

Exploring the Root Causes of Acne

There comes a point when you've tried every single over-the-counter product you could find in your battle against the dreaded blight of acne... and yet still the battle rages on. You may have even crossed over to more natural methods of skincare like the honey face mask, homemade toner and coconut oil. And while these certainly help (I know from experience!), they fail to do one important thing: address the root causes of acne.

For a few, cleansing methods alone are enough to eradicate acne. But for the rest of us, there is something going on under the surface that is causing acne to rear its ugly head.

They say beauty isn't just skin deep. Well, neither is your acne.

Getting down to the root of the issue isn't easy. For one thing, we're all different. What causes my acne may have nothing to do with yours. It's all about how our bodies function as individuals. Still, while there are many factors that may be contributing to your acne, they all boil down to four simple categories:

1. Gut Health
2. Stress
3. Toxins
4. Hormonal Imbalance

Keep in mind that these can be tied together (and usually are). Stress can cause hormonal imbalances, poor gut health can cause toxins to build up, toxic overload can cause stress, etc. It's all just one big cycle of cause and effect. Because of this, you may have to address all four of these root issues to truly achieve clear skin (and excellent health). But many of you may experience dramatic results simply by identifying the one factor that's at the bottom of everything and addressing it accordingly.

Let's delve a little deeper into these four categories:

1. Gut Health

Breaking the Vicious Cycle: Intestinal Health Through Diet I put this one first for a reason—mainly because the condition of your gut affects your entire body far more than most of us realize. Balancing gut flora and rebuilding the strength of your gut lining is imperative to good health. An unhealthy gut system can contribute to toxic overload, hormonal imbalances and stress—gut health is truly the foundation of your overall health and well being.

Acne may actually be one of the first problems to surface when something in your gut isn't functioning properly. Better to catch this one early on than to wait until even more devastating symptoms arise. Simple ways to improve your gut health include eating probiotic foods like raw milk yogurt, taking herbal bitters to improve digestion, and having at least one cup of bone broth every

day. Others find they experience more healing when they cut out more difficult to digest foods such as dairy and grains.

If you find yourself facing food intolerances, consider doing the GAPS diet or the Specific Carbohydrate Diet (SCD) in order to restore gut health and reverse food sensitivities. These are strict diets, but they are also only temporary and can be extremely effective at repairing a damaged gut.

2. Stress

Stress is a common root cause of acne because it raises adrenaline and cortisol levels. When these stress hormones are chronically elevated, certain health issues begin to crop up. Acne is just one of them (others include back pain, irritability, headaches, insomnia and more—read more about high cortisol here).

For me, a telltale sign of stress-induced acne is—for lack of a better term—bacne. I only experience breakouts on my back and shoulders when stress is the issue. Fortunately I rarely experience this anymore, most likely because I've put a lot of effort into learning to manage my stressors and deal with them in a more positive way. I've also taken up a few positive habits like yoga practice and getting plenty of quality sleep.

Read more about how to reduce stress or learn more about the effect of stress on the body.

3. Toxins

Let's face it: in many ways our world is more toxic than ever. Some suggest that when our systems are overloaded with toxins (think chemical dyes, pesticides, synthetic hormones, fluoride, chlorine, etc.), the body has trouble processing and eliminating all of them. This overload ends up manifesting itself as clogged pores and acne. If you are sensitive to certain chemicals, this may be doubly true. Melissa from The Cellulite Investigation has written extensively about her experience with fluoroderma and acne. For her, exposure to fluoride guarantees cystic acne breakouts. Read more about her thoughts on fluoroderma and acne here.

Whether you are sensitive to specific chemicals or just suffer from general toxic overload, practicing some simple detoxification methods may prove to be very helpful. Try things like dry brushing your skin, drinking a glass of warm lemon water first thing in the morning, oil pulling, taking Epsom salt baths, or rebounding.

4. Hormonal Imbalance

Navitas Naturals Organic Raw Maca Powder, Incan Superfood, 16-Ounce Pouch Hormonal imbalance is another common underlying cause of acne, but unfortunately conventional medicine offers only one solution: birth control pills. Not my cup of tea!

But hormonal imbalances is last on my list simply because restoring gut health, managing stress and detoxing can all help balance your hormones. But for some, hormones are truly the root cause of their acne, and in that case it's an appropriate place to focus your efforts. I always recommend natural remedies for balancing hormones first and foremost. For instance, many people experience positive results with raw maca powder or vitex (chaste berry extract), both of which are well known for their ability to naturally balance hormones.

Elevated levels of DHT (dihydrotestosterone) may also contribute to your acne, especially if you experience mostly cystic acne along your jawline and chin. Herbs that balance DHT levels include saw palmetto extract and spearmint tea.

Managing blood sugar and insulin levels is also a key in balancing your hormones. Balanced, real food meals are the best way to get your blood sugar under control. Include some protein and fat with your carbs (specific amounts will vary based on your individual metabolism), and eat smaller meals to avoid drastic upswings in your blood sugar and insulin levels. Some people find specific foods trigger a blood sugar roller coaster. Refined white flour and white sugar seem to be the most common culprits.

If you suspect hormonal imbalance to be the root cause of your acne, then getting a hormone profile test may be needed to determine where you should focus your efforts and if bioidentical hormone replacement is necessary in your particular case.

Try to remember the bigger picture when figuring out the root causes of your acne. Addressing the above issues may not solve your acne woes overnight. It takes time to heal. Impatience will only conjure up feelings of stress—which we know does nothing to improve your complexion! So think long term and make healing your acne just as much about healing your body as a whole. That's when the real benefits happen.