

# Diet & Acne

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**A**cne is one of the most common dermatological conditions, affecting millions of young adults worldwide, and can have serious psychosocial effects. But acne isn't limited to teenagers. Some middle-aged adults are forced to deal with breakouts right along with developing wrinkles.

## What Causes Acne?

Acne is the result of several factors – excess sebum (oil), hormones, and follicular occlusion. They create the perfect environment for the growth of bacteria that triggers an immune response resulting in inflammation. Puberty, birth control, pregnancy, menopause and menstruation can all cause hormonal fluctuations. For example, low levels of oestrogen and higher levels of testosterone can increase sebum production and clog our pores, contributing to the development of acne.

## But Can Diet Affect Acne?

Consuming excessive refined carbohydrates (white bread, pastries, white flour, etc.) without adequate fibre, fat or protein to help slow digestion and absorption can increase blood sugar levels and, subsequently, insulin. Insulin can stimulate testosterone production and IGF-1 (insulin-like growth factor 1), which both can increase oil secretion. Diet influences these factors, providing the link between diet and acne. But genes are the



major risk factor for developing acne. Here are some general acne diet recommendations: Following a low-glycemic (low GI) diet may reduce the amount of acne you have. GI ranks the potential of carbohydrate-containing foods to raise blood sugar. Foods with a high GI are rapidly digested and absorbed, whereas foods with a low GI have a gradual response. Adding protein or fat to carbohydrates will slow digestion and blood sugar and consequently the insulin response (for example, having white bread smeared with some avocado and topped it off with an egg).

Follow a dairy-free diet. Although research in this area is not perfectly conclusive, some suggest that there's a 16% increased risk for acne when consuming cow's milk.

Add omega-3 to your diet. Omega-3 has a variety of anti-inflammatory properties. In addition to fatty fish,

you can also find omega-3 in flaxseed, walnuts and fish oil supplements.

Foods that are rich in antioxidants are also good for your skin. Antioxidants are naturally found in many nutritious foods, most of which are also low GI. Foods high in antioxidants include nuts, berries, beans, cabbage, artichokes, beets, and orange vegetables.

Get some of everyone's favourite sunshine vitamin: vitamin D. Vitamin D deficiency is common amongst people who suffer from acne. Food sources are limited, but we can maximise our intake through sun exposure and supplementation.

Diet may offer some people an alternative approach to preventing and treating acne. Still, it's also important to remember that genes will always be the strongest risk factor for this skin condition.



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