

# Tips for treating pimples

By Melissa Erickson

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**N**early every teen has to deal with acne, which is bothersome for some adults, too.

Acne is the most common skin condition in the United States, affecting up to 50 million people annually, according to the American Academy of Dermatology.

It may seem like a minor irritation, but waking up with acne before an important event like a school dance or a work presentation can certainly affect the way people feel about themselves.

"Different types of acne happen at different times in a person's life," said board-certified dermatologist Dr. Amy J. Derick, instructor of clinical dermatology at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. "Before puberty, it is more common to experience blackheads and oil in the face's T-zone. During and after puberty, deeper nodules tend to occur. The deeper lesions tend to be more painful. Cystic acne is the most difficult type of acne to treat, and it can leave permanent scarring if not treated early."

While there's no immediate cure for acne, over-the-counter treatments and medications can successfully clear up pimples, Derick said.

## Never squeeze

Resist your urges to squeeze a pimple that develops deep in the skin, causing a red, swollen and painful bump, Derick said. Doing so can make acne more noticeable and increase your risk of infection, discoloration and scarring.

"If a pimple has a whitehead, consider using a warm compress to see if the whitehead will drain," Derick said.

Also, "warm compresses at home can help dilate nearby blood vessels to help speed healing," said board-certified dermatologist Dr. Elizabeth

K. Hale, clinical associate professor of dermatology at NYU's Langone Medical Center. "A crushed baby aspirin in warm water can serve as a DIY salicylic acid paste, which can help dry the pimple up and quicken resolution."

If a pimple doesn't drain, with two clean cotton swabs gently squeeze the whitehead.

"Consider applying benzoyl peroxide to the pimple to initiate clearing," Derick said.

"Also, many prescription topical formulations like Epiduo, Aczone and RetinA can be prescribed by a dermatologist, which can help prevent acne and speed the resolution of individual lesions when they do occur," Hale said.

## Avoid questionable remedies

Be cautious of online advice promoting natural remedies for acne or myths like applying toothpaste to the area. Just because something is natural doesn't mean it's good for your skin, and even if a natural ingredient is good for your skin, it could be combined with another ingredient that could be harmful.

"I have found that most home remedies either don't work well or cause more irritation," Derick said.

## Treat early to avoid scarring

"Acne needs to be treated early because scarring from acne is one of the hardest skin problems to treat — especially in patients who have darker skin types," Derick said. Seek professional advice sooner than later.

"Picking at acne is what leads to acne scarring, which can be a time-consuming and expensive problem to treat. So, try your best to avoid picking or manipulating, and instead apply an over-the-counter or prescription acne medicine to speed resolution and minimize the chance of scarring," Hale said.

