



Antibiotics for Acne?

Reading over the questionnaires of our acne clients, reveals some disturbing trends. Most have seen dermatologists and most dermatologists prescribed antibiotics as the first course of action.

There are two reasons that should make you very wary of this approach. The overuse of antibiotics is a common topic these days; because of the creation of resistant strains of bacteria and because of the highly publicized multitude of long term health risks. These risks range from increased frequency of common colds to a dramatic increase in the risk of breast cancer. The other reason is that it is mostly ineffective.

Even if we had an antibiotic that could kill 100% of the bacteria, you would still have an acne problem. The condition that causes acne is pores clogged with dead skin cells. The normal action of bacteria in the pores does have something to do with acne, but not as much as most people think. Oral antibiotics only provide 20 to 30 percent of the needed acne solution.

The fact that antibiotics are so readily prescribed for acne and that some doctors are having clients take several different antibiotics over the course of a number of years is a travesty. The risks of taking antibiotics are many: toxic side effects such as recurring nausea, heartburn, interference with the useful bacteria in the digestive system, frequent vaginal yeast infections for women, possible permanent staining of the teeth, increase in colds, and possibly a link to breast cancer. Retin-A is another drug commonly prescribed. Long term health risks are unknown, however excessive drying and thinning of the epidermis are common while on Retin-A. The effect is usually uncomfortable and there is increased vulnerability to sun exposure. Another oral prescription is isotretinoin, brand name Accutane. FDA warnings about birth defects, liver damage, skeletal damage, and severe depression are well warranted, yet many of my clients, who I'd gotten clear using only benign topicals, had previously been on this dangerous drug.

The best way to treat acne is with an at-home regimen that includes the topical use of an alpha or beta hydroxy acid that is strong enough to exfoliate but not so strong as to irritate or burn the skin, and an antimicrobial that delivers oxygen into the pores. Because skin types and conditions vary greatly, different topical products need to be tested on the individual to check for sensitivity and efficacy. Some skin types and conditions can get noticeable results in just several days and get totally clear in just a couple of weeks. Some will take several weeks and need to have their regimen changed as their skin adapts, but less than 10% of the cases are difficult to treat and may take 6 months or more to really get under control.

The only possible risk of this course of treatment is temporary skin irritation. If you have acne, seek out a professional who specializes in treating acne and doesn't just dole out prescriptions. Efficacy is higher and the risks much more benign.

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