



SEEING SPOTS? (MORE THAN HALF OF ADULT WOMEN DO.) HERE ARE THE BEST METHODS TO CLEAR UP BLEMISHES.

the decoder
**ACNE
TREATMENTS**

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01

tea-tree oil

USE IT: To treat mild, occasional breakouts.

HOW IT WORKS: Distilled from the leaves of an Australian shrub, tea-tree oil contains antibacterial and antimicrobial compounds called terpenoids that help kill the bacteria that, when trapped behind oil in a plugged pore, lead to acne breakouts. Try Burt's Bees Herbal Blemish Stick (\$8.50, burtsbees.com).

GOOD TO KNOW: Studies testing tea-tree oil against the gold-standard acne treatment, benzoyl peroxide, have shown that while the latter works more quickly, tea-tree oil is equally effective over time. And it results in fewer annoying side effects—namely, dryness and redness.



A roller-ball tube makes for easy application.

02

sulfur

USE IT: If you have sensitive skin.

HOW IT WORKS: A time-tested, gentle acne fighter, sulfur “acts like a sponge to draw oil out of blocked pores,” says Dennis Gross, a New York City dermatologist. This dries up pimples and keeps sebum production in check, helping to prevent future blemishes. Try Kate Somerville EradiKate Acne Treatment (\$22, katesomerville.com).

GOOD TO KNOW: Sulfur has a distinct smell—think rotten eggs. Most preparations that use it contain a masking fragrance. But to play it safe (and avoid scaring off coworkers), apply these products at night.



Dab directly onto spots with a clean cotton swab (and don't double-dip).

03

salicylic acid

USE IT: To treat and soothe red, inflamed blemishes.

HOW IT WORKS: Salicylic acid can have a calming, anti-inflammatory effect on pimples. “It also breaks down the ‘cement’ between cells in clogged pores to help unplug them,” says Valori Treloar, a dermatologist in Newton, Massachusetts, and a coauthor of *The Clear Skin Diet* (Cumberland House, \$23). Try Murad Clarifying Cleanser (\$26, murad.com).

GOOD TO KNOW: Salicylic acid is less irritating than more potent treatments, so it may be better for those with dry skin. It also tends to work well on stubborn blackheads.



04

benzoyl peroxide

USE IT: To spot-treat a blemish fast.

HOW IT WORKS: This top acne treatment is an antibacterial agent, killing the bacteria that cause pimples to form, says Gross. Because benzoyl peroxide is so powerful, it helps blemishes go down quickly. Try Clearasil Ultra Rapid Action Treatment Cream (\$10 at drugstores).

GOOD TO KNOW: Initially, it can cause dryness and redness. Also, “it bleaches towels and clothes,” says Zoe Draelos, a dermatologist in High Point, North Carolina.



Use a non-comedogenic moisturizer first to minimize dryness.

05

retinoids

USE THEM: Nightly to prevent breakouts.

HOW THEY WORK: Retinoids, which include over-the-counter retinol and prescription-strength Retin-A, reduce acne by altering the oil chemistry on the skin. “They help stop dense sebum from getting stuck within the pores,” says Gross. Without oil deposits, bacteria can't grow and cause blemishes. Try SkinCeuticals Retinol 1.0 (\$48, skinceuticals.com).

GOOD TO KNOW: Since retinoids can make skin sensitive to the sun, doctors recommend using them at night (and being diligent about wearing sunscreen during the day). To avoid irritation, apply every other evening to start, gradually working up to nightly use. Bonus benefit: Retinoids have been shown to increase collagen production and plump fine lines, making them a good choice if you're dealing with acne *and* wrinkles.



06

blue-light therapy

USE IT: If you want the latest preventive treatment—and don't mind plunking down some cash for it.

HOW IT WORKS: Once or twice a week, you use a handheld device to aim a beam of blue light onto your skin. “Its wavelength hits and kills acne-causing bacteria,” explains Draelos, so any brewing pimples never come to the surface.

GOOD TO KNOW: This method won't address existing blemishes. Doctors typically suggest combining blue-light therapy with other remedies, such as topical treatments. To make things easy, consider a blue-light device that comes in a kit, like the TRIA Skin Clarifying System (\$295, triabeauty.com), which includes a cleanser and a lotion that both contain salicylic acid.



At-home devices are smart alternatives to multiple costly treatments at a doctor's office.



Some antibiotics must be taken on an empty stomach, so read the label carefully.

07

oral antibiotics

USE THEM: If you experience painful bumps below the skin surface and your pimples leave lasting marks, says Jonette Keri, an associate professor of dermatology at the Miami Miller School of Medicine, in Florida.

HOW THEY WORK: "Oral antibiotics act from the inside to kill the bacteria that cause acne," says Keri. They also reduce the inflammation associated with pimples, so deep-seated blemishes hurt less and leave fewer scars.

GOOD TO KNOW: It's considered safe to take oral antibiotics for several months, but they're not for the long term. Doctors usually prescribe them to get a severe condition under control and may then switch to topical treatments.

08



oral contraceptives

USE THEM: If you break out without fail around the time of your period.

HOW THEY WORK: Acne in adult women is often due to fluctuating hormones. Birth control pills contain ingredients that, while controlling your menstrual cycle, alter your body's androgen, a sex hormone that can increase oil production and cause blemishes. Three brands—Ortho Tri-Cyclen, Estrostep/Fe, and Yaz—have been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to treat acne.

GOOD TO KNOW: Drugs aren't the only way to keep hormone-related breakouts in line. In general, getting adequate sleep, lowering stress levels, and eating a diet rich in antioxidants can help, too, says Treloar.

09



You must wait at least three months after going off the drug before trying to get pregnant.

isotretinoin

USE IT: When you have severe, cystic, inflammatory acne that has not responded to other therapies.

HOW IT WORKS: This oral medication destroys abnormal oil glands where acne and cysts form. Over a typical four-to-seven-month course, oil production is normalized and breakouts occur less frequently. Isotretinoin was once sold under the name Accutane but is now called Sotret, Claravis, or Amnesteem (there is also a generic form).

GOOD TO KNOW: It can cause severe birth defects, and you will be required to participate in iPledge, a program approved by the FDA that commits you to using two forms of birth control and taking a doctor-administered pregnancy test in order to fill a prescription each month.

USE #2

Give carpet spills the boot

Use OxiClean® to kill nightmare stains to the carpet. For just pennies, you'll have cleaner carpets laying at your feet.



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