

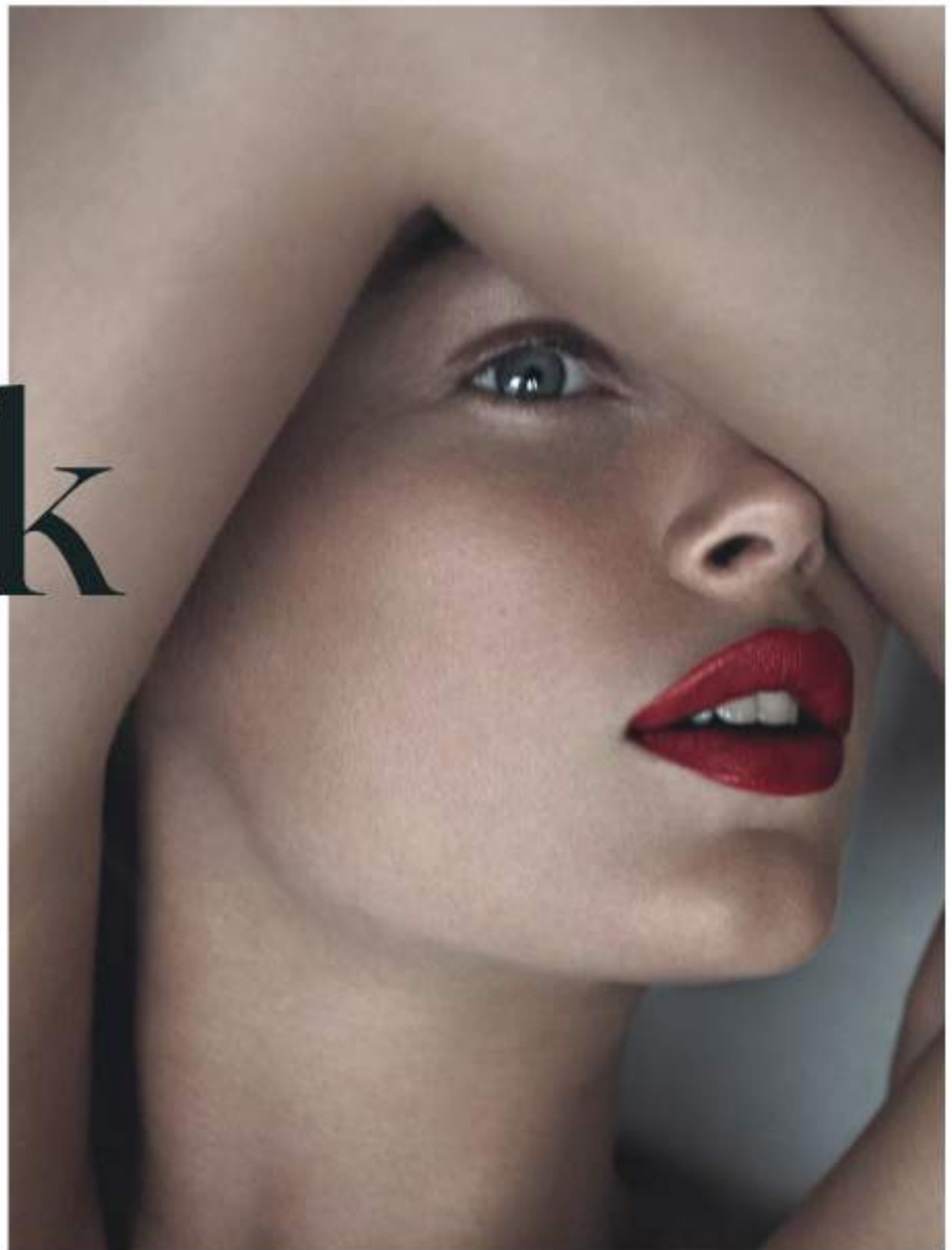
**BEAUTY ENQUIRER**  
**Spot**  
**check**

Spots are for teenagers, right? Wrong. Half of us still suffer from bad skin well past our schooldays. So what's causing post-teen blemishes and, crucially, what can you do about it?

*Words by* JESS LACEY

**The real reason you've got spots...**

By now most of us know about the blocked-pore cycle, where blemishes are caused by an excess of dead skin cells accumulating on the surface – they fall inside pores, clog them up and let impurities build. Then, because this is a micro-environment without air or oxygen, bacteria thrives and we get an outbreak. When we're young, skin is tighter, but the depletion of collagen over time causes skin –



**Pop it or stop it?**

**POP IT** if it's a small spot with a black or white head, but only with a sterile needle – never your fingers. Use a cotton bud dipped in tea tree oil to wipe away the offending plug of dirt. **STOP IT** if it's raised, red and tender, dot on some benzoyl peroxide or tea tree oil before bed. Even better, crush up four aspirin tablets and mix them with a little water to form a paste, then apply to the spot.

and pores – to sag, which is why they appear enlarged, and are also more likely to trap impurities.

However, as an adult with a good skincare regime, it's less likely to be the state of your skin's surface that causes spots and more probably your changing hormone levels that are to blame. If you're buying all the latest high-tech skincare products and ▶

not noticing a difference, it could be an internal problem that no amount of money thrown at the beauty counter can fix.

After the age of 40, women start to lose their previously high levels of oestrogen and progesterone, signalling changes in the hormone department. Teenage acne might be due to temporary hormone fluctuations, but adult hormones can become unbalanced, too. Dr Terry Loong is a hormonal-acne specialist and puts 80 per cent of adult blemish breakouts down to hormones. She says: 'Skin is always an expression of the stress your body is going through, and hormones and skin are directly related, so whatever happens with your skin is an indicator of something happening on the inside. Skin is the last organ to receive any internal change, so if something's showing up on your complexion, then it will have been a problem in your body for a while. Balance your hormones and your skin will turn around.'

Adult acne has a huge impact on women's self-esteem and many who suffer believe they're not taken seriously at work as a result. Elaine Slater, consultant therapist at The Priory Hospital, explains: 'It's shocking how disempowering [it is] for strong, successful women to have bad skin.'

Studies show that women believe bad skin portrays a lack of control in their lives, but actually

these are focused, determined women at the top of their game. 'I see high-powered business women with terrible acne from faddy diets, eating pre-packaged foods, sleeping with mobile phones, too much international travel and a chronic lack of sleep,' says Slater. She calls it the 'tired but wired'

phenomenon of continually high cortisol (the stress hormone). 'Often spots are caused by high anxiety levels and not breathing right. Many very slim women even have a band of fat around their middle that they can't shift – it's their "stress pouch", where all the cortisol sits.'

## How to balance your hormones and beat adult acne for good

**1. Eat right** As ever, nutrition plays a significant part. Foods with vitamin B and C boost your progesterone levels – which means stocking up on greens, especially cauliflower, broccoli, kale and also egg yolks. Fibre and still spring water are the best way to flush out toxins, and olive and hemp oil both lubricate the gut. Also opt for organic meat

whenever you can. Farm animals are often given oestrogen to help them grow quickly, and when you eat the meat you take on those additional hormones. If you have bad skin, cut out meat and switch to almond milk for a while – you'll be amazed at the improvement. And finally, avoid ▶

## Need-to-know hormones

**Testosterone** The male hormone. Crucial for muscle mass, agility and stamina, it also promotes increased collagen and elastin. All women have it: it's what makes you feel sexy and ambitious, but aggressive women tend to have an overload of it. The other downside of having too much? Oily skin.

**Oestrogen** The diva hormone. It's what makes you a woman and gives you your curves. After the body uses oestrogen, it's taken to the liver to be disposed of, but poor diet can cause it to build up, leading to breakouts and irritability.

**Progesterone** Your best friend. This hormone keeps all the others in check, helps you sleep, and clears your skin.

**Cortisol** The stress hormone. Raises your blood pressure to drive sugar into the brain. But as sugar is super-inflammatory, it's a red flag for acne.

sugar in all its forms. It's super-inflammatory and as soon as your insulin drops, cortisol will kick in.

**2. Get clinical** Dr Loong has developed a 12-week Hormonal Adult Acne System that addresses lifestyle, digestion and hormonal imbalance. Starting with an in-depth consultation, she first identifies what's missing in your diet and lifestyle and puts you on a 21-day elimination regime, which slowly weans you off food groups to try to identify where the problems may lie. All this is combined with three medical facials over the space of three months, a bespoke range of skin products and a 90-day supply of supplements for full internal support. (From £1,500; visit drterry.com.)

**3. Breathe deeply** Believe it or not, breathing exercises can relieve stress and reduce cortisol levels, which in turn can help to clear up breakouts. Short, shallow breaths contract the diaphragm and increase anxiety, whereas slow, regular breathing will get oxygen circulating around the body, through the organs and, finally, into the skin.

Dr Andrew Weil advocates his 4-7-8 breathing method as a natural tranquiliser for the nervous system to combat stress and poor digestion. So how does it work? Inhale through your nose to the count of four seconds, hold your breath for a count of seven and then exhale completely through your mouth to a count of eight. Repeat the entire cycle four times, but do it no more than twice a day. ■

## Your on-the-spot kit

It's a myth that drying out skin also dries out spots. Instead, you need to calm and rebalance your complexion – and don't be afraid to moisturise. Here are the products for the worst skin days...



**1. Estée Lauder Clear Difference Targeted Blemish Treatment, £25**

Not only does this shrink existing spots fast, it also works in the long-term to prevent new ones joining in. Apply it at the first tingle of a blemish to stop it in its tracks.

**2. Vichy Normaderm Purifying Pore-Tightening Lotion, £10.50**

A toner that's hardy enough to clear out pores and tighten them after the spot is gone, but without the associated sting. Swept over cleansed skin with a cotton pad, it's great for sensitive complexions.

**3. Bobbi Brown Corrective Spot Treatment SPF 25, £25**

A cover-up that's actually good for spots, this conceals blemishes and calms the surrounding area. Plus, it has a unique washable applicator,

so you're not contaminating your skin every time you use it.

**4. Clinique Anti-blemish Solutions Clinical Clearing Gel, £14**

For the whole face or just the offending area, this punchy gel contains salicylic acid to clear away dead surface cells that clog pores, laminaria saccharina to normalise oil production, and sea whip extract to reduce redness.

**5. La Roche-Posay Effaclar Duo, £15.50**

A genius cream for acne scars, this contains an active ingredient called Procerad that rebuilds the skin's surface after it's been damaged by acne. It also helps prevent the pigmentation marks that can form after the blemishes have gone.