

# ETERNAL HEALTH

## CONDITION OF THE WEEK

### Acne - what causes it and can it be cured?

Acne can be an extremely debilitating disorder and also big business. In America treatment for acne generates an annual revenue of 2.2 billion dollars. Science has yet to uncover exactly what causes acne but we now know it is a combination of factors including the overproduction of sebum, often driven by stress ramping up the manufacture of male hormones known as androgens, the presence near the surface of the skin of a bacterium called propionibacterium acnes, which elicits inflammatory cells and finally an overgrowth of cells in the skin called keratinocytes. Given this level of complexity it is surprising that medical treatments have not yet been developed, which are designed to switch off all of these precipitating events. In fact research is still in its infancy in its attempt to address these.

It is against this background that I consulted just the other day with Rebecca. She is a typical example of acne not just being a disease of adolescence. It can be long lasting or it can manifest as a sudden outbreak later in life. In her 30's, Rebecca had an attack of acne out of nowhere. She had no history of teenage acne and had, as she described a perfect skin until this episode, which manifested six months before she came to see me. What she had done was consult with a number of specialist dermatologists who had prescribed the standard fare of medical treatments that are currently used to treat acne. These include antibiotics and vitamin A like drugs administered both as oral medications and used on the skin. These have been around for quite a while and we eagerly await treatments that, as I suggested above, home in on the specific causes. She had experienced some benefits with these treatments but she felt that none were really focusing on the underlying cause of her disease and not one of the specialists had talked about diet or considered any natural remedies.

Before 2005 we thought that diet did not impact acne. Now there is clear evidence that all forms of milk and foods that are high in sugar, the so-called high glycaemic index diet, significantly increase the incidence of acne. I indicated to Rebecca that she needed to avoid dairy and to commence a low-glycaemic index diet and simply cut out or at least limit anything that tasted sweet, which is very difficult to do for an extended period of time.

There are a range of natural remedies that have been shown to benefit acne. These include guggul, an extract of the gum resin of the Commiphora mukul tree, which is native to India, saccharomyces boulardii, a form of yeast that has been demonstrated to help decrease the appearance of acne when used for up to 5 months and zinc, improving acne in some trials. There is some evidence that acne sufferers are zinc deficient.

With Rebecca I have also instituted investigations for food allergy, liver detoxification function, hormone status, although this can be difficult to determine, as the hormones which affect skin function aren't easily identifiable by means of a blood test or any medical test for that matter, nutritional deficiencies, blood sugar metabolism and gut dysfunction, specifically looking at the balance of germs in the gut, as much as this can be identified, with the presence of millions of germs in the bowel. I am hoping that these tests as well as the dietary changes we have instituted will go some way to addressing what might be the underlying reasons for a disorder, which has become extremely emotionally crippling.