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These 5 common skincare mistakes are making your acne worse

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From a dirty phone screen to bad acne advice, these slips could be hurting your chance at clear skin



If you're sleeping eight hours a day, drinking enough water, loading up on green leafy vegetables and sticking to your skincare routine and still waking up to a new acne breakout on the morning of a big party—of course, it can get frustrating. It seems that the internet, your friends and even your nosey aunt have thoughts, advice and products to push at your pimples—toothpaste on your zits, perhaps? To make things a little simpler, we spoke to Dr Geetika Mittal Gupta, founder and medical director, ISAAC, as well as Mumbai-based dermatologist Dr Satish Bhatia on the things you might be doing to exacerbate your acne, and the easy changes you can make to fix them.

1. Relying on acne hacks from the internet

Self-diagnosis is one of the most common ways to antagonise your acne, says Dr Bhatia. “Using antibiotics prescribed on the internet makes the acne worse as they ultimately become antibiotic-resistant. It then leads up to a situation where the acne-afflicted skin needs higher antibiotic dosage or isotretinoin to work.” If acne is bothering you, he suggests seeking the help of a certified professional.

Besides medication, there are several anti-acne hacks done at home that can worsen the breakouts. Clinical studies estimate it can affect up to 50 per cent of women at some point in their adult life, points out Dr Gupta. “Treating adult acne is not easy, since traditional topical medications and internet-favoured hacks described online are best suited to oily, teenage skin.”

Attempting to spot treat the wrong kinds of breakouts can be harmful as well. A traditional whitehead-topped pimple contains an infection that needs to come up and through the skin's surface—it is how the skin heals itself. However, when one applies a strong spot treatment to bring the inflammation down immediately, it dries out the skin's surface and creates dead, flaky cells that trap the infection under the skin. Most derms recommend applying a zit-zapping spot treatment only once the whitehead is fully formed.

2. Using makeup that isn't up the mark

Misuse of cosmetics could also lead to an outbreak of bacteria on the skin. “Expired makeup can harbour bacteria, and liquid or cream-based products are the worst offenders. Added to this, wearing too many long-lasting or oil-based makeup products for long periods of time can cause or exacerbate acne flare-ups. Wearing it every single day can leave your skin with fewer opportunities to breathe,” says Dr Gupta. According to her, it is best to use makeup products that work for your specific skin type, and use the right cleansers to remove all traces of it before bed. She cautions against sleeping with makeup on, as it's a sure-shot way to clog the pores. Sharing makeup, even between friends and family members, is also a big no-no. “Products that are in direct contact with the face, as well as brushes, applicators

and makeup sponges, should not be shared, as you'd be facilitating the transfer of bacteria across. In any case, you should be washing your brushes and applicators at least once a week, either with a dedicated cleansing solution, or a mixture of Dettol and baby shampoo.”

3. Choosing skincare products that don't work for your skin type

The use of heavy creams or oils can clog the pores, especially for oily and combination skin types. “Avoid wheatgerm, olive, coconut and mineral oils. Use coconut oil as a facial cleanser only, as it can clog pores easily [if left on skin for long periods],” suggests Dr Gupta. “Those with acne-prone skin should prefer rosehip, argan, jojoba or tea tree oils. Use a small amount only to lock in the serum or moisturiser at night.” Some dermatologists rely on a trick to know whether a cream is appropriate for oily skin types—if you turn the jar over, and the moisturiser doesn't pour or seep out, it is usually too thick for greasy, acne-prone skin. For those with this skin type, not moisturising can be as harmful. When skin is too sapped of moisture, it begins to create its own oil to tip the scales, leading to an oilier complexion. Hydrating the skin with humectants and occlusives will create a better balance.

4. Eating foods you might be sensitive to

“Consumption of dairy products in people prone to acne has been seen to trigger breakouts. That's because acne is an inflammatory condition,” explains Dr Bhatia. Besides dairy, some foods like breads, pasta and even chocolate are clinically known to make acne worse, he says. “Avoiding high glycemic load foods too can reduce the severity of the acne.” Other than food, certain drugs like corticosteroids, testosterone and lithium can induce acne. “Something as unsuspecting as the use of Vitamin B 12 supplements can cause the acne to get worse, and most patients don't know this,” notes Dr Bhatia.

5. Not wiping down your phone screen enough

This last one is the easiest to change. Stats say that each square inch of your cell phone screen contains roughly 25,000 germs, which when you're on the phone for two hours in the evening, can lead to a buildup of bacteria on the chin and cheeks, leading to congested skin. Sleeping on dirty pillowcases or wiping the face down with grimy towels will not help your case either. Keep a pack of disinfectant wipes handy at your work desk, and make it a practise to change your towels and pillowcases frequently to avoid untimely breakouts.

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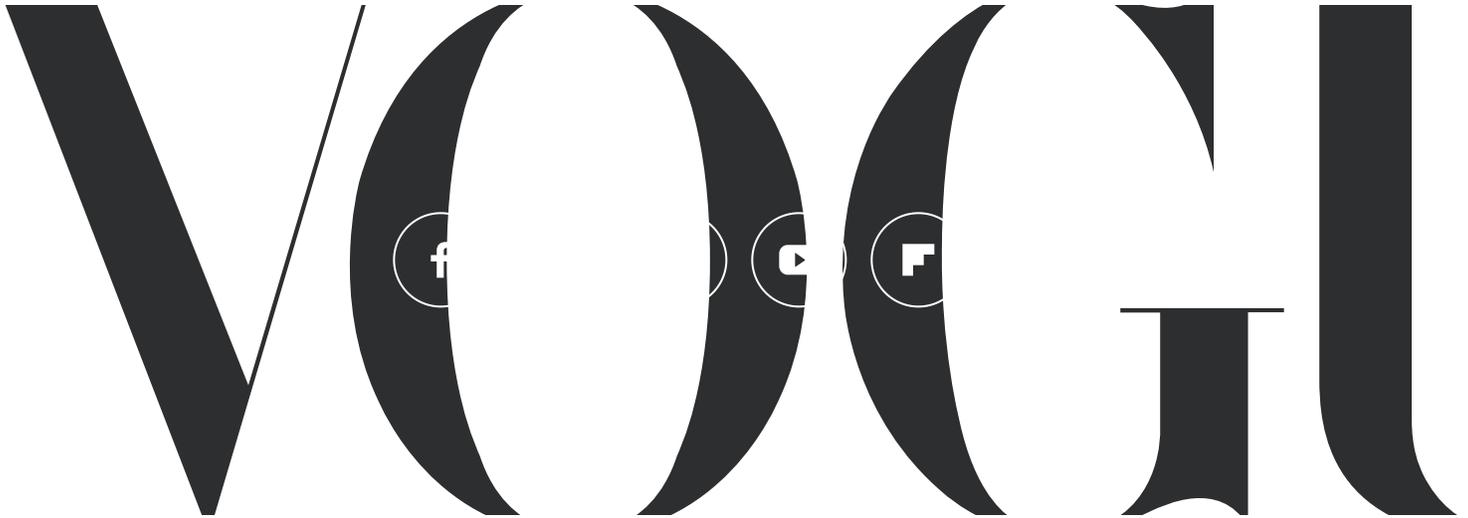
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