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**SKIN PROBLEMS IN ADOLESCENTS**

Skin problems are so common in adolescents that it is rare to find a teenager with a perfect complexion. About 85% of adolescents have Acne to some degree.

Approximately two thirds of those with Acne have just a mild form called Blackheads. In medical terms these are called Comedones. They are produced by blockage of the oil producing skin glands called Sebaceous glands which are attached to the hair follicles. Their product called Sebum, lubricates and protects the hair and skin.

Mild acne blemishes clear up without scarring, provided they are not picked on and remain free of infection.

Severe acne which has blackheads, pus bumps and cysts is called Cystic acne and can involve the face, neck, chest and back. Multiple scarring can be caused by this disfiguring condition which affects boys more than girls.

A tendency towards acne runs in families but is mainly caused by a surge of male type hormones called Androgens which are present in both sexes during puberty. Under the influence of these hormones the Sebaceous glands enlarge and increase their output of Sebum. Girls have a surge of these hormones right before their periods, causing premenstrual acne.

Despite old wives' tales there is no link between acne outbreaks and consumption of chocolate, candies and fried foods. Nor is acne caused by sexual activity or constipation. Some people claim that they break out in "zits" right after eating certain foods. The reality is that stress is known to cause or worsen acne. Stress leads to release of steroid like hormones which can cause food cravings. So it is really the stress and not the diet which is to be blamed.

Exercise in combination with a healthy well balanced diet, can benefit the whole body along with the skin. Acne flare ups are scientifically associated with consumption of large amounts of Iodine; Kelp supplements sold in health food stores; large doses of Vitamin B complex and medicines containing steroids, hormones and Lithium. Acne is very upsetting for teenagers who are self conscious and concerned about making the right impression on their peers. Safe and effective treatment is now available. Washing of the face at least twice a day with mild water rinsible skin cleansers or

soap substitute should be encouraged. Over washing and vigorous scrubbing should be avoided as it can cause skin irritation. Teenagers with acne should avoid oil based face lotions and make-up.

Pediatricians can recommend or prescribe creams with 5%Benzoyl-peroxide alone or in combination with an antibiotic. These are to be applied twice a day for several months. This medicine can initially irritate the skin which causes many users to become noncompliant, but with prolonged use there is good clearance of acne.

The more cystic and scarred acne is usually treated by Dermatologists with the use prescription medicine locally or by mouth. Retin-A is the compound generally used and this can have serious effect on the fetus, so it is important to exercise birth control when on this medicine.

Picking at blemishes can make the skin vulnerable to infection, which may lead to permanent scarring. Left alone most acne lesions heal without a scar.

People who constantly pick at skin blemishes may have an underlying emotional problem and may benefit from counselling.

