

LOCAL HEALTH TALK

Treatment for acne sufferers

Acne is the most common skin disorder, and is most common in adolescents, although adults may also have acne.

This skin condition ranges from mild to very severe, with painful, swollen cysts, fever, illness and deep, disfiguring scarring. Many disregard acne as a normal part of growing up, but dermatologists see it very differently. For many adolescents and adults it is the medical condition that most affects their lives. Acne may cause low self-esteem, low self-confidence, depression, reclusiveness and poor social development.

For teens, acne affects their lives when they are most vulnerable, just as they are developing their sense of identity. Many adults say the disease limits them socially and in the workplace.

In my opinion, the most devastating part of the disease is the development of scarring. Children will outgrow the acne, but not the scars. Also, it is much more difficult to treat acne scars than it is to treat the acne before scars develop. Patients who develop these scars never really get over their acne. The causes of this complex disorder include genetics, lifestyle, stress, bacteria on the skin's surface, makeup and items applied to the skin. There does not appear to be any connection with diet. Another cause is male hormone levels and each individual's sensitivity to them.

Therapies include topical medications such as benzoyl peroxide, salicylic acid and synthetic vitamin A (Retin A). For more severe cases, therapy includes oral antibiotics. The most severe acne is treated with Acutane, an oral form of synthetic vitamin A. Treatment success varies, but all these therapies have potential side effects, including skin dryness, irritation and sun sensitivity.

For the oral therapies, side effects include stomach



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upset, headache, dizziness, sun sensitivity and allergic reactions. Women may develop vaginal yeast infections on antibiotics. Acutane may produce severe side effects such as hepatitis, vision problems, severe headache, elevated triglycerides and, most significant, serious birth defects.

Because of these side effects, dermatologists have been searching for new treatment options for acne. Recent clinical advances utilizing light-based

technology have shown promise. Lasers may be utilized to quickly reduce inflammation in order to rapidly resolve the acne lesion and eliminate the redness it causes. Lasers can also target the sebaceous gland (where oil is produced), the site of acne's development, to inactivate it and reduce oil and acne production.

I utilize two different lasers to treat acne and have seen promising results. A newer option is a process called PhotoDynamic Therapy, which entails applying a photosensitive drug to the skin, which is stimulated with specific laser light, inactivating the oil glands.

PDT has other uses, including treating precancerous and cancerous lesions. It is also used in conjunction with lasers in the treatment of sun-damaged, aged and wrinkled skin. Laser and PDT treatment of acne is safe, requires no oral drugs, has little side effects and creates a longer remission of the disease. It also reduces pore size, smoothes the skin surface, evens coloring, lessens oiliness and prevents scarring before it occurs.

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