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OF YOUR EVERY DAY BLOG

How To Help Your Tween with Early Acne

TAKE CHARGE on 01.17.13



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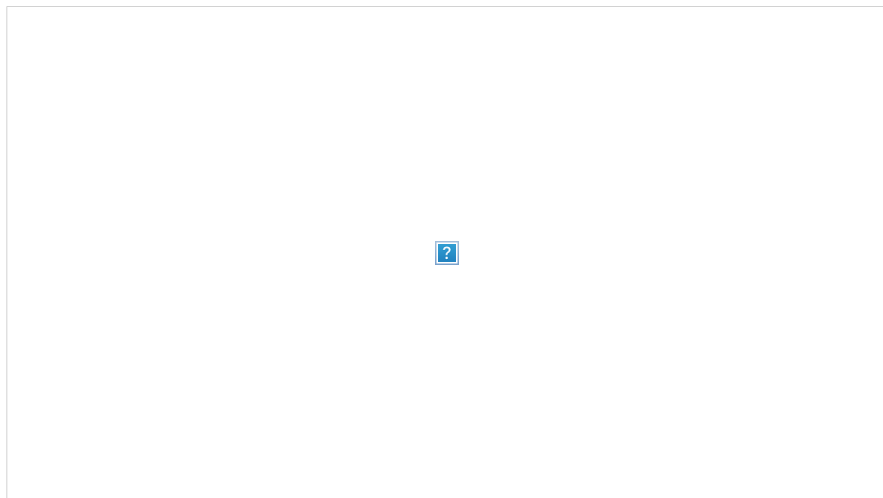


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Studies show that **puberty is starting earlier** for girls **and boys**, which means you might find your tween dealing with acne before you expected. Does tween skin that is developing early acne need any special treatment? You bet! But it's a mix of education and basic skin care.

I asked two top dermatologists what parents should know about helping their tween deal with early acne. Take note:

Don't pop a white head. Really, don't do it. A white head is basically a pimple filled with pus, which means there's a ton of bacteria inside. If the white head is popped, more bacteria is being introduced into the site, says Latanya Benjamin, a pediatric dermatologist and clinical assistant professor at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital at Stanford. The white head could return in even a worse state or create a localized infection. Also? It could cause a scar. "You can't gauge the amount of pressure that will do damage to their skin," adds Dr. Benjamin. "We just don't want these kids to scar."

Teach kids to wash their face once a day with a gentle brand soap. "Over washing can make it worse," says Dr. Benjamin. Once a day is sufficient, unless the tween is involved in sports that cause a fair amount of sweating. The extra wash "helps reduce the amount of bacteria" on the skin, she says. Buy your child an over-the-counter medicated wash that includes five percent of Benzoyl Peroxide. **Jessica Krant**, a dermatologist and Assistant Clinical Professor of Dermatology at SUNY Downstate Medical Center, explains that the ingredient helps kill acne bacteria and mildly exfoliate skin. "Another is salicylic acid, an exfoliant that is also mildly anti-inflammatory. Both can be potentially irritating if overused, and should not be used directly on eyelids," says Dr. Krant. You can

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also use a spot treatment (e.g., Oxy-5 or Neutrogena On-the-Spot Acne Cream) with five percent Benzoyl Peroxide.

And remember that acne isn't about dirt on the skin. It's a mix of hormones, genetics and bacteria on the skin, according to Dr. Benjamin.

It's okay to take your child to a pediatric dermatologist at the first sign of acne. Visiting the dermatologist doesn't automatically mean that your child will receive medical treatment (e.g., prescriptive acne meds). It's all about teaching your child how to take care of his or her skin as it changes over time. Says Krantz: "Sometimes guidance from a 'real doctor' directly to the tween can be helpful in creating a sense of empowerment and self-determination, and get the child more involved and focused."

It's not all about pimples. A dermatologist can detect early signs of scarring and any other skin issues, says Dr. Benjamin. In addition, kids can learn about acne and general skin care, including information about protecting their skin from the sun. "They will get something out of it [the visit]," she says.

Know when you should be concerned about acne. Don't freak out about your tween's skin at the first sight of a pimple. "Definitely be concerned if pimples are leaving long-standing red or brown marks, indentations in the skin, or other signs of scarring," says Dr. Krant. "That is not just a 'teen thing' but can affect your tween decades later. Early management can generally be relatively simple and can avoid a lot of heartache and self-consciousness."

A healthy, low-stress lifestyle matters. While certain foods and activities don't necessarily cause acne, "stress and bad food never helps," notes Dr. Benjamin.

What happens if your child isn't even a tween and has started developing acne? Dr. Benjamin notes that if you have a child under eight years old and he or she is developing acne, you should probably visit your pediatrician. "It could be an early sign of an endocrine disorder," she says.

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