

ACNE

Clearing up all misconceptions

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“I was in denial that my skin was as bad as it was, and every time my parents would tell me my face looked red, I would make an excuse for it,” senior Rachel Treinen said. “I’ve had acne since about the fifth grade, and from then until the beginning of junior year, I had tried every possible face wash, totaling about nine different brands.”

Many Marian girls, just like Treinen, have seen acne rear its ugly face year after year. Now it’s time to wash it off for good. Acne vulgaris, more commonly known as acne, is the skin condition that many teens dread.

“Acne is a combination of blocked oil glands and skin. When people don’t shed skin efficiently, it builds up with oil like glue,” Dr. Christopher J. Huerter, Associate Professor of Medicine and Chief Division of Dermatology at Creighton University Medical Center, said.

“Acne is both a hormonal and hereditary issue. If you have a strong family history of acne, you’re going to get it. There’s no way around it. But there are so many products on the market that everyone can have clear skin,” Dr. Huerter said.

Acne, in general, can be divided into two main divisions: non-inflammatory and inflammatory. Under non-inflammatory, blackheads, whiteheads and milia are listed.

“Milia look like whiteheads, but you can get them without having acne,” Dr. Huerter said. “They are most common in people who use too much or too heavy of a cream or moisturizer. People with really oily skin don’t need a lot of moisturizer.”

On the more painful and visually unpleasant side is inflammatory acne, encompassing a handful of repulsive-sounding words: cyst, nodule, papule and pustule.

“Blackheads and whiteheads are basically the same thing, both are superficial blockages. Whiteheads just have a light layer of skin over top, so blackheads are not dirt,” Dr. Huerter said.

The inflammatory acne of papules, pustules, nodules and cysts is exactly what it sounds like: inflamed, painful and sometimes infected by pus as explained by acne.com.

So how is one washed over with the blessing of acne? Blame the family, not the food. In simplest terms, acne is caused by hormonal and genetic factors.

The myth that what one eats affects acne is “not necessarily true,” Dr.

Huerter said. Some studies have shown that a diet high in sugar, like two to four sodas per day, can be linked to causing acne. Also, a diet high in dairy, comparable to 10 glasses of milk in a day, can be a risk factor for acne.

If acne can be triggered by food, what about the other popular myth of tanning to clear up acne?

“Tanning is bad, period,” Dr. Huerter said. “It’s not any different than smoking cigarettes, a risk. If you tan enough and you get color, you’re doing damage. The damage you do never goes away.”

Although these myths on the treatment of acne are not true, Dr. Huerter gives some recommendations on how to prevent acne: “good hygiene, avoid heavy creams on the face, and have a decent diet.”

If simple face washing is not enough to clear acne up for good, there are other options; the most popular option perhaps being Proactiv.

“I don’t recommend Proactiv because it’s pretty expensive, and you can get it cheaper at HyVee. I recommend the Neutrogena Oil Free Acne Wash,” Dr. Huerter said.

“Also, the single most effective treatment for acne without a prescription is Benzoyl Peroxide. As of March 2011, all products that are straight Benzoyl Peroxide (5 percent or 10 percent, it doesn’t matter) are available over the counter,” Dr. Huerter said.

Another, more expensive, option would be to contact a dermatologist and see what they can do to treat acne. There are plenty of prescription face washes, moisturizers, toners and medications that have been proven to clear up acne.

One of the more popular prescribed medicines being used to treat acne is Accutane.

“The dermatologist took one look at my face and literally said, ‘Oh God, this is bad.’ He told me it was time to take extreme measures and be put on the strongest acne medicine on the market, Accutane,” Treinen said.

“I give it to people with cystic or scarring acne and those who have not had success with previous medications,” Dr. Huerter said concerning Accutane. “You should only go on it through an experienced dermatologist and if they go through all of the pros and cons. It’s extremely effective and safe.”

“For Accutane, I had to go to the doctor’s office once a month to get a blood test and a pregnancy test, because if you get pregnant while you are on taking Accutane, the birth defects are very severe,” senior Kaitlyn Fischer said on the requirements for being on Accutane.

“The dermatologist also emphasized the other side effects that come with taking Accutane—especially the emotional effects,” Treinen said. “I had previously heard of young adults committing suicide while on Accutane, but it did not stop me, because I knew that once my skin started clearing up I would finally see hope again.”

“After being on birth control for a month, I started the Accutane and immediately felt my body get drier,” Treinen said. “My lips were constantly chapped, my hair never got greasy, my face was dry and my immune system was not as strong. Yet I never suffered from any emotional effects.”

If all else fails, contact a dermatologist, like these girls did. Although finding the right medication with a dermatologist may be frustrating and time-consuming, it just might leave you with cleaner and clearer skin.

“I took Accutane for about four or five months in my sophomore year, and my acne has stayed away since,” Fischer said.

Treinen also had similar success with the medicine.

“My skin really put me in a state of hopelessness for a few months,” Treinen said. “Accutane saved me from thinking that my skin would look like that forever.”



WARNING! This bottle contains multiple myths about acne.

CONTENTS: Eating greasy or unhealthy foods, more specifically chocolate or French Fries, causes acne **100% FALSE**

Stress causes acne **100% FALSE**

Sweating and exercise cleans out pores **100% FALSE** (Although exercise is beneficial, sweat can clog pores; so, make sure to shower and wash the face directly after exercise.)

Excessive face washing is a practical way to prevent acne, as dirt on the face causes acne **200% FALSE** (Washing the face more than two times a day can cause irritation or dry skin.)

DIRECTIONS TO PREVENT ACNE: Although most make-ups are non-comedogenic (meaning they will not clog pores), extreme exercise can cause make-up to be absorbed into pores; so, be wary of wearing make-up to the gym. Try to prevent using any oily products on the face or in the hair. Wash hair on a daily basis. Avoid touching the face. Avoid tight-fitting straps on or near the face (chin straps on helmets, tight headbands, etc.)

Sources: acne.com, acne.org, mayoclinic.org and webmd.com

Graphic by BrittanyHytrek