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## Spot on remedies

By Jill Alphonso -  
The Straits Times

You may have shed your puppy fat. But most people are horrified to find that the bane of their teenage years - acne - can come back to haunt them.

In fact, according to The Acne Resource Center Online, an American website dedicated to acne research, 25 per cent of adult men and 50 per cent of adult women in the United States develop acne between the ages of 20 and 40.

The National Skin Centre in Singapore sees around 4,000 patients in their 20s and 1,000 in their 30s for acne treatment each year.

Like teenage acne, adult acne can be caused by hormonal changes, says DrLawrence Khoo, a consultant dermatologist at Dermatology Associates.

But unlike teenage acne, which often lasts two to five years, adult acne can last as long as 10 years.

Dr Audrey Tan, a dermatologist at the National Skin Centre, adds that adult acne can be brought on by a range of factors, such as stress or the environment.

Acne is generally caused by overactive sebaceous glands, which are found on the face and scalp. These glands provide the skin with sebum, an oily substance that lubricates the skin. An over-production of sebum leads to blocked pores and acne.

Genes also influence how active the glands are, while androgens, or male hormones which both men and women possess, increase sebum production.

Those in their 40s usually see a respite as their hormones are more stable.

Although doctors say they have seen a rise of about 20 per cent in the number of adult acne patients over the past three to five years, they attribute the spike to a growing awareness of the treatments available.

Traditionally, treatments include anti-bacterial or retinoid creams and oral medication that cost \$50 to \$100. But in the last five years, aestheticians and beauticians have also begun peddling acne remedies.

Treatments range from chemical peels to newfangled facials and light therapy.

Doctors are catching on, too. The National Skin Centre is researching the effects of light therapy, a treatment that gained acceptance about two years ago.

Dr Calvin Chan, director of a private aesthetic and laser clinic in Paragon, says: 'New technology such as light therapy makes treatments less painful and recovery time is shorter.'

Those with acne-related problems make up 25 per cent of his patients. Where they had to endure post-treatment redness or pain for days in the past, these side-effects have been reduced to a matter of hours with the new remedies.

'But there's no quick fix,' warns DrChan. 'With acne, people often have to go back for five or six treatments, or wait up till two months to see results.'

Skin takes time to heal, explains Cathlyn Leyau, managing director of FIL Spa Intelligence. And it also takes time to purge toxins that have built up over time.

Another thing to bear in mind, say doctors, is that everyone's skin reacts differently to treatments, so consult your dermatologist before going for any treatment.

### NEW TREATMENTS

We suss out five new remedies for adult acne and ask dermatologists if they work.

#### Facials

Try specialised treatments that target pimples. Beauty treatment centre Bio Focus offers a Bio Vita C treatment where you get a lymphatic drainage massage that helps drain the skin of toxins.

Vitamin C ampoules also help nourish the skin and boost collagen renewal. The treatment can be combined with dermabrasion - a procedure in which the surface of the skin is removed.

Where: Bio Focus, 39 Carpenter Street, 01-00 (tel: 6532-5885). Each treatment costs \$180 and up.

Dermatologists say: Vitamin C generally boosts skin health, but lymphatic drainage may not have a direct impact on it. However, combined with dermabrasion, this could be a good treatment as the exfoliation will help clear clogged pores. Just don't aggravate skin further by having extractions.

#### PCA peels

These peels work well for mild to severe break-outs, says Dr Calvin Chan, director of Calvin Chan Aesthetic & Laser Clinic at Paragon. PCA, which stands for Physician's Choice of Arizona in the United States, is a peel that exfoliates with blends of lactic and salicylic acids.

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They reduce break-outs, control oil production and help to clear clogged pores. A peel takes around 30 minutes and may sting a little. One or two sessions usually does the trick for minor break-outs.

Where: Aestheticians' clinics, such as DrChan's clinic, Point Medical Aesthetics, 11-04/05 Paragon (tel: 9456-7113). Each session costs \$100. Also call 6872-4684 for more locations.

Dermatologists say: If your pimples are red or inflamed, peels are not a good idea as they can irritate and damage the skin.

#### Light treatment

This is known to help those with sensitive to oily skin that is acne-prone. When acne erupts, it pumps out chemicals called porphyrins which are associated with acne bacteria. Certain wavelengths of light can kill that bacteria, hence stopping the formation of acne.

Ask for an auralight treatment, which uses both blue and red light. While blue light kills the bacteria and calms the skin, red light boosts collagen production and helps with the renewal of skin cells. Expect to see results after at least two treatments.

Where: Available at spas and clinics. Try FIL Spa Intelligence, 01-12 Singapore Shopping Centre (tel: 6333-0055). Each treatment costs \$800.

Dermatologists say: Blue light is known to be effective in killing bacteria, reducing inflammation. But the treatment can cause irritation or even hives in those who are sensitive to light. If you are the type who breaks out in a rash after sun exposure, this may not be for you.

#### Laser treatments

The CoolTouch laser treatment is suitable for those with acne and acne-scarred skin. It cools the top layers of skin and allows a pulse of laser energy to penetrate the skin.

The laser targets problem spots and then heats up the skin, which helps kill acne bacteria. It also stimulates collagen formation, which reduces scarring.

Where: LL Cheong Skin & Laser Clinic, 09-09 Mount Elizabeth Medical Centre (tel: 6836-1480). Each treatment costs \$500.

Dermatologists say: If oral medications and topical creams don't work, this is a good option. It has been proven to be effective, especially with scars.

#### Holistic medicine

Acne can be treated with internal medicine as well. Some believe the toxin levels in the body can affect your skin. Certain types of fungi found in the body are also linked to acne break-outs.

At holistic clinics, most acne cases are treated with either an anti-fungal or an anti-allergenic diet.

An anti-fungal diet eliminates wheat, sugar, yeast and fruit from the patient's diet. For an anti-allergenic diet, the patient may have to avoid wheat, corn and dairy products.

The results are often seen within 14 to 21 days. Patients may also be asked to take prescription-only herbal and homeopathic medicines.

Where: Natural Therapies, 39 Kreta Ayer Road (tel: 6323-6652). Consultations cost \$240 and medicines range from \$150 to \$200.

Dermatologists say: There is no proven correlation between diet and skin break-outs. Drinking at least two litres of water per day and consuming lots of antioxidants from green, leafy vegetables are good for the body and skin in general. But doctors acknowledge that holistic and Western medicine do not often agree on philosophies.

*Medical input from Dr Patricia Yuen, consultant dermatologist at Pacific Healthcare Specialist Centre; Dr Audrey Tan, dermatologist at the National Skin Centre; and Dr Lawrence Khoo, consultant dermatologist at Dermatology Associates.*

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