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KEEP IT SIMPLE

When it comes to men's acne, straightforward treatments are best

by Shannon Esau

Well-known computer scientist Alan Perlis once said, "Simplicity does not precede complexity, but follows it."

While he was talking about programming, the same could be said for skin care. Particularly when it comes to men's skin.

Men's skin doesn't differ all that much from women's, but one of the biggest hurdles for men is adoption of a consistent skin care routine. If they are new to the world of advanced skin care, overly complex treatment programs and regimens can send men running back to the drugstore-brand, all-in-one face cream they were previously using. While the formulations you use in the treatment room and prescribe in their home care should be complex in terms of the science that goes into them, simplicity in their care plans is essential.

With that in mind, what does it take to care for the modern man's skin? Have their needs changed over time? And what are the key differences between men's and women's skin?



THE BIG CHALLENGE

Regardless of gender, acne is one of the most prevalent skin issues on the rise in recent years. In fact, it's become the most common skin condition in the US, affecting nearly 60 million Americans. According to the American Academy of Dermatology, 85 percent of individuals between ages 12 and 24 experience some form of minor acne.¹ But it's not limited to adolescents—20 percent of those impacted are adults.

Though women tend to experience acne more often, dermatology experts at Cleveland Clinic report an uptick in male acne among those in their 20s and 30s.² While the majority of cases tend to be persistent acne (acne that develops in adolescence and continues), late-onset acne can also occur. Additionally, some individuals never really outgrow it, either experiencing prolonged acne side effects that linger into their 30s, 40s, and beyond. And, if left untreated, it can cause significant scarring, not to mention the potential negative effects on one's emotional well-being and confidence.

While acne doesn't discriminate based on gender, it does affect men and women differently. Beginning during puberty, men develop larger quantities of the hormones (androgens) that stimulate the oil production glands. These hormones are also what stimulate some of the more distinct male characteristics, including facial hair and muscle development. Because of this hormone, men tend to experience more severe cases of acne that last longer and, therefore, can be more vulnerable to scarring than women.

Additionally, men's pores are often more open, which makes them more susceptible to accumulating bacteria, triggering inflammation, and producing the comedones and redness associated with acne. Hats and certain beard oils can further exacerbate the problem if the skin is not properly cleansed and exfoliated on a regular basis. That said, it is important to identify the potential triggers prior to developing a treatment plan.

WHAT CAUSES AN OUTBREAK?

While there are numerous theories as to the exact cause of acne, we have at

least identified some of the common triggers. This makes proper diagnosis a quintessential part of restoring the skin to optimal health. If you can identify the trigger, you can start by eliminating it or building a course of treatment to directly address it. Let's look at some of the common acne triggers.

Hormones: Oil production is regulated heavily by hormones, specifically testosterone, which stimulates the development of sebaceous follicles and attached oil glands. Because of this, women are five times more prone to acne later in life than men.

Stress: Stress is one of the top triggers of acne, as it stimulates the adrenal glands to produce more cortisol, which can cause excess sebum and inflammation. Acne flare-ups can occur from 14 days to a month after the stress response.

Medication: Certain medications can have an adverse effect on hormones (adrenals), which can spur on blemishes.

Nutrition and Diet: Alcohol, caffeine, and foods with iodide (salt, processed and fast foods, MSG, and excessive dairy) can trigger existing acne. When foods high in starch or sugar are consumed, it can spike insulin, and some research suggests this can also instigate sebum production.

Improper Cleansing: Bacteria forms when oil builds up on the skin, and this creates an environment for blemishes to occur. In some cases, simply showing male clients proper cleansing techniques may help eliminate the issue. It's worth noting, however, that acne is not an indicator of hygiene, as there is often much more going on beneath the surface.

Skin Irritants: Detergents, fabric softeners, certain shampoos and conditioners, and fragrances or dyes can irritate existing acne conditions.

Picking: Improper squeezing, picking, and inept extractions may rupture the follicle wall, causing bacteria to spread. It may also lead to deeper impaction

and scarring. Male clients, in particular, can be guilty of improper squeezing and picking, so talk to them about icing as a way to reduce inflammation when they feel the pressure of a lesion.

Overstripping the Skin: Overuse of certain drying skin care products may cause the skin to overproduce sebum as a way of maintaining a healthy level of oils. When there is an overproduction of oil, it can then get trapped in the pores, causing bacteria buildup.

Genetics: Some people are simply predisposed to acne, based on genes. When you do an intake with a new male client with an acne condition, it's essential to learn as much as you can about what could be contributing to his acne. Understanding his skin histology and lifestyle will better prepare you to map out an effective treatment plan.

TYPES OF ACNE MOST PREVALENT IN MALES

The types of men's acne you might see in the treatment room vary widely, and knowing which type you are working with, in addition to the possible trigger, will help you better treat the skin. While there are numerous types of acne, there are a few primary types most common to men.

Hormonal Acne (*acne vulgaris*): This is the most common type of acne across both genders. It is characterized by comedones, papules, pustules, nodules, cysts, and sequelae—such as pitted or hypertrophic scars. *Acne vulgaris* is caused by *Propionibacterium acnes* (*P. acnes*).

Acne cosmetica: As the name implies, this is acne caused or stimulated by cosmetics. But this is not limited to makeup. It also includes products like hair gels, conditioners, and certain beard oils. This type is usually noninflammatory and indicated by small, slightly raised red lesions, whiteheads, and occasional pustules. This can usually be corrected by eliminating the acne-producing product and educating clients on proper cleansing techniques.

Pseudofolliculitis barbae: This occurs when coarse, curved hair penetrates into the skin before it leaves the follicle (also known as ingrown hairs).

IN THE TREATMENT ROOM

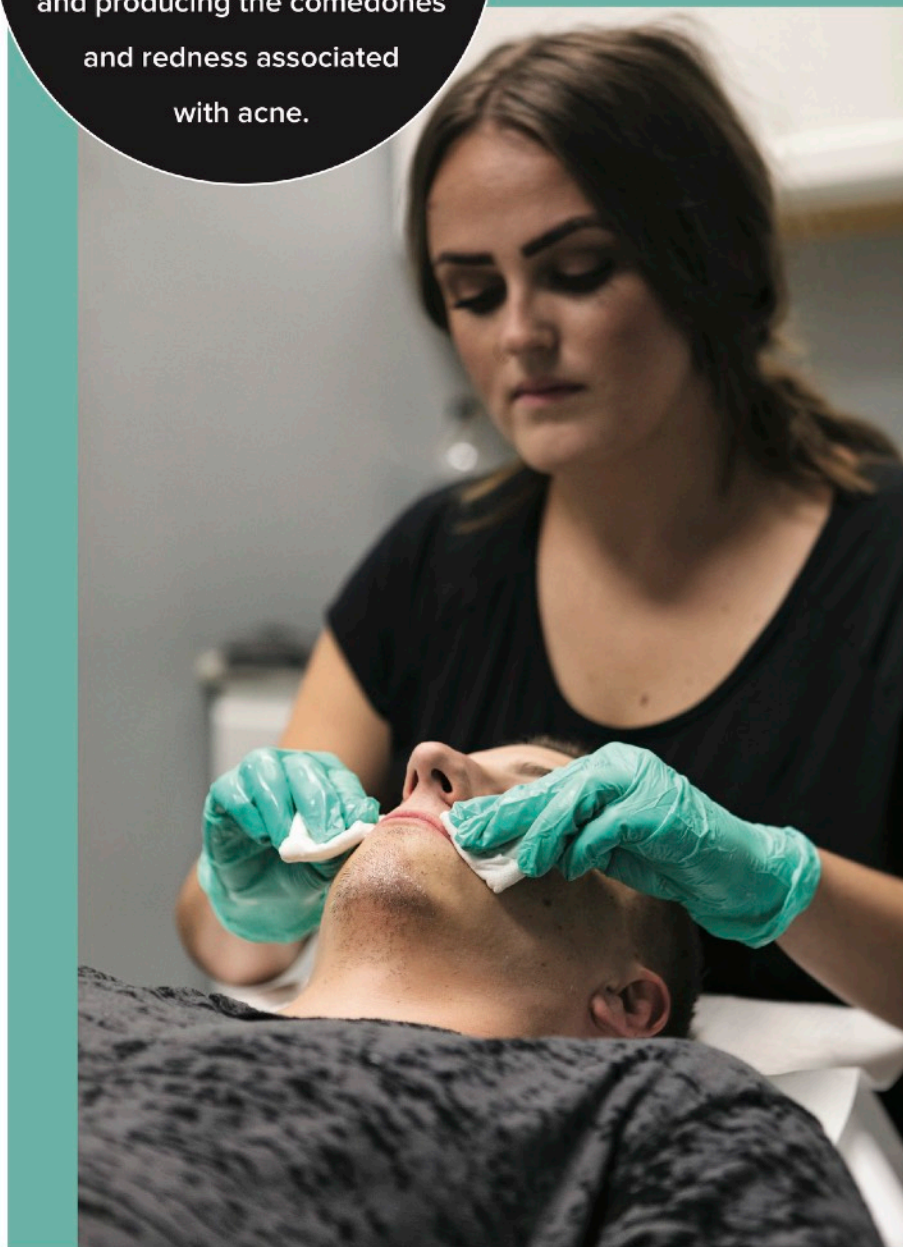
No two skins are the same; however, when it comes to treating acne, there are three key areas that must be addressed: reducing inflammation and bacteria, eliminating cellular buildup, and supporting wound repair. With acne conditions, it's also important to catch it at the first signs of lesions to help prevent scarring and restore the skin to optimum health. With a simple, three-step clinical approach, you'll be able to help remedy acne at the onset and prevent future breakouts from occurring.

Reduce Bacteria and Inflammation:

When pores get clogged with sebum and dead skin cells, bacteria then spreads and creates inflammation and acne breakouts. To reduce bacteria and inflammation, dry cleanse the skin with a salicylic acid and green tea-based cleanser. Salicylic acid will work as a surface exfoliant, providing antiseptic and antioxidant benefits while softening comedones and promoting cell turnover. The green tea will deliver necessary antioxidants to the skin. This could be followed with a second-phase cleanse with a glycolic-based cleanser.

Increase Cellular Exfoliation: The goal is to increase cellular turnover and stimulate blood flow. Salicylic or mandelic acids are great choices for most acne skin. For oily and congested acne skin, an enzyme combination of papaya extracts with hydrogen peroxide, herb enzymes, and salicylic, glycolic, and L-lactic acids will help regenerate, heal, and reduce sebum. Alternatively, for dry acne skin, consider eliminating hydrogen peroxide to avoid stripping the skin of too much hydration. For deeper exfoliation, a progressive peel will work wonders for many acne skins. For this, a tomato-based formula combined with herb enzymes, mandelic acid, and arginine will provide regenerating, antioxidant, and strengthening support to the skin. A cell conditioner might also be added to reduce inflammation and start the wound repair process.

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TRY THIS TECHNIQUE: Corrective Facial for Men with Acne

Step 1: Skin Preparation: Reduce Bacteria and Inflammation

Cleanse skin with a green tea and salicylic-based cleanser. Rinse thoroughly with a 4" x 4" gauze. Pat skin dry. Saturate a 2" x 2" gauze with a cell conditioner and apply to the face and neck using firm, even pressure. Let it remain on the skin and be absorbed.



Step 2: Enzyme Application: Increase Cellular Exfoliation

The enzymes chosen for this step will depend on the skin you are working with.

- For oily/congested skin, use an enzyme combination of papaya extracts with hydrogen peroxide; herb enzymes; and salicylic, glycolic, and L-lactic acids.
- For dry acne, eliminate the hydrogen peroxide and opt for enzymes such as papaya extracts; herbs; and salicylic, glycolic, and L-lactic acids.

Dispense enzyme mixture into a glass beaker, and mix with a booster containing beta glucan, niacinamide, and cornflower extract to support wound healing. Using a firm, square brush, apply an even layer to the face and neck. Leave on the skin for 10 minutes.

Remove with tepid water using a 4" x 4" gauze. Rinse several times to ensure thorough removal. Pat skin dry.

Perform extractions if needed. Saturate a 2" x 2" gauze with green tea-based lotion and apply to the face and neck to prevent bacteria from spreading. Let it remain on the skin and be absorbed.



Step 3: Therapeutic Gel Mask Application

Combine a small amount of a booster containing chamomile, edelweiss, and coneflower with a booster of hyaluronic acid and aloe in a glass beaker. Mix with 1–2 droppers of a peel containing mandelic acid and arginine until well-blended. Using a firm, square brush, apply an even layer to the face and neck. Let set for 2 minutes, then layer the second mask application over the therapeutic gel mask.



Step 4: Second Mask Application

Combine a tomato-based enzyme peel with a milk-based mask. For oily/congested skin, use a slightly higher ratio of the peel to the milk mask. For dry acne skin, the milk mask ratio will be slightly higher.

Dispense mask mixture into a glass beaker, add 2–3 pumps of a vitamin E serum, and mix well. Using a firm, square brush, apply an even layer to the face and neck. Leave on the skin for 8–10 minutes.

Lay two unfolded 4" x 4" gauzes, dampened with cool water, on the upper and lower portions of the face. Roll chilled ice globes over the face for several minutes. Wrap the face and neck with a hot compress. Rinse with tepid water and a 4" x 4" gauze. Pat skin dry.



Step 5: Building and Strengthening: Support Wound Healing

Spot treat with a blemish serum. Let it remain on the skin and be absorbed.

Dispense 1–2 droppers of the mandelic acid and arginine peel formula with a small amount of the beta glucan, niacinamide, and cornflower extract booster; mix well. Apply mixture to the face and neck and gently massage into the skin. Let it remain on the skin and be absorbed.

Combine a hydrating serum containing grapeseed oil with natural arnica; gently massage into the skin. Let it remain on the skin and be absorbed.



Step 6: Finishing Application

Finish with a zinc-based sun protection.



Support Wound Healing: To support the rebuilding of the skin and wound repair, look to omega-6 essential fatty acids, arginine, epidermal growth factors, and natural arnica.

SIMPLIFY HOME CARE

As an extension of a professional regimen, recommend a home care plan for clients with best practices for a daily skin care routine and beneficial habits to follow to help control outbreaks and maintain acne-free skin between treatments. When it comes to acneic skin, particularly men's skin, it's best to keep it simple. Keeping their home care system to a few ingredients like green tea, epidermal growth factors, and mandelic acid will help them manage bacteria and inflammation, gently exfoliate, and repair wounded, damaged skin. From this point, you will be able to determine progress and appropriately add to the regimen as time goes on.

To start, advise them to use a gentle scrub with bamboo extract and jojoba beads, and anti-inflammatories like natural dragon's blood—a resin extract. The scrub shouldn't be used more than three times per week to avoid irritating and damaging to the skin.

Create a Clean Environment: It's essential clients understand how to cleanse the skin properly and avoid harsh cleansers that strip the skin of all oils. Recommend cleansers with ingredients like green tea and salicylic or glycolic acid. Instruct them to massage it into the skin for several minutes, then rinse with warm water and a white cloth. When the cloth wipes clean, the job is done. Cleansing pads may also be recommended for quick, in-between cleanups.

Eliminate Buildup: You might recommend an AHA and green tea-based toner to balance and repair the skin and keep oil at bay. Clients may also exfoliate with a gentle scrub using jojoba beads and bamboo extract.

Find Balance: Balance is key. Remind clients some oil is good, and excess dryness can increase oil production. Bentonite clay and kaolin clay masks will help purify and detoxify the skin. Retinol will also promote cell turnover, strengthen capillaries, and encourage collagen synthesis. Benzoyl peroxide, when applied to affected areas, will release oxygen deep inside clogged pores to break down the skin and sebum while healing the skin, preventing incidents of scarring, and diminishing *P. acnes* bacteria.

Rebuild and Protect: Epidermal growth factor is essential for acne clients to use in any daily program. It will help promote the growth of new, healthy cells.

LESS IS MORE

It's also helpful to talk to male clients about eating a healthy diet rich in antioxidants, taking measures to reduce stress, sleeping on a clean pillowcase and sheets, and wearing zinc-based sun protection, as the sun can aggravate and inflame the skin and trigger acne. Bottom line, when it comes to acne skin, and men's skin in particular, less is more. Keep it simple. ☺

Notes

1. American Academy of Dermatology, "Skin Conditions by the Numbers," accessed March 2019, www.aad.org/media/stats/conditions/skin-conditions-by-the-numbers.
2. Health.ClevelandClinic.org, "When Should Men See a Dermatologist for Adult Acne?" accessed March 2019, <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/when-should-men-see-a-dermatologist-for-adult-acne>.