REAL SIMPLE › STYLE › SKINCARE

8 Things That Are Causing Your Bacne—and What to Do About It

Doctors outline the primary causes of back acne so you can address the issue head-on.

By **Wendy Rose Gould** | July 09, 2019

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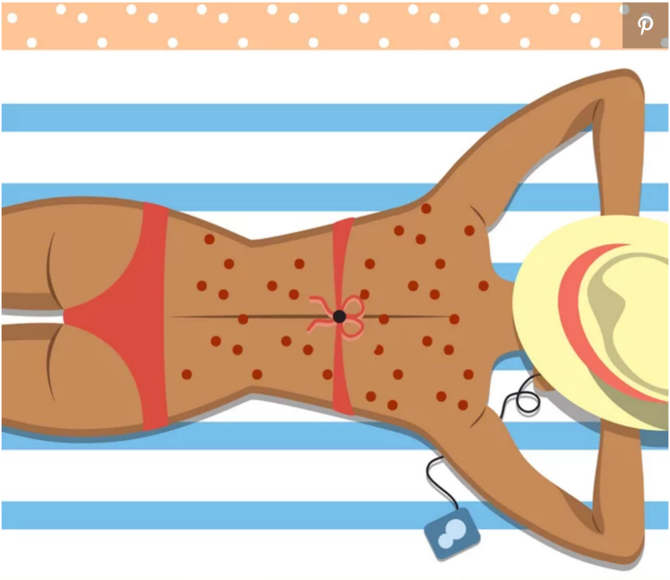

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You may not have to confront it every single day like you would a breakout on your face, but back acne—or bacne—still remains one of the more frustrating skin issues.

“Acne can appear anywhere there are sweat and oil glands. It occurs when sweat, oil, bacteria, dead skin cells, and dirt gets trapped within a hair follicle and clog those pores. Because our back has sweat glands, acne can also occur there,” says Dr. Howard Sobel, a board-certified cosmetic dermatologist and founder of Sobel Skin. “Some people are certainly more prone to getting acne, whether it’s genetics, diet, or lifestyle.”

In addition to genetics, Dr. Sobel says there are a few other culprits that can exacerbate back acne. Here are the biggest offenders so you can pinpoint what’s causing your bacne and find out how to get rid of back acne once and for all.

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1

A Hormonal Imbalance

“It’s important to make sure your hormones are balanced in order to avoid androgen stimulation of your sebaceous glands, which are the glands that produce the oil that leads to acne,” says Dr. Jessica Wright, a board-certified general surgeon who specializes in aesthetics.

The biggest hormonal culprit, she adds, is testosterone. In addition to avoiding testosterone supplements (which are illegal unless prescribed), it’s wise to schedule a consultation with your physician to determine if hormonal imbalance is an issue, and if so, how to address it.

2

You're Not Showering After a Workout

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Sweaty workout clothes are basically a theme park for acne bacteria. “While exercising and sweating alone does not lead to more bacne, staying in dirty workout clothes can be a trigger,” Dr. Sobel says. “That’s because sweat, bacteria, and dead skin cells clog pores, which is the prime breeding ground for acne."

Hop out of those clothes and straight into the shower as quickly as possible after your workout. If showering isn't an option, bring body wipes and change into clean, loose-fitting clothes. Try Bliss Lemon & Sage Refreshing Body Wipes ($8; blissworld.com).

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3 Your Showers Are Too Hot and Too Long

"Hot water is not great for your skin, especially if you have any history of eczema or sensitivity," says Dr. Hal Weitzbuch, a board-certified dermatologist. "The heat increases how dry your skin is after your shower, and this in turn can increase how sensitive your skin will be to environmental triggers. Rather, lukewarm water is much better for your skin and will not dry it out nearly as much." Also, keep your shower to less than 10 minutes if you can help it, but ideally less than five.

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4 Ingredients in Your Shampoo or Conditioner

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Shampoos and conditioners are particularly notorious for causing back acne. "Hair conditioner is meant to be very occlusive, so your hair is hydrated and moisturized," Dr. Sobel says. "However, if it's not rinsed off, it can lead to bacne flare-ups."

Not only will rinsing really well help but choosing a product that addresses the back acne issue can be a game changer. For example, Seen Haircare products ($55; helloseen.com) are formulated specifically to be non-comedogenic to help fight the battle against body acne. You can also save washing your body for the last step in your regimen. Dr. Wright recommends using a lightweight gel, such as Neutrogena Body Clear Acne Body Wash With Salicylic Acid ($6.50; target.com).

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5

Using Dirty Towels

“Damp towels that don’t have the chance to dry may be harboring organisms from fungus to bacteria,” says Dr. Weitzbuch. “If your towel hangs in your bathroom, the door is usually shut closed, and you don’t use a fan to circulate air, you may have this issue without knowing it.”

He recommends checking if your towel is damp before hopping in the shower. If it is, grab a fresh one. Ideally, you should rotate towels daily, but if you’re keen on reusing them, make sure your towel is hanging in a bright, breezy space (aka not your bathroom) and is completely dry. You can also use towels that are built to dry faster, such as Brooklyn Bamboo’s Absorbent Antifungal Hypoallergenic Towels ($30 for 3; amazon.com).

6

Aggressive Exfoliation

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When it comes to acne, we tend to have this “beat it into submission” approach that always backfires. “Over exfoliating your back with rough, manual exfoliants can cause inflamed skin,” Dr. Sobel says. “That leads to a breakdown in its protective barrier, which tricks the skin into ramping up oil can lead to bacne flare-ups.”

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