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Don't let problem skin plague your life – follow our definitive guide to common conditions and how to treat them

IN MY CASE



'A natural remedy helped my rosacea'

FIONA AUSTIN, 40, is a hypnotherapist and mother of two from London

'After having my second child seven years ago, my skin became hypersensitive, with red cheeks and rashes. Eventually I was diagnosed with rosacea. My GP suggested avoiding spicy foods, hot drinks and the sun. I also tried anti-redness creams, but nothing worked. A friend recommended a natural, SPF25 cream called Kalme (www.kalme.co.uk), which was instantly soothing. That was six months ago and my skin looks fantastic – the redness has almost gone and I no longer have any bumps. I use Kalme every day and my skin is now mostly clear.'

Rosacea

Rosacea may begin as a tendency to blush easily, but redness and swelling can soon become persistent, gradually spreading to the cheeks, forehead, nose and even the eyes. 'Small dilated blood vessels (telangiectasia) and tiny pimples (a bit like acne) may also appear,' says Dr Lowe. 'Symptoms aren't usually painful, but there may be a tingly, burning sensation.' In severe cases the skin can look red, blotchy and almost raw. Sometimes, the nose swells up like a strawberry and other complications may include eye problems, such as conjunctivitis and blepharitis (swollen eyelids). Causes for rosacea vary, but can include genes, stress, hormones, tiny blood vessels that become leaky or damaged under the skin, abnormal immune reactions that lead to inflammation, sun exposure and reactions to certain foods and drinks.

TAKE ACTION You can alleviate symptoms by becoming more aware of potential triggers, including extremes of temperature, alcohol, spicy foods, hot drinks and stress. Try Avenè Eau Thermale Antirougeurs (£11, Boots and health stores) shown in trials to reduce redness by 50 per cent within a month. Varama camouflage creams can help mask any redness (£17.75, Varama, www.varama.co.uk).

Adult acne

Hormonal changes such as pregnancy, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), stress and diet can contribute to acne in adults. 'Acne is an inflammatory skin disease that affects the pores, particularly on the face, back and chest,' says Dr Nick Lowe, at the Cranley Clinic, London. It occurs because of an over-production of sebum (oils and waxes secreted by the sebaceous glands). 'When dead skin cells get trapped in a blocked pore, a spot forms and there may be further inflammation in the hair follicles, caused by bacteria on the surface of the skin,' he explains. Symptoms include blackheads, whiteheads, pustules, spots, boils and cysts. In more severe cases, acne can lead to scarring.

TAKE ACTION For mild to moderate acne, try an over-the-counter product, formulated to control symptoms by reducing inflammation and preventing new spots and scarring. You could try Avenè TriAcnéal Treatment Cream (£23.50) or Oxy Clearlight (£40; both Boots, www.boots.com), a new light therapy treatment. This small device targets spots with a blue light to kill the bacteria that causes outbreaks.

'If your acne is more severe, ask your GP to refer you to a dermatologist,' says Dr Lowe. 'Specialised treatments include antibiotic lotions, low-dose oral antibiotics, spironolactone (a hormone blocker) and the oral retinoid (a form of vitamin A) Roaccutane.' Although it can be an effective last resort, Roaccutane is prescribed with caution because of its possible side-effects including, in extreme cases, suicidal depression.

If you've ever developed a nasty spot before an important occasion, you'll know that even the smallest blemish can make you feel self-conscious. Now imagine having to worry about problem skin every day – that's the reality for nine million people* (15 per cent of the UK population) who seek help from their GPs each year. Of these, nearly one million patients are referred to a dermatologist – and experts say the psychological damage for sufferers can be crippling.

For while skin complaints may not seem as serious as other health problems, they can have a profound effect on people's lives. 'The emotional impact of living with a skin condition is not to be underestimated,' says Dr Anthony Bewley, consultant dermatologist at St Bartholomew's Hospital, London.

'Two-thirds of sufferers say it has a marked effect on their self-esteem and wellbeing. We also know that people with a skin condition are less likely to be employed and are more likely to say they feel "lucky to find a partner who will put up with them".'

Problem skin can affect work and family life, too, with 66 per cent of patients saying it had influenced a major life-changing decision about their career; 22 per cent admitting it had influenced their decision to have children and 46 per cent saying it influenced their choice of clothing.

But these days the prognosis isn't as bleak as those affected may fear. 'Some people don't seek help for months or even years,' Dr Bewley says. 'Yet most conditions can be treated and there are many methods on offer to help manage and alleviate symptoms.'

IN MY CASE



'Laser treatment smoothed my acne scar'

JUNE THAVIBHOKA, 50, is a teacher from Cambridge

'I'd suffered from cystic acne in my twenties which left a deep, noticeable scar on my chin. When I heard about

a new laser treatment which would leave my skin smoother in one session, it seemed too good to be true. CO2RE has the ability to target problem areas, such as old acne scars. Dermatologist Dr Ariel Haus (www.drhausdermatology.com)

explained that powerful laser waves would penetrate the skin at both superficial and deep levels and, after a numbing gel was rubbed onto the area, the treatment was over in seconds, with no pain at all. The area was red for around four weeks; this was easily covered by make-up. I used a high-factor sunscreen and moisturiser as advised. Three months on, my scar is almost gone.'

• Prices start from £300 a session.