

6 Things I Did to Clear Up My Back Acne-Fast

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From ELLE

I pride myself on taking really good care of my skin, and I usually get compliments on how well the texture of it looks and feels. However, this past spring, meteorite-like clusters of acne spread like wildfire on my back. What's worse: It all started spiraling just weeks before the start of summer a.k.a. the best time to stunt in my favorite off-the-shoulder blouses and sexy date night attire. Skin in this season-point, blank, and period-and I refused to experience backless dress-FOMO.

I automatically began researching causes, treatments, and the best products to combat my not-so-fabulous flare-up all while trying my hardest not to be insecure or impatient about it. I consulted top dermatologists, estheticians, skin experts, and also became my own guinea pig for products to see what really works. It has been a bumpy road, literally, but I now know how to approach this sketchy skin situation like an OG if it ever happens again. Shall we?

1. Understand what causes bacne.

"Bacne," short for back acne, can be caused by a variety of issues. In my case, it was hard to pinpoint exactly what triggered the initial outbreak, but with my busy lifestyle (rigorous exercising, sweating while waiting underground at steamy NYC subway stops, sometimes-poor diet, always testing new body washes, etc.), I'm sure there was a collision of causes. Research shows that acne on your back is caused for the same reasons it would erupt on your face. "The primary pathogenic factors that cause acne are the same regardless of location-oil and dead skin cells can block the pore and lead to P. acnes bacterial overgrowth and inflammation," Dr. Sejal Shah, founder of SmarterSkin Dermatology explains. "Other contributing factors that can play a role include hormones, diet, pressure or friction on back, skin and hair products that can clog the pore, sweat, and some medications."

Additionally, there are factors that are back-specific such as not changing your sheets as Angela Rosen, Owner of Penelope & The Beauty and D A P H N E Studio points out. "It's natural to sweat during the nighttime but this bacteria gets stuck in the sheets night after night," she says. Another element that Dermatology and Laser Group Founder Dr. Arash Akhavan shared is that "the skin on the back usually has more sebaceous gland activity than other parts of your body." He says, "For most people, due to flexibility issues, it is also the area that is least thoroughly cleansed. When oil, dead skin, sweat, dirt, and other materials sit in pores, they can sometimes harden forming little concretions in the pores."

2. Exfoliate, exfoliate, exfoliate.

After a few failed attempts (just laying low and wishing for the best being one of them), I decided to proactively consult with professionals to seek out treatments I can try. Experts agree that getting a good back scrub and proper exfoliation can work wonders. "Making sure to exfoliate to increase cell turnover is key," advises NYC-based dermatologist Dr. Michelle Henry. You can also try a full-on back facial such as the 60-minute We Have Your Back treatment that both Penelope & The Beauty Bar and D A P H N E offers. "We cleanse the skin, exfoliate, perform extractions and finish with a soothing and purifying mask," explains Rosen. "I also recommend getting a body polish every quarter. This treatment exfoliates and removes built-up dead skin cells allowing your skin to breathe."

4. Learn which ingredients to look for.

Director of the Vitiligo & Pigmentation Institute of Southern California Dr. Pearl E. Grimes advises that key ingredients used to treat and prevent future breakouts include salicylic acid and benzoyl peroxide. "Benzoyl peroxide generally helps to kill bacteria that causes acne, and if used daily, it can help you to control back acne and reduce flares," she explains. "Exfoliating low-concentration alpha hydroxy acid-based products works extremely well on the back as well. For prescription, I recommend clindamycin-based solutions or foams and azelaic acid." Grimes also advises staying away from using occlusive petrolatum-based products and heavy oils when treating back acne as those textures can further aggravate the skin.

5. Keep a solid skincare routine going post-breakout.

Now that I've been putting new doctor-approved practices in place. Another issue has hit the surface: Hyperpigmentation (dark spots). I have deep brown skin, and I've learned from previous experience dark spots can, unfortunately, take a while to clear up. However, Grimes has given me hope that there are many solutions to expedite the brightening process. "Hydroquinone still remains 'king of the highway'-the gold standard," she points out. "Some other products include those with kojic acid, arbutin, niacinamide, and azelaic acid." Shah also reminded me never to forget applying an SPF of at least 30 to my back to prevent my dark spots from getting worse.

The biggest takeaway from almost all of the skin experts I've consulted with was to absolutely stop picking at my back acne. So, I'm trying, but I'll be the first to admit it is hard to resist the urge.

6. Use the right products.

While testing out different products over the past few weeks, there are seven standouts that actually help to treat and improve the look of my breakout. I have faith that before the end of the summer, these go-tos listed below will help banish my bacne once and for all. Use everything in moderation as you don't want to overmedicate and make matters worse.