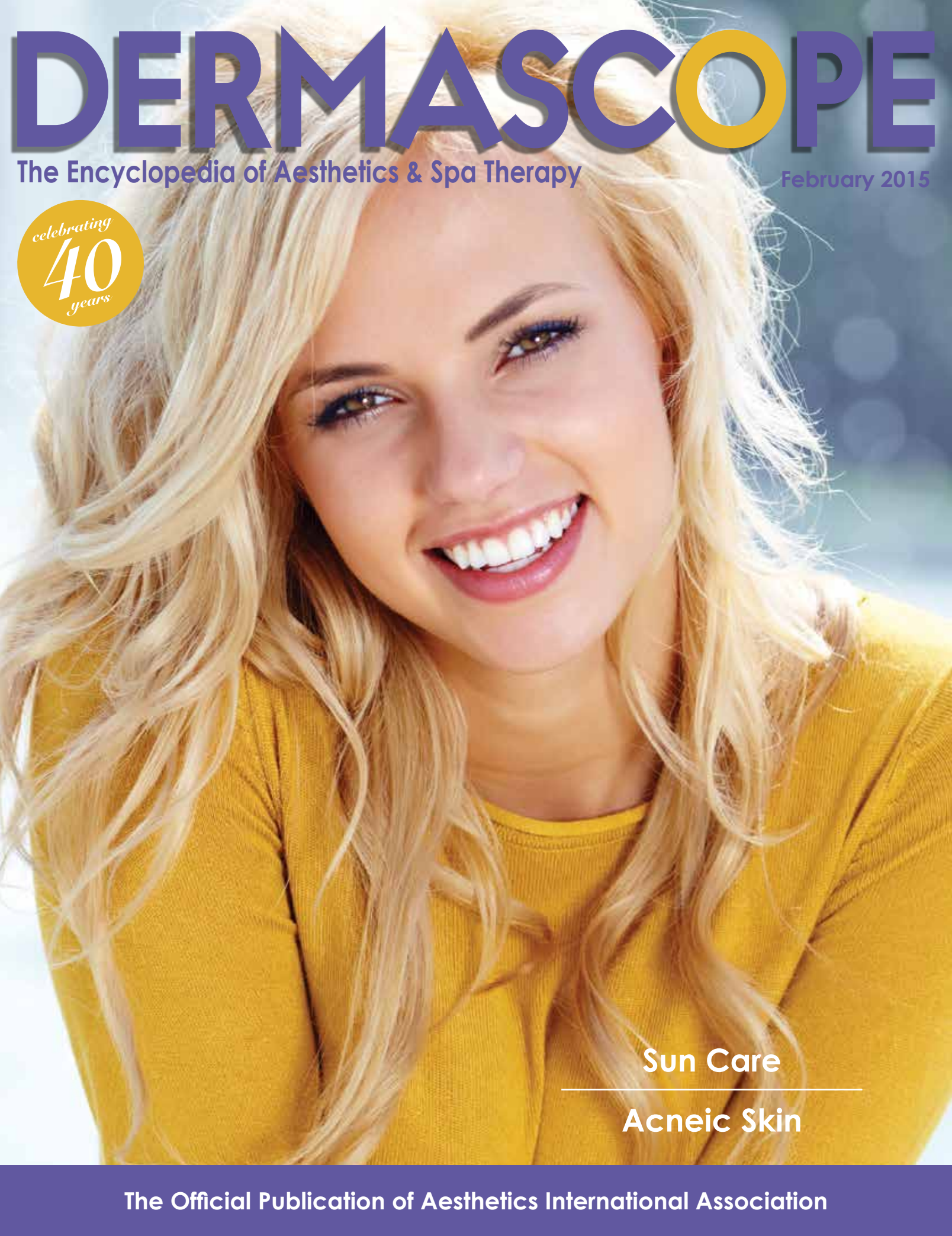


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# NATURAL VERSUS SYNTHETIC ACNE SOLUTIONS

by Tina Zillmann, L.E., C.L.H.R.P.

According to the American Academy of Dermatology, acne affects over 40 million Americans. Over \$2.2 billion was spent in acne treatment alone in 2004. As skin care professionals, we know that acne is not limited to teenagers; more adult women are experiencing acne symptoms as a result of hormonal imbalances. Its effects are physical and emotional, which makes acne therapy a solid market for professional treatment and retail growth – if you know the condition, treatment limitations, and are realistic with client expectations.

Many clients want to look and feel better without delay and downtime, and at a price that is budget-conscious. They also want safe skin care solutions. In my experience as a skin care facility owner and product distributor, I have noticed a growing demand for natural skin care solutions without chemical ingredients that work. First, skin care professionals must understand the condition prior to treatment, which puts consultation and skin analysis at the forefront of acne therapy. Then, based on the client's individual acne characteristics, they need to define what natural and chemical solutions are available and have the opportunity to deliver those treatment plans. With expertise and thorough product knowledge, the best solution can be deciphered to help acne clients the best manager their acne.





## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT ACNE

Acne is a skin disorder that can be mild to severe, presenting with overactive sebaceous glands and poor desquamation. Together, these variables result in plugged follicles, blackheads, and whiteheads. Mild acne can also be referred to as non-inflammatory acne. Inversely, inflammatory acne conditions can present with infection (*P. acnes* bacteria) and inflammation, leading to painful cysts or nodules that increase the risk of scarring the skin. The underlying question of why clients have acne continues to be researched.

The primary suspect in acne development is androgens. However, there are more variables to consider

with adult women who suffer from acne. Pregnancy, menopause transitions, and female reproductive disorders should be managed medically with a gynecologist or endocrinologist. Without medical help, acne can be an ongoing battle. Female clients tend to get emotional with acne development because it is something they have never before experienced. They may have other variables to consider, including excessive hair growth on the face and body, irregular menstrual cycles, dry skin, hyperpigmentation, or rosacea. Finding a solution can be a challenge, but the solution can be managed with a combination of medical and aesthetic care.

Like rosacea, management with topical skin care is just as important as avoiding specific ingredients, foods, and environments that may trigger a flare-up or worsen the condition. Products that occlude the follicle increase the prevalence of breakouts. Additionally, the term oil-free can be misleading for clients who do not understand the benefits of many essential oils for acneic skin like tea tree oil and citrus oils. Some potentially-occlusive ingredients include shea butter, mineral oil, lanolin, petrolatum, and squalene. Ingredients consumed through the foods clients eat can play an important role in acne management. Foods that contribute to a steady blood sugar (low glycemic index diet), along with an elimination/reduction of dairy foods, may help improve acne conditions. Unfortunately, the acne-dairy relationship has yet to develop a definitive link between the two and eliminating dairy has not worked for everyone with acne. Finally, there are several other factors that may contribute to acne and should be considered during treatment, including sun exposure, stress, alcohol consumption, dehydration, and medications. Advising on the many alternative treatment options can help improve the skin care professional's value.

## NATURAL VERSUS MANMADE ACNE THERAPY

There is a very common misconception that natural or organic is good while manmade chemicals are harmful. Modern chemists are beginning to call this widespread belief chemophobia, a distrust of chemicals or anything perceived to be a chemical. Essentially, anything has the potential to be dangerous; it all depends on how it is used or consumed. Apples, for example, are one of the most widely available, cultivated fruits consumed by people for their





nutritional value. A typical apple, when eaten, gives dietary fiber, some vitamin C, and phytochemicals (substances currently being researched for their potential to reduce the risk of some types of cancer). Apple seeds contain a small amount of compounded amygdalin, sugar, and cyanide. One apple and its seeds do not contain enough poison to harm or kill us, but consuming nearly a cup of apple seeds just might. Although natural skin care solutions are advocated for, the ingredients used to formulate these products could still be manmade. Naturally-derived extracts and oils can be created synthetically in laboratories, offering high quality, consistent, and sustainable ingredients without inflicting harm to the environment or depleting natural resources. Everything is chemical, whether natural or manmade; the key is to use the right percentages.

When it comes to acne therapy, natural ingredients are generally perceived to be derived from nature. Unfortunately, without chemical exfoliation and oil management, natural solutions cannot be utilized to their fullest abilities. The most notable natural acne solutions include tea tree, citrus oils, apple cider vinegar, honey, willow bark extract, witch hazel, clay, and sulfur. Each of these ingredients may offer a combination of antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, or astringent qualities for acne skin.

I have a great appreciation for natural ingredients, but these home-remedy solutions are not enough for individuals with persistent acne. Salicylic acid, glycolic acid, and benzoyl peroxide are necessary to exfoliate and manage oil on the surface, while helping to reduce the occurrence of breakouts. Like the cyanide in apple seeds, a low dose of hydroxy acids or benzoyl peroxide used consistently can be beneficial, and overuse of a single ingredient can cause inflammation, dryness, and sensitivity. It is all about balancing the regimen.

Inflammatory or systemic acne conditions that present with an increased risk of scarring need more than cosmeceutical skin care solutions. Prescription retinoids, including tretinoin (Retin-A®), adapalene (Differin®), tazarotene (Tazorac®) or isotretinoin (Accutane®) improve cellular regeneration, desquamation, and prevent breakouts. In many cases, cystic acne clients need an antibiotic to help reduce *P. acnes* bacteria and inflammation. Commonly-prescribed antibiotics include erythromycin, tetracycline, doxycycline, and minocycline. Finally, oral contraceptives for women, prescription azelaic acid, or benzoyl peroxide have also been used to treat acne effectively. None of these solutions are so-called natural, but are necessary in order to manage the condition, prevent scarring, reduce pain

and discomfort, and – probably the most important part of acne care – build confidence, self-esteem, and a brighter outlook in a client's life.

## PROFESSIONAL ACNE MANAGEMENT

Homecare is the most essential part of acne treatment. Aestheticians should retail acne products to help facilitate client care, while simultaneously improving their credentials and client retention. Acne regimens should be concise. Overuse of acne products can result in dry, irritated, and sensitive skin and perpetuate the aversion to chemical acne products. Finding a product line that utilizes a combination of good cleansing with oil control, exfoliation, and anti-inflammatory qualities can offer a diversified approach to treatment.

Cleansing is the most fundamental part of a skin care regimen. Using a cleanser with salicylic acid or benzoyl peroxide twice daily helps wash away excess oil and dirt to immediately improve the look and feel of the skin, while helping to manage *P. acnes* bacteria. These staple ingredients, combined with citrus or papaya essential oils or ceramides, help prevent dehydration and refine pores.

Acne is a skin condition that needs help in improving the health of the barrier and preventing cellular buildup that causes comedones. Exfoliation is a key component to help resolve all three of these problems. However, there are two other important variables to consider: excess oil and inflammation. Over-exfoliating oily skin may increase oil production. Inflamed, chapped, and angry skin can become painful if exfoliated, perpetuating the inflammation process. Depending on the severity of acne and the integrity of the skin's barrier, moderate use of a combination of chemical exfoliation via hydroxy acids or benzoyl peroxide can be beneficial to acne skin. Acne scrubs can be used sparingly on light comedonal acne, but never on moderate to severe acne with inflammation. Overall, exfoliation is important but should be used sparingly one to two times per week or



as a spot treatment only, depending on the type of acne present, barrier integrity, and skin tolerance.

Although acne skin is oily, it can become dehydrated. This generally appears as a cellophane-like appearance on the skin surface and when pinched lightly, the skin holds superficial lines. Exfoliation is an important part of removing keratinized dead skin cells that contribute to dehydration, but hydration is the key to preventing the condition while keeping the skin supple and reducing acne breakouts. Using a lightweight skin moisturizer that absorbs quickly is well-tolerated by most acneic skin. Some key natural oils and extracts that may help with acne include tea tree, hemp, jojoba, echinacea, green tea, and citrus. Some of these ingredients, formulated with non-comodogenic humectants (ceramides, hyaluronic acid, panthenol, glycerin, or honey), help improve hydration and overall skin appearance.

Sun care is the best anti-aging support for skin. Photo damage contributes to hyperpigmentation, collagen degradation, capillary damage, and dehydration. Many acne clients suffer from post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation, otherwise characterized by red, purple, brown, or black spots where a blemish once appeared. Sunscreen may help prevent the severity of post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation, but the cause of the pigmentation is a result of trauma to the skin (inflammation or physically picking/scratching). Any post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation can have deep-rooted pigment that may span through the layers of the epidermis, causing it to take a long time to bring the skin back to an even tone. Spot treatment with a kojic and azelaic acid lightener can help improve the look of post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation and prevent future development of the hyperpigmentation.

There is a common misconception that more is better when it comes to clients and their self-prescribed acne regimen. They will try a variety of different products to get relief. They will pick, squeeze, and pop zits away, increasing infection, irritation, post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation, and scarring (open sores or scabs should always be considered a wound and handled accordingly). It is important to remember that acne therapy is a long-term commitment that requires consistent monitoring and evaluation. As the condition evolves or improves, changes to the home regimen can be addressed for the best results. In my facilities, we approach acne management in two different ways: teenage and adult.

## Teenage Acne

Teenage acne management involves routine care, education, and emotional support to help them improve the look of their skin and self-esteem. It is important to remember that there is more to the service than the price point. Parents bring their teenagers in every two weeks because it is affordable; they are using the products retailed in-store and are getting routine care that helps improve their teenager's skin and prevent lifelong scarring. Most suffer from comedonal acne, which benefits from light peel treatments and professional extraction services. Up-selling the peel or a partial microdermabrasion adds to the service price point, as do waxing services. Overall, teenagers need to be educated about their skin and how to practice healthy habits. Routine care is the best way to help instill those habits and – as they grow into adults – become lifelong clients.

## Adult Acne


Adult acne can be a hormonal change in women, induced by prescription medication, or combined with rosacea. Women are the primary sufferers of adult onset acne. They can present with dry skin, hyperpigmentation, or rosacea symptoms that can put a wrench in many stereotypical treatment plans. Most women experience cysts on the chin and jaw area and can usually feel the infection and hardness grow. Immediate cyst reduction is important in order to help minimize bacteria and growth of the cyst. This may be achieved with a benzoyl peroxide or Jessner peel spot treatment, ultrasonic reduction, or a laser. Prescription medication induced acne or rosacea conditions can be moderate to severe. These clients need a combination of medical and aesthetic care in order to help manage their acne. If the client



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presents with irritated, chapped and inflamed skin, a short-term dose of antibiotic can be instrumental in calming the skin in order to progress with homecare and facial treatments. Without medical assistance, adult acne may be an ongoing battle.

Consultation and a good skin analysis are at the forefront of acne therapy. As a professional, depending on the type of acne you are treating, light chemical peels, ultrasonic therapy, microdermabrasion, and laser can be instrumental at exfoliating the skin and managing bacteria growth that leads to inflammation. Treatment alone is not sufficient enough to help reduce blemishes and maintain good skin health. Balancing homecare with facial treatments is the best course of action for managing acne and preventing scarring. With the growing trend of clients wanting natural solutions that deliver results, it is important to educate clients about their conditions and let them know that there is no cure for acne – only management. Moreover, a combination of natural and chemical homecare may be necessary to help them improve the health and look of their skin. 



*Tina Zillmann is the founder of Advanced Rejuvenating Concepts and Skin Rejuvenation Clinic. As a business owner, aesthetician, product developer, and licensed laser*

*professional, she is fluent on all aspects of the aesthetic business. She has been awarded on television and print as a local skin care expert in San Antonio, Texas and nationally as a public speaker and published writer in the skin care industry.*

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