



essential beauty

## Spot checks

Acne doesn't discriminate – it attacks anyone, even celebrities – but treatments are broadening.

**Words Sherryn George**

Before the release of *Ugly Betty*, actress Cameron Diaz was attacked by a long-term condition: Acne. In the middle of the *Charlie's Angels* franchise, surrounded by paparazzi, Diaz was diagnosed with the condition of rosacea, which causes open sores on the face, and she took a break from the show. It wasn't the first time she had broken out, and she isn't alone. *Shrek* co-star Mike Myers and fellow Hollywood hitmaker Brad Pitt, Jessica Simpson and Jessica Alba have also gone on the record about their long-term battles with the skin condition.

Most of us have experienced at least one of these spots in its most serious stage. It can be painful, disfiguring and the cause of social isolation and embarrassment. It also leaves permanent scars – psychologically and physically.

Rosacea, eczema and acne sufferers who are dealing with the pressures of social development and high-stress environments, the condition is brought on by the surge in hormones that accompanies adolescence, and affects boys primarily between the ages of 13 and 17. Girls tend to experience milder versions, until they reach about 15 years of age, when further hormonal changes can lead to severe adult-onset acne. And people who have acne will be living with its rages for an average of seven years.

Characterised by blackheads (blackened pores, which remain open at the surface), whiteheads (blackened pores, with a closed cap) and cysts (large infected pockets developing under the surface of the skin), acne also plays host to a flood of what is called *Factor bacteria*, which can irritate across a woman's face.

For teenagers, the barely affordable options include visiting the chemist for a wealth of topical treatments or seeing a doctor, who may prescribe antibiotics and/or recommend dermatological treatments.

If the condition is serious enough, they may prescribe the expensive Roaccutane, which has no impressive record and dire effects such as both defects and reports of mental distress. All these approaches contribute to the millions of dollars spent each year on treatments.

Acne's starting can be more than skin deep. In fact, with depression is accountable for social and educational difficulties. The *Pluse Health Report* from 2005 found that 80 per cent of teens will suffer from the condition, and that 70 per cent of them reported being ridiculed and teased about their acne.

Registered nurse Kathleen Hoskins suffered debilitating acne from the age of 13. At 28, she has it under control and now treats other sufferers at the Eden Institute of Cosmetic and Plastic Surgery in Baulkham Hills.

"It's awful – agony – and I understand it," she says. "I took Roaccutane, but the acne came back later. It was back from the age of 23 and I'm now managing it – but there are still breakouts," she says.

Hoskins's approach combines nutritional changes, high-tech light work and low-cost topical treatments. "I have teenagers eating whole grains, to decrease milk and to ensure they have sufficient protein with their lunch so they don't have sugar cravings in the afternoon."

She also uses blue-light laser treatment, which targets and destroys acne bacteria and costs about \$100 a session. According to a small UK study published in 2003 in the medical journal *The Lancet*, a single blue-light treatment on mild to moderate acne reduced lesions on the face by about half. However, its price may send teens back to the chemist's shelf for topical treatments that seem, in the short term, more affordable.

Lisa Sullivan-Smith of the Bondi Junction skincare centre, the Clinic, says successful treatment is all about understanding the teenage mind-set. "I often recommend a course of microdermabrasion," Sullivan-Smith says. "Teenagers love it. It takes 10 minutes to do and there's no side-effect penalty. For teenagers who have the acne all down their neck as well, they do six or eight treatments, and we may have used them from having Roaccutane."

It can also be beneficial to wear a certain type of cosmetics. "I tell people that if they're going to use cosmetics, to use mineral cosmetics," Hoskins says. "It's made from minerals and zinc. Anything talc-based increases inflammation. The minerals actually decrease the inflammation – so while you're healing, mineral make-up can actually assist the condition."

For more information: Kathleen Hoskins, the Eden Institute, phone 8814 5800. Lisa Sullivan-Smith, see [www.theclinic.net.au](http://www.theclinic.net.au).

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Hoskins's approach combines nutritional changes, high-tech light work and low-cost topical treatments. "I have teenagers eating foods that have a low glycaemic index. This reduces the amount of sugars in their system, which reduces their body's insulin response, which means less hormone stimulation. I encourage them to eat whole

grains, to decrease milk and to ensure they have sufficient protein with their lunch so they don't have sugar cravings in the afternoon."

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