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Summer Skin: The Pore Police

by Sarah Brown

Photographed by Steven Meisel, Vogue, January 2005

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So far this summer, my skin is having a major moment. Not in a good way. My complexion is shining in all the wrong places; my pores are clogged; my T-zone suddenly looks bumpy, instead of smooth. On the weekend—what should be a carefree brunch-and-beach no-makeup zone—I look at myself in the mirror, frown, and glumly reach for the foundation (which masks the red but doesn't solve the texture issue). As a beauty editor, I have (a) an arsenal of cutting-edge products available to me, and (b) the phone number of every skin expert in town. Since I am clearly using (a) all wrong, let's start with (b).

I phone dermatologist **Dennis Gross, M.D.**, in semi-panic. I tell him that in an effort to unclog the blocked pores along my forehead, nose, and chin, I have been rigorously using multi-acid peels and salicylic treatments at night. Plus, I have been making the classic amateur mistake of scrubbing energetically with yet another exfoliant each morning in the shower, hoping it will all just go away. The result of my experiments is a traumatized complexion, which is now even more clogged, not to mention dehydrated and scaly in places (did I mention I am also spot-treating particularly threatening bumps—which, due to my prodding, are on the verge of turning into acne—with a diabolical sulfuric concoction, too?).

"You're in the midst of a hurricane," Gross says calmly. "Exfoliation is highly important, but you're inflaming the skin because you're overdoing it." Maintaining the skin's balance, even in the height of a crisis, is the critical thing, he explains. "People think, 'my pores are clogged, my skin is too oily—I must dry it out.'" The catch is that when you've overdried your skin, it just adds to the blockage and clogging of the pore. Instead of whisking the waxy debris away to reveal a uniform layer of clear, glowing skin underneath (the goal), I have simply created a dull layer on top, through which my pores are struggling to breathe. And since pores are essentially "a long winding road to the oil gland," my face is producing more oil to compensate for the confusing dryness. It's all very stressful. So what's the plan? Click through our slideshow for a derm-approved strategy for clear, pore-perfect summer skin.



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The big (but gentle) gun: The Isolaz laser, recommended by Karen and administered at the dermatologist's office, uses a vacuum to physically clean out pores. Added benefit: The broadband light helps kill acne-causing bacteria, too.

To find an Isolaz-certified doctor near you: isolaz.com

Photo: Courtesy of Isolaz

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