



Please note that the information contained in this document is intended as general guidance purposes only.
For more information visit the Acne Support website: www.acnesupport.org.uk

Guide to Acne Myths

There is a lot of misinformation about acne. This guide addresses some common beliefs about acne, some of which are myths and some of which are supported by evidence.

You should not treat acne but leave it to run its course

Acne should be treated as soon as possible to lower the risk of it getting worse and potential scarring. To learn more about the treatments that are available please visit the Treatments section of the Acne Support website.

Eating chocolate causes acne

There is no strong scientific evidence that links chocolate to acne outbreaks. However, there is observational and anecdotal evidence that foods and drinks that cause significant rises to your blood sugar levels (such as carbohydrates, sugars and dairy) may be linked to the development of acne.

Currently, the best advice is to speak with your doctor or nurse, who can then advise you on the best action to take. You should not make any significant changes to your diet without first discussing it with your healthcare provider.

To learn more about the causes of acne visit the Causes section of the Acne Support website.

Acne is a teenage problem. Adults shouldn't get it

The onset of acne is often related to the balance of hormones in the body, which is why it frequently starts in puberty when the body's hormones begin to change. However, people will experience hormone changes throughout their lives, especially women, which can result in acne outbreaks.

Your DNA also has a lot to do as to whether or not you will be affected by acne. Many people's skin naturally produces more oil, whilst other's naturally shed more skin cells. Both of these make it more likely that you will have acne-prone skin no matter your age.

To learn more about the causes of acne visit the Causes section of the Acne Support website.

Sunlight can cure acne

Short exposures to UV radiation in the sun's rays can have an anti-inflammatory effect on the skin. However, longer exposures to UV radiation can actually have an acne-causing effect on the skin by promoting the formation of acne-related blockages in hair follicles.

Warning: UV radiation is directly related to skin cancer. You should not spend long periods of time in the sun without protection.

Saltwater cures acne

There has been no strong scientific evidence that proves salt water cures acne.

Make-up causes acne and can make pre-existing acne worse

Make-up products that are heavy or oily in texture can block the opening of hair follicles and cause acne-inducing blockages inside.

For more information on the causes of acne, and make-up and prevention advice, please visit the other sections of the Acne Support website.

You don't need to see your doctor to treat your acne

People who have mild to moderate cases of acne should try over the counter products for several weeks first (that is products that you can buy without a prescription, such as at a local pharmacy). If no improvement is seen within that time then they should arrange to visit their GP.

People affected by severe acne, that is acne that consists of many lesions covering an area, with cysts and nodules being present, are unlikely to benefit from over-the-counter treatment and should visit their GP or dermatologist.

More expensive products equal better acne treatment

It is not about the expense of the product that is important but the active ingredients that it contains. For more information about acne treatments visit the Treatments section of the Acne Support website.

You should steam your pores open before cleansing your skin and then close them again with cold water

The surface opening of hair follicles, known as pores, cannot physically open or close. Steaming may be useful to help loosen acne blockages inside of your hair follicles before mechanical exfoliation. For more information about acne treatments visit the Treatments section of the Acne Support website.

All forms of exfoliation work equally well

In general, chemical exfoliation works better than mechanical exfoliation and mechanical exfoliation may increase inflammation in certain types of acne. Please see the Treatment section of the Acne Support website for more information.

You can get acne from sleeping on a dirty pillow

Acne does not develop as a result of the skin being exposed to dirt. It develops mostly because of dead skin cells, which are already inside of your hair follicles, mixing with your skin's natural oil,

which is also already inside of your hair follicles. Bacteria that naturally live on your skin then multiply rapidly inside of the blockage and cause inflammation.

You should avoid touching your face if you have acne

The concern around touching your face when you have acne is the fear that you might transfer dirt or bacteria onto your skin and make the acne worse. However, dirt does not play a role in the formation of acne and the bacteria that is associated with acne already naturally lives on your skin.

You should avoid picking or squeezing your acne as this increases the risks of worsening acne and scarring.

If you have acne you should not use moisturisers or sunscreens

The use of moisturisers and sunscreen are beneficial to both your general health and the health of your skin, with sunscreen being an important defence against the risk of skin cancer.

The problem with moisturisers and sunscreen is that they can be quite oily and become trapped in your hair follicles, leading to acne-causing blockages building up behind them.

The answer is to choose moisturisers and sunscreens that are labelled non-comedogenic and are non-oily in texture, such as mattes and gels.

For more information on how to prevent acne visit the Prevention section of this website.

Toothpaste is an effective treatment for acne

Whilst toothpaste does include anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory ingredients, it is highly irritant to the skin and often causes severe discolouration (especially in darker skin types). You should use targeted acne treatments, which include anti-bacterials and anti-inflammatories, that are designed to be applied to the skin. For more information on the treatments that are available visit the Treatment section of this website.

Acne is caused by poor hygiene or having a dirty face

Most acne is caused by dead skin cells that are already inside of your hair follicles becoming stuck in the oil that is travelling up from the oil gland towards the surface of the skin. The dead skin cells and oil form a blockage that leads to acne.

You shouldn't pop or squeeze your spots

We do not recommend that you pop your acne lesions. Instead, you should use a safe, targeted acne treatment. To find out more about the treatments that are available, and how you can cover-up your acne lesions, visit the Treatments and Cover-Up sections of this website.