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There are many myths about acne and its causes, cures and aggravating factors. The biggest is that chocolate and fatty, greasy, foods are the culprits in causing acne. Another fallacy is that poor hygiene is the cause.

Acne is a skin condition where the follicles – small sacs in the skin that hold hair roots – get blocked with old, dead skin. In normal hair follicles the old cells lining the sacs fall away and get carried by sebum (oil) to the skin's surface. During adolescence, there are many changes taking place in a teenager's body, especially to the levels of sex hormones, such as androgens, which increase. The result is production of more sebum which combines with old skin cells to form a 'plug'. Oil builds-up behind the 'plug' and forms a whitehead. When the 'plug' reaches the skin's surface it darkens and becomes a blackhead. Both are mild forms of acne.

Pimples form when bacteria, normally found on the skin, grow in the follicles and break down the oil plugs. The follicles swell and pus can form. Pimples, along with pustules, nodules and deep cysts, are more severe forms of acne and involve breakdown of follicle walls, inflammation and redness. They involve deeper skin layers and pain and scarring can result.

Acne can be made worse by increased sweating, wearing clothes that rub against the skin, by some medicines such as contraceptive pills, and wearing heavy, greasy make-up. For some women, acne gets worse around period time.

Acne can be embarrassing and distressing for many people but there are lots of options available for treating it and reducing its effects. Having a good skin care routine helps control the oil and remove the old skin to prevent it blocking the hair follicles. This involves gentle washing and cleansing your face and other acne areas, morning and night, using mild oil-free cleansers. After cleansing, pat your face gently to dry it. There are many skin care products available on the market. Some interesting ones include witch hazel or purified spring water which can be very healing on the skin.

Try wearing loose-fitting clothing and keeping hair off your face. Avoid squeezing or popping pimples as this may damage the skin and cause scarring.

A wide range of medicines is available and the best one will depend on how bad your acne is. Some will need a Doctor's prescription – especially those containing antibiotics to control the bacteria, and those used for very severe acne where large lumps called cysts have formed. Many treatments for acne take time to work so don't expect instant results, rather keep using your treatment. Ask your Pharmacist for more information on treatments available. It is important to see your Doctor if you have acne on your chest or back; you have large red pimples that may or may not contain pus and if your acne does not improve with medicines you have tried already.

Acne can also respond very well to the right nutrients such as zinc from lean red meat, fish and nuts; vitamin B's found in whole grains, dark leafy vegetables and fish, and vitamin A from carrots or dark green leafy vegetables. Vitamin E from avocados, broccoli and sunflower seeds and vitamin C from citrus fruit, berries, grapes and broccoli may also help heal the scars resulting from acne. Drinking plenty of water and exercising regularly will also help keep your body healthy.