



COVERING THE BEAUTY BEAT and having bad skin is like being a hair-stylist with mall bangs or a personal trainer that's seriously out of shape. It's a hard sell.

As a teenager, I dealt with the typical lumps and bumps of hormonal acne. Now I've been out of high school for over a decade, but my skin still hasn't graduated from good ol' acne. My friends and I describe the condition as "wracne": a Frankenstein-like hybrid of wrinkles and acne. What's a girl (or should I say, woman) to do? Teen-targeted pimple fighters are drying and exacerbate my fine lines, but rich anti-aging creams throw a pimple party on my face – and everyone's invited.

So I'm on a mission to find clear skin, and my first step is to meet with dermatologist Lisa Kellett of DLK in Toronto to get some answers. Kellett cuts to the chase: "I want you to tell me what you put on your skin from the time you get up in the morning until you go to bed," she says with her pen poised.

Hesitantly, I rattle off the dozens of products I've been trying as of late and, based on her reaction, she's not impressed with my supersize skin-care regimen. Apparently, my anti-aging efforts may be part of the problem. While she admits that acne is the result of a number of factors, she is adamant that 95 percent of what's causing adult acne in her patients is improper skin care. And by that, she doesn't mean we're not cleaning our faces; she's saying that we aging beauties need to lay off the occlusive (ointment-based) creams that can cause clogged pores.

She instructs me to use a nonfoaming gel-based cleanser with small exfoliating beads in the morning and at night, and recommends I apply an acne treatment all over to treat breakouts before they start. She suggests a serum with a one percent retinol concentration to use at night and a serum with a 25 percent or higher vitamin C concentration for morning.

Besides the glaring errors in my skin-care routine, I wonder if my lifestyle and diet could be causing my bad complexion. So I book an appointment with naturopath Penny Kendall-Reed at Urban Wellness in Toronto to see if she can help me take a holistic approach to my acne issues.

"Acne is often hormonal," says Kendall-Reed. Teenage acne, she explains, is stimulated by an imbalance among estrogen, testosterone and progesterone; it causes sebum (an oily substance) to be

released into the skin. But she also sees a lot of acne in women when they have additional hormonal shifts, such as in their late 20s and early 30s, and again in their late 40s and early 50s. "During those transition years, women often have imbalances between progesterone and testosterone, and a surge in cortisol, the stress hormone, all of which release more sebum into the skin. These imbalances also increase an enzyme called collagenase, which breaks down collagen in the skin, creating the perfect recipe for acne and wrinkles," she explains.

So what can you do to counter the problems caused by cortisol and your other raging hormones? Load up on omega-3s (get 3,000 milligrams a day in capsule form or from foods such as fish, flax, avocados and nuts), zinc (get it in foods such as walnuts), vitamin C (get 1,000 milligrams a day in capsule form or from leafy greens and berries) and hyaluronic acid (take 40 to 80 milligrams a day in capsule form).

And what about the rumour that dairy products cause breakouts? Kendall-Reed doesn't buy it. "It's very individual," she says. "Some people may react to dairy while others react to wheat or other foods." But there is a common culprit: sugar. Remember that commercial from the early '90s about acne being caused by eating too many chocolate bars? There might be some truth to it. A diet high in sugar does affect the skin by creating advanced glycation end products, which can weaken collagen cells, cause inflammation and exacerbate acne. Kendall-Reed recommends trying an elimination diet while keeping a food diary to see which foods contribute to breakouts.

With a new list of eating habits and my supplements in hand, it's time to seek out a skin-care professional to round out my routine. So I head for a facial at The International Dermal Institute in Toronto to get the skinny from skin therapist Amanda Lindsay. She points out my problem areas (my jawline and chin), which are very common breakout areas for adult acne. (Teen acne usually occurs on the forehead and around the centre of the face.) She recommends cleansing twice at the end of the day, starting with an oil-based (non-mineral oil) cleanser and following with another cleanser tailored to my skin type. "Oil will attract oil just like water attracts water, so an oil-based cleanser actually helps deep-clean the pores," says Lindsay. She cautions me to be extra gentle when exfoliating,

because scrubbing a breakout can lead to inflammation.

One sneaky acne-causing culprit is bacteria. Lindsay reminds me that I should be washing my makeup brushes once a week (oops, guilty!) and changing my pillowcases frequently. She also suggests I reevaluate the kind of hair products I use, including any heavy-duty conditioners and silicone-laced products that can clog pores.

But her most important tip (and the hardest one to follow) is not to squeeze breakouts. "You can push the infection deeper, and that will cause pigmentation issues that can last for a long time and are hard to treat," says Lindsay.

Now that I've cleared my cupboard of pore-clogging creams, stocked my fridge with skin-clearing foods and gotten a lesson in skin hygiene, a future with a clear complexion is in my sights. ●

BEST FACE FORWARD



B. Kamins Acne Wash, \$34, bkamins.com.

SkinCeuticals Blemish + Age Defense, \$94, skinceuticals.com/canada.

Olay Professional Pro-X Exfoliating Renewal Cleanser, \$20, olay.ca.

Dermalogica Overnight Clearing Gel, \$58, dermalogica.ca.

Dermalogica Precleanse, \$50.50, dermalogica.ca.

Vichy Normaderm Anti-Age, \$35, vichy.ca.

REMEMBER WHEN YOUR MOM SAID YOU'D GROW OUT OF YOUR PIMPLES? WELL, SHE LIED. **KATE DALEY** GOES ON A MISSION TO CLEAR UP HER ADULT ACNE. PHOTOGRAPHY BY NATASHA V.

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