

YOUR SKIN, SAVED



We may associate acne with teens and ageing with our elders, but for many women, their twenties, thirties and forties can throw up some serious skincare conundrums. Hood sits down with Dr Sobia Ali to discuss her client's most common skin complaints, what can be done about them, and when it's time to call in the professionals...

ACNE

If you've ever asked yourself 'Why am I breaking out?', you're far from alone – Dr Sobia says around twenty per cent of her skincare consultations arise from acne concerns. "Acne occurs when the skin pores become clogged, trapping skin cells and bacteria inside them which causes the pores to become inflamed, forming blackheads, whiteheads, pimples and cysts," she explains. "The more sebum, the greater the degree of acne."

So, what are the most common causes? Unsurprisingly, hormones are the key culprit. "Around seventy per cent of women notice an aggravation of acne just before or in the first few days of their menstrual cycle," Dr Sobia says. "Fluctuations in hormone levels increase sebum production, clog the pores and cause skin inflammation. Hormonal contraceptives may help improve these breakouts, but they are not for everyone, so a good skincare regime is key to maintaining skin health."

Diet can also play a role – avoiding refined sugars and white carbs, and upping your consumption of whole grains, fruit, vegetables and fish could help. Dr Sobia adds: "There is also some

evidence that stress makes acne worse, however, the widely accepted view is that stress may result in poor self-care, poor sleep, poor diet and a fluctuation in hormone levels, thereby causing acne flares."

As such, the picture surrounding adult acne is complex, and following the right skincare regime is key to managing existing acne and preventing future outbreaks, says Dr Sobia. "Skincare products that reduce sebum production and exfoliate the skin cells to unclog and tighten the pores will help. Many high street skincare brands claim to have fantastic ingredients, however, the concentrations are so low that they will not have a measurable effect on the skin – so it's worth seeing a healthcare professional with experience in managing acne who will take a detailed history and provide medical skincare solutions for you."

AGEING SKIN

Tick Tock. Is it time for an anti-ageing programme yet? "Nearly all my patients will ask about anti-ageing at their consultation," admits Dr Sobia. "We all want to get old, but not many of us want to look the part, and with a strong anti-ageing strategy we don't have to.

The key to future proofing your skin is to start the anti-ageing regime early, as early as your 20s."

Nonetheless, whatever your current age, there are some universally beneficial steps you could easily introduce today. "It all starts with sun protection, even in Scotland," Dr Sobia explains. "Exposure to the sun's UV light does a lot more than increase our risk of skin cancer. It ages our skin significantly, causing wrinkles, dryness and age spots.

"The sunlight that reaches our skin is made up of two types of harmful rays: UVA and UVB. UVA rays are present all year round, not just summer, so it's important to use high factor sun protection 365 days a year. I never leave the house without SPF 50."

A healthy lifestyle can go a long way to improving matters too, namely avoiding smoking, exercising regularly and eating healthily.

Skincare, too, is key. "A strong programme containing Retinol and Vitamin C will help combat the ageing skin process regardless of a woman's age," assures Dr Sobia. "Retinol is a vitamin A derivative and it is the key player in any anti-ageing skincare programme. It is clinically proven to boost collagen

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production, which reduces fine lines and wrinkles, increases skin renewal and improves skin tone and texture. The strength of Retinol is incredibly important, therefore it is worth seeing a skincare specialist that will prescribe effective strengths of retinol as over the counter products do not contain concentrations high enough to create a change in your skin. Vitamin C, meanwhile, is a vital part of any anti-ageing skincare regime too, as it helps stimulate the body's collagen production, supports the skin structure and acts as a powerful anti-oxidant by blocking DNA damage in the skin. It is also a very effective skin brightening agent and I typically use at least 10% strength of pure vitamin C on my patients."

DRY SKIN

"Only a very small percentage of the population have a true dry skin condition, such as eczema or psoriasis," says Dr Sobia, yet "the vast majority of us feel we have dry or sensitive skin and reach for a moisturiser. Moisturisers account for more than half of skincare sales, we are brought up to believe that the ritual of cleanse, tone and moisturise is

as important as brushing our teeth, and the main misconception is that moisturiser hydrates our skin. Natural hydration however, must come from within and cannot be replaced by moisturisers."

In fact, says Dr Sobia, your moisturiser could be making matters worse. "When a moisturiser is applied to the skin regularly, the skin detects this and switches off its own natural moisturising mechanisms, resulting in dry skin and moisturiser dependence. The moisturiser also sits on the surface of the skin, clogs pores and damages the texture of the skin. Most of my patients do not have a dry skin condition and are encouraged to stop moisturisers immediately. It takes around three weeks to wake up the skin's own natural moisturising process, but the take home message is avoid moisturisers."

ROSACEA

Confused about what could be causing your chronically red cheeks? It might be worth considering rosacea, a common, long term skin condition which causes a facial rash and typically appears after the age of 30. Symptoms include facial redness, flushing, swelling and congested pores and, with time, the redness may become more apparent and visible blood vessels can appear.

"Although the exact cause of this inflammation and redness is poorly understood, key culprits include hormone fluctuations, genetics and hyperactive oil levels in the skin," explains Dr Sobia. "The exhaustive list of rosacea triggers also ranges from sun exposure and emotional stress to alcohol and spicy foods.

"Although there is no cure for rosacea, it can be controlled with the right skincare regime. The first step is to consult a skincare specialist who can create an effective treatment plan to keep rosacea under control. It is also important to try to identify potential triggers and avoid them."

PIGMENTATION

Hyperpigmentation occurs when an area of skin darkens due to the overproduction of our skin pigment, melanin – think freckles, age spots and melasma. So what causes this discolouration? Many factors are believed to be involved, including genetics, advancing age, sun exposure, pregnancy and medication.

"Hyperpigmentation can be a source of real aesthetic concern," acknowledges Dr Sobia, "but if treated correctly, it can significantly improve. There are many options to lighten dark spots and improve the skin complexion, ranging from hydroquinone-based bleaching agents and skin peels to non-hydroquinone brightening agents, retinol and vitamin C. It is important to see a skincare doctor who will assess the severity and type of pigmentation and prescribe a tailor-made skin brightening regime for you."



Dr. Sobia Ali, MBChB, Bsc (Hons), MRCPGP, practices as the skin health doctor at Dr Nestor's Medical and Cosmetic Centre, Dundas Street, Edinburgh. For more information or to make an appointment, visit drnestor.co.uk