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get answers to your acne questions!

Responses from **Hema Sundaram, M.D.**, a Washington, D.C.-based dermatologist and author of **Face Value**.



**“Which vitamins or foods can you eat to help get rid of acne?”**

--Chynna, 17, Leigh, NE

There are no rigid rules regarding what to eat if you have acne. In general, you should eat a healthy diet with plenty of water, fresh vegetables, and fruits. You can add a one-a-day multivitamin, but avoid megadoses of vitamins. If you identify certain foods that make you break out, e.g., fried foods, chocolate, or nuts, then minimize them. Eating yogurt with active cultures may be helpful, especially in place of milk if it seems to make your acne flare up.

**“Can you use the same acne face products for the acne on your chest?”** --Katrisha, 16, Florida, NY

Yes. Cleansing wipes or a liquid cleanser are quick and easy to use in place of soap for both your chest and face. Ask your dermatologist if you are a good candidate for the Tretin-X system, which combines prescription tretinoin cream with a therapeutic cleanser and moisturizer containing antioxidant green tea extract and CoQ10.

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**“Do face-cleansing towelettes work better to clean your face every day than soap and water?”** --Jacqueline, 15, Mattoon, IL

Soap and water may actually irritate sensitive skin, especially if you are on acne medication that dries your skin. You may also inadvertently skip areas of your face with the soap lather. Soap-free liquid cleansers, towelettes, or wipes may be a better choice to remove excess oil, skin debris, and makeup and to cleanse your face thoroughly without irritating it.

**“I have pretty bad acne on my back and chest. What do you suggest is the best method to conceal these so that I can still wear cute summer tops?”** --Monica, 17, Mississauga, ON, Canada

Concealers and camouflage creams do not hide extensive acne well, especially on the body, and they tend to smear or rub off on clothing. They may also block pores and cause more acne flare-ups. Rather than camouflaging your acne, why not clear it up? Ask your dermatologist if you are a good candidate for prescription acne medication.

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**“I put on medicine before I put on my makeup -- does that help?”**

--Kelsey, 15, New Albany, IN

Yes, this will help. I suggest you wait three to five minutes after applying medication to your face and before applying your makeup, so that the medication can be absorbed into your skin. Use water-based, noncomedogenic makeup to avoid blocking pores and worsening your acne.

**“I’ve always had really clear skin, but recently I have started breaking out on my forehead, and having bumps all over my skin. I just started going to a tanning salon; could that be the problem?”** --Melissa, 17, Katy, TX

Tanning -- whether from the sun or at a salon -- is your skin’s response to damage by ultraviolet light. Your skin bumps could be a reaction to this damage, or to creams or oils applied to your skin before, during, or after tanning. In any case, I recommend that you stop tanning, as it increases your risk of skin cancer and premature aging.

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## **“Can acne build up a defense to the same routine?”**

--Jennifer, 15, Williston, ND

Some acne sufferers may find it beneficial to switch medications or skin-care routines if they are no longer responding to their current treatment. Your dermatologist can suggest alternative acne therapies for you.

## **“What are some good acne products for people with really sensitive skin conditions like eczema?”** --Heidi, 14, Boyds, MD

If you have dry skin or eczema, avoid benzoyl peroxide, salicylic acid, alpha hydroxy acids such as glycolic acid, and alcohol-based gels and pads, as they may dry out your skin further. Ask your dermatologist if the Tretin-X system might be suitable for you, as the antioxidant, soap-free cleanser and moisturizer calm skin irritation any may increase your tolerance for prescription creams. You might also try an at-home face mask of natural yogurt with honey. The yogurt contains lactic acid, which gently exfoliates your skin, and the honey fights bacteria.

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**“What’s the difference between benzoyl peroxide and salicylic acid, and are they made for different kinds of acne/skin types?”**

--Blythe, 22, Farmington Hills, MI

Benzoyl peroxide, an over-the-counter-strength acne treatment, decreases the growth of skin bacteria. It is best used on oily skin, as it can be drying. Salicylic acid is a beta hydroxy acid that is used in chemical peels and at-home acne therapy, available in a dermatologist’s office and also in over-the-counter acne treatments. All but the most dry or sensitive skin types can probably tolerate salicylic acid, provided it is not in a very drying formulation.

**“Are mineral cosmetics better for acne-prone skin? Do they provide the same coverage?”** --Sarah, 19, New Orleans, LA

Some acne sufferers find that mineral makeup calms and improves their acne, and causes less trauma when applied to the skin than conventional makeup. Look for a mineral makeup that is free of mineral oil; bismuth; Biron (bismuth oxychloride); and FD&C Dyes and Lake Blends. All these additives can cause or worsen acne. You may find it helpful to experiment with different brands and application techniques to get the best coverage. Consider starting with one or more professional applications from an aesthetician or makeup artist to perfect your technique.