere to the official government Guidelines of Care for Acne Vulgaris Management, put forth by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This outlines the conventional acne treatment protocol, including topical and systemic antibiotics, steroids and hormonal agents (including oral contraceptives and Accutane—one of the most dangerous drugs ever developed).

The above recommendations have been fully approved by the American Academy of Dermatology as the current roadmap for acne treatment—they are extremely influential and have set the treatment standard at clinical, corporate, and governmental levels. It is astounding that the seventh and final item on their list of therapies is called "**Dietary Restrictions (Not Recommended)**"—addressing the cause of your acne, but rather in merely *managing it*.

Managing it means ongoing visits to your dermatologist, and continued profits for the medical industry.

The consequences of these guidelines are as expected—aggressive promotion of drugs, biased federal regulations, misguided medical practice, and continued public deception.

## Overview of Conventional Acne Treatments

1. Topical treatments (lotions, creams, and gels)—often the first thing a physician will recommend.
2. Oral antibiotics (tetracycline, doxycycline, minocycline, and erythromycin)—usually reserved for severe acne cases.
3. Accutane (isotretinoin) and its generic equivalents—reserved for severe acne cases.

Topical treatments are claimed to reduce oil production, increase skin cell turnover, and supposedly reduce inflammation. Examples are tretinoin (Avita, Retin-A, Renova) and adapalene (Differin), both derived from vitamin A.

I am ok with topical Retin A, which is most likely beneficial and probably prevents and eases acne. However, I strongly urge you to avoid Accutane and its generic kin.

## Avoid One of the MOST Dangerous Drugs Ever Made

Accutane is a highly controversial drug yet incredibly remains the industry standard for : Holding AG, manufacturer of Accutane, has spent most of this century in court defendin health has been irreparably damaged by this menacing drug.

Roche has lost six out of six lawsuits and was recently ordered to pay \$25.16 million in developed inflammatory bowel disease as a result of the drug. Due to generic competi personal injury lawsuits, Roche stopped selling the drug in June 2009.

However, the generic form of Accutane (isotretinoin) is equally deadly and remains avai Claravis, Sotret and Amnesteem. More than two million people have taken Accutane, d depression, suicide, inflammatory bowel disease, and **100 percent guarantee of birth**

In 2004, brain scans showed that people taking Accutane suffer a 21 percent decrease that plays a critical role in mood and social interaction. These brain changes may explai behavior, and psychotic reactions reported by some Accutane users.

Is reducing your acne worth *that*?

Even official regulation policy acknowledges the real danger of Accutane. The U.S. Foo warned physicians and consumers about reports of "depression, psychosis, and rarely : use of Accutane. Patients using Accutane reported to the FDA that these psychological Accutane therapy, but worsened with re-start of the drug.

In light of this evidence, the labeling of Accutane was changed to strengthen the warnin Isotretinoin now has the strongest warning available for any drug category—and given a

**If you are taking isotretinoin and become pregnant, you are virtually guaranteed to** extremely teratogenic (causing damage to a fetus).

According to the Mayo Clinic:

*"Isotretinoin is associated with severe birth defects, so it can't be taken by pregnai pregnant during the course of treatment or within several weeks of concluding trea potential side effects that women of reproductive age must participate in a Food a program to receive a prescription for the drug."*

In addition to teratogenic and psychological adverse effects, Accutane (isotretinoin) use effects:

<u>Increased levels of triglycerides and cholesterol in your blood</u>	Increased liver enzyme levels and liver damage
Headaches and brain swelling	Disturbances of your central nervous system

Damage to skin and mucous membranes Premature epiphyseal closure	Hyperostosis (excessive bone growth) and bone demineralization
Development of <u>inflammatory bowel disease</u>	Damage to your eyes including cataracts
Pancreatitis	Heart attack and stroke

## Antibiotics for Acne: Doing More Harm than Good

Many dermatologists prescribe long-term antibiotic treatments for acne. Even though you avoid these medications, as they will inevitably cause more problems than they solve.

Every time you take an antibiotic, you kill your beneficial bacteria along with the problem infections, as well as resistant bacterial strains.

Antibiotic resistance is a serious and growing problem today. This includes the antibiotic erythromycin, which is becoming increasingly ineffective as more strains of bacteria have developed. Physicians are beginning to pull away from treating acne with antibiotics, or at least limit antibiotic use. Without antibiotic resistance, antibiotics are not without risks themselves.

For example:

- Erythromycin can cause damage to your teeth or skeleton.
- Doxycycline is associated with photosensitivity.
- Minocycline is known to cause pigment deposition in your skin (most often in acne) and occasionally autoimmune hepatitis (a lupus-like syndrome) and serum sickness-like reactions.

And ALL oral antibiotics are associated with vaginal candidiasis, as most women will attribute their yeast infections to their antibiotic treatments. Instead, the underlying reason you have acne—which is why your body falls out of balance, so the goal must be to regain homeostasis. This can be achieved through dietary and lifestyle modifications.

## The Truth is, Acne is one of the Easiest Problems to Treat Naturally

Just like other chronic diseases running rampant in Western society (like diabetes, heart disease, and disease of the Western world).

More proof is continuing to emerge that the root cause of acne is not bacteria or genetics, but your diet. Acne is much less of a problem in non-Westernized societies, where refined carbohydrates are consumed in much lower amounts. Solid evidence exists that diets high in sugar and refined carbohydrates are the primary cause of acne.

We now know that a low-grain or no-grain diet will very likely clear up your skin, and permanently correcting your diet creates an internal environment that does not ALLOW bacterial overgrowth.

After diet, the other major factor is stress.

Part of a holistic plan for preventing acne flare-ups is managing your stress. We know that's any kind. So why aren't physicians lining up to give you the good news? Well, they can't who will reap the benefits from that is you!

## Grain-Free Diets Can Clear Up Your Acne FOR GOOD!

Not all carbohydrates are created equal. Carbohydrates can be categorized into the following

- **Simple carbohydrates** are sugars, such as those found in candy, soda, and baked goods. Those in your diet—working toward eliminating them completely. Be especially careful of fructose, which is a major component of sodas and processed foods.
- **Complex carbohydrates** are found in natural whole foods such as beans, nuts, and grains. Beans, nuts, and grains contain more nutritive value than simple carbohydrates, so go for you.

Your body "prefers" the complex carbs found in vegetables to the complex carbs found in grains. Your body digests them differently. Vegetable-carbs are slow to break down into simple sugars, with grain-carbs raising your insulin and insulin-like growth factor (IGF-1).

Higher IGF-1 levels can lead to increased male hormones, which cause your pores to swell and trap that acne-promoting bacteria. IGF-1 also causes skin cells (known as keratinocytes) to shed more slowly, leading to acne.

This is why most grains should be avoided if you have acne issues.

The research holds this up.

In a 2007 study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, young men (aged 18-30) on low-glycemic diets for 12 weeks, showing significant improvements in acne and insulin resistance.

Similar findings were shown in this 2002 study.

Simply eliminating grains, sugars (particularly fructose), cereals, potatoes, corn, rice, and pasta improves acne for most people. Fruit contains a fair amount of fructose, so it should be avoided if you are predisposed to acne. And fruit juices should be strictly avoided since the sugar is very high. (Fruit is great, though, especially green juices.)

So, how many carbs is too many? Nutritional Typing can give you your answer.

Knowing your Nutritional Type will help you determine the ideal amount of carbohydrate for you. Learning to analyze your reactions to the foods you eat, you can begin to fine-tune each carb that is just right for you. For a simple FREE tool to help you determine your Nutritional Type, visit [Nutritional Typing](#).

If you incorporate these dietary changes, not only will your acne subside, but also your skin will be youthful.

## Can Gluten Make Your Acne Worse?

Gluten in wheat and other grains may be contributing to your acne symptoms if you have done. This is a separate issue from the insulin effects already discussed. Gluten is a prime problem, especially for Baby Boomers.

According to The Gluten Free Diet:

*"A person who is gluten intolerant cannot digest gluten, so the body will not recognize it as a foreign body when trying to digest it.*

*Because the body of a gluten intolerant person cannot process gluten properly, then over time causing digestive issues. The gluten intolerance can produce other symptoms, such as acne."*

Since gluten sensitivity is so pervasive anyway it would make loads of sense to try a gluten-free diet to see if your acne or any other health symptoms improve. This shouldn't be too difficult if you are on a grain diet, which minimizes sources of gluten.

## The Milk-Iodine-Acne Connection

You may already know that I am an advocate of raw milk for its vast nutritional benefits. I have a statement for you, *IF you are an acne sufferer*. Milk generally contains a fair amount of iodine compared to pasteurized milk. Iodine is known to aggravate acne.

Several studies document this relationship as farmers often feed their cows iodine-fortified feed.

Therefore, if you drink milk, you should seek to choose raw over pasteurized—this is true for all, then, it seems wise to eliminate milk and other dairy products from your diet altogether to avoid skin issues with your skin. Since raw milk naturally contains iodine at healthier levels, it is less likely to cause acne than pasteurized milk—but the potential still exists for even raw milk to trigger flare-ups.

There are no studies of which I am aware investigating the relationship between raw milk and acne. If you are yourself, you can try consuming raw, organic, grass-fed milk, and if it seems to be making a difference, you can eliminate it from your diet.

## Many Skin Care Products Only Contribute to the Problem

What you put on your skin is as important as what you eat. In fact, what you apply topically is really a semi-permeable membrane through which substances pass directly into your bloodstream.

Many of today's skin care products and cosmetics are nothing more than a toxic mélange of chemicals that cause more skin problems than they solve. And when it comes to acne, these chemicals can seriously hinder your skin's natural healing.

Why do so many cleansers, lotions and potions contain these potentially hazardous ingredients?

Because they're cheap, readily available, and easy to dilute.

When it comes to the skin care industry, anything goes. The Environmental Working Group products contain more than one ingredient that has never been evaluated for safety. It operates on "the honor system" but has a multitude of *dishonorable players*.

So you have to be a meticulous, well-educated label reader to know what you're getting

You should spend five minutes every day cleansing your face, which removes the impurities from a typical day and clog up your pores. And ladies, please never sleep in your makeup. It's recommended to wash your face twice per week. But do so gently, especially if you are experiencing an outbreak, and never scrub.

You should use pure, safe, natural skin care products—preferably organic ones. Apply them consistently to maximize absorption.

And once you've cleansed, exfoliated and moisturized, take a deep breath and... relax.

## Relaxing Your Way to Clearer Skin

Stress can potentially worsen just about every condition, including acne. It's important to address stress BEFORE it becomes overwhelming. It is even more important to teach your children how to manage stress so it doesn't accumulate unabated and begins to take a toll on their health.

Recent studies substantiate the hypothesis that stress can aggravate acne.

One study involving college students found a connection between acne flare-ups and stress. It states that subjects who had the most stress during examination periods also had the worst acne. Stress from external sources is a significant factor.

While it has been argued that the stress associated with acne is an effect of acne rather than a cause, I believe this new evidence proves otherwise—that it's the stress that is exacerbating the acne.

Additionally, stress and fatigue can lead to adrenal burnout, where your adrenal glands produce less cortisol, which can worsen acne as well and perpetuate higher stress levels.

So how do you deal with the ever-present stress in today's demanding world?

My favorite tool is the Emotional Freedom Technique, or EFT. EFT involves tapping your fingers to clear emotional blocks, thus restoring balance to your mind and body. EFT is easy for adults and children to learn. It can even relieve physical complaints such as headaches and muscle pain.

You could also add in other proven stress-busters, such as yoga and meditation.

## You Can Take Control of Your Skin Health

Remember, your complexion is a reflection of your overall health. Don't forget to incorporate these steps into your skin care busting plan:

- **Sugars and Grains:** This is probably the single most important step you can take to improve your complexion. For a few weeks there is a major likelihood you will see a major improvement in your complexion.

- **Water**: Drink plenty of fresh, pure water every day. Hydrating your body facilitates wastes, and sloughing away dead skin cells. Hydration will also improve your skin

**Every day, drink enough water so that your urine is a pale yellow color.** If you to drink more water (unless you take B vitamins, which themselves turn urine bright

- **Exercise**: Getting plenty of high-intensity exercise helps your body flush out toxins; exercise is vitally important to all other aspects of your health. If you happen to have helpful, because the more you sweat, the more you flush unwanted debris and cor
- **Sleep**: Did you know that a good night's sleep can decrease your stress and lead and rebuilding is at night while you sleep, and this applies to your skin. Sleep is al
- **Proper balance of bacteria**: This is especially important if you have been on anti-indiscriminately kill off the beneficial bacteria in your gut, without which you cannot reestablish your bacterial balance by taking a high quality probiotic supplement, or fermented/cultured foods into your diet.
- **Vitamin D**: This important nutrient is crucial for maintaining a healthy immune response. Without adequate vitamin D, your body cannot control infection, in your skin or elsewhere. To appropriate amounts of sunshine is the best way to optimize your vitamin D levels. Expose your skin until you just barely begin turning pink, which indicates you've gotten the day.

If you don't have access to regular UV exposure, the next best thing is an oral vitamin D monitoring of your vitamin D levels with a blood test.

If you change your diet and lifestyle in the ways I've recommended, you can expect significant improvement in the appearance of your skin. Plus, those same strategies will lead to improvements in your bank account of expensive acne drugs that don't offer any real or lasting solution to you

Remember lifestyle changes are not a "quick fix," but over the long run, they reap endless

## Sources:

- » [Acne Resource Center](#)
- » [Guidelines of Care for Acne Vulgaris Management](#)
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- » [Arch. Dermatol. December 2002](#)
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