



TEEN HEALTH AND ACNE

Many adolescents believe that eating chocolate or fatty and sugary foods will give them a “crater face.” Recent research tends to confirm this view. The typical Western diet may indeed be the cause of zits and blemishes.

Acne affects more than 80 percent of adolescents living Western lifestyles. Yet it is virtually nonexistent among primitive and traditional societies such as in Brazil and Papua New Guinea.

what causes acne?

Diets that regularly include high-GI foods like white bread, cookies, processed snacks, and sodas spike insulin levels in the blood. Elevated insulin in turn raises hormones such as androgens and various growth factors that promote sebum production, which causes acne to proliferate. As there is already a transient decrease in insulin sensitivity during puberty, high-GI eating simply adds insult to injury.

anti-zit eating

The following suggestions may help your teen to avoid, or at least decrease, his or her acne problem.

► **Low-GI diet.** The most convincing evidence for treating and preventing acne by diet comes from a study in Australia. Male acne patients between the ages of 15 and 25 who were placed on a low-GI diet experienced a 20 percent reduction in the number of pimples overall and a 50

percent reduction in inflammatory lesions.

- **Milk free.** Several large population studies have linked milk intake to a higher prevalence of acne during adolescence. Fat is not a suspect however, because skim milk was even more strongly associated with pimples. Hormones and other bioactive substances in dairy products are thought to play a role.
- **Healthy fats.** High-fat diets per se are not related to acne, but some evidence suggests that the saturated fats in meat, full-fat dairy, and processed foods can exacerbate acne. Omega-3 fats help tone down inflammation.
- **Antioxidants.** High doses of vitamin A supplements can reduce acne, but the risk of toxicity to the rest of the body outweighs any potential benefits. The situation is similar with zinc, which causes gastrointestinal disturbances in high doses. The safest way for your teen to get his or her antioxidants is to pile their plate with fruits and vegetables, legumes, whole-grain bread, and other low-GI whole grains.

Nutritionist Sue Radd is the award-winning author of *The Breakfast Book* and coauthor of *Eat To Live*, internationally acclaimed for showing how savvy eating can combat cancer and heart disease and improve well-being. See www.sueradd.com for more nutrition information.