

ThursdayStyles

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Skin Deep

Why Should Kids Have All the Acne?

By NATASHA SINGER

AT meetings of 12-step recovery programs, people offer gripping testimonials about their struggles, and rarely fail to mention how long they've been clean. In commercials for Proactiv Solution, the popular acne treatment, celebrities and aver-

Are adults getting lots of pimples, or just infomercials?

age joes on the three-step skin-care program tell their tales of woe and often gush about how long their skin has been clear.

The Proactiv sob sell has galvanized even people who rarely have blemishes to become, well, proactive about their skin.

Rebecca Powell, a graduate student in microbiology at New York University, ordered Proac-

tiv three years ago after seeing an infomercial, although she only occasionally gets a pimple.

Ms. Powell said the products dried out her skin, and she stopped using them. But earlier this month, Ms. Powell, 24, purchased a Proactiv sulfur face mask designed to reduce inflamed pimples. "You see the infomercials and you become more aware of body image stuff and it makes you care more, so you buy it," she said.

Founded in 1995 by two dermatologists, Proactiv has become a phenomenon by transforming the way consumers think about pimples. The brand captured public attention by hiring stars for its infomercials like Vanessa Williams, Jessica Simpson and Sean Combs to lay bare their valiant struggles to attain flawless skin, effectively turning acne into a celebrity malady. But the company's real innovation was repositioning mild breakouts from a routine annoyance that a dab of Clearasil might fix to a preventable condition, like cavities, requiring vigilant daily

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Hands Off

LIKE a Dyson vacuum cleaner whose clear canister shows the dirt it has sucked up, skin-care treatments that pull oil out of pores offer both instant gratification and a gross-out factor.

But some dermatologists caution patients not to overuse pore strips.

"As soon as pores get dried of their oil, your body automatically sends a message to your sebaceous glands to produce more oil, so it can end up being a vicious cycle," said Dr. Tina S. Alster, a dermatologist in Washington. She advises patients not to use the strips more than once a week.

A spokeswoman for Bioré, which introduced pore strips in 1997, said its strips should be used no more than once every three days.

Now a new machine called Isolaz combines a suction device to clean out pores and intense pulsed light to break up pigmented spots.

"You get instant gratification when you see the little white specks that get sucked out," said Dr. Fredric S. Brandt, a dermatologist in Manhattan and Coral Gables, Fla. Dr. Brandt, who is a paid consultant to Isolaz and received a free device to use in his office, said that treatment requires an initial series of three \$500 sessions. "There's long-term gratification from seeing smaller pores and reduced redness." Heat from the machine's light source may cause sebaceous glands to slow oil buildup, he said.

Dr. Alster, who also received a free Isolaz machine, said that she prefers that her patients use pore strips or the suction device instead of what she called "fingernail surgery."

"They are both less traumatic to your skin than either you or your facialist squeezing your cheeks or the side of your nose," she said.

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