

Aromatherapy and Acne

What is Acne?

NHS Choices website states that,

“Acne is a common skin condition that affects most people at some point. It causes spots, oily skin and sometimes skin that's hot or painful to touch.

Acne most commonly develops on the:

- face – this affects almost everyone with acne
- back – this affects more than half of people with acne
- chest – this affects about 15% of people with acne

There are six main types of spot caused by acne:

- **blackheads** – small black or yellowish bumps that develop on the skin; they're not filled with dirt, but are black because the inner lining of the hair follicle produces pigmentation (colouring)
- **whiteheads** – have a similar appearance to blackheads, but may be firmer and won't empty when squeezed
- **papules** – small red bumps that may feel tender or sore
- **pustules** – similar to papules, but have a white tip in the centre, caused by a build-up of pus
- **nodules** – large hard lumps that build up beneath the surface of the skin and can be painful
- **cysts** – the most severe type of spot caused by acne; they're large pus-filled lumps that look similar to boils and carry the greatest risk of causing permanent scarring.

Acne is caused when tiny holes in the skin, known as hair follicles, become blocked.

Sebaceous glands are tiny glands found near the surface of your skin. The glands are attached to hair follicles, which are small holes in your skin that an individual hair grows out of.

Sebaceous glands lubricate the hair and the skin to stop it drying out. They do this by producing an oily substance called sebum.

In acne, the glands begin to produce too much sebum. The excess sebum mixes with dead skin cells and both substances form a plug in the follicle.

If the plugged follicle is close to the surface of the skin, it bulges outwards, creating a whitehead. Alternatively, the plugged follicle can be open to the skin, creating a blackhead.

Normally harmless bacteria that live on the skin can then contaminate and infect the plugged follicles, causing papules, pustules, nodules or cysts.

Testosterone

Teenage acne is thought to be triggered by increased levels of a hormone called testosterone, which occurs during puberty. The hormone plays an important role in stimulating the growth and development of the penis and testicles in boys, and maintaining muscle and bone strength in girls.

The sebaceous glands are particularly sensitive to hormones. It's thought that increased levels of testosterone cause the glands to produce much more sebum than the skin needs.

Acne in families

Acne can run in families. If your parents had acne, it's likely that you'll also develop it. One study has found that if both your parents had acne, you're more likely to get more severe acne at an early age. It also found that if one or both of your parents had adult acne, you're more likely to get adult acne too.

Acne in women

More than 80% of cases of adult acne occur in women. It's thought that many cases of adult acne are caused by the changes in hormone levels that many women have at certain times.

These times include:

- periods – some women have a flare-up of acne just before their period
- pregnancy – many women have symptoms of acne at this time, usually during the first three months of their pregnancy
- polycystic ovary syndrome – a common condition that can cause acne, weight gain and the formation of small cysts inside the ovary.

Other triggers

Other possible triggers of an acne flare-up include:

- some cosmetic products – however, this is less common as most products are now tested, so they don't cause spots (non-comedogenic)
- certain medications – such as steroid medications, lithium (used to treat depression and bipolar disorder) and some anti-epileptic drugs (used to treat epilepsy)
- regularly wearing items that place pressure on an affected area of skin, such as a headband or backpack
- smoking – which can contribute to acne in older people.”

How Can Aromatherapy Help with Acne?

Certain essential oils may help to balance sebum production, minimise scarring and act as antiseptics. These include:

- Bergamot (Citrus bergamia)
- Geranium (Pelargonium graveolens)
- Juniperberry (Juniperus communis)
- Lavender (Lavandula angustifolia)
- Cedarwood (Cedrus atlantica)
- Tea Tree (Melaleuca alternifolia)
- Sandalwood (Santalum spicata)

A carrier oil appropriate for use in cases of acne is Jojoba (*Simmondsia chinensis*).

Always contact a qualified Aromatherapist who will guide you on the oils that are suitable for your individual needs.

References:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/acne/>

The Art of Aromatherapy by Robert Tisserand

Aromatherapy – An A-Z by Patricia Davies

The Complete Guide to Aromatherapy by Salvatore Battaglia

The Encyclopedia of Essential Oils by Julia Lawless

Encyclopedia of Aromatherapy by Chrissie Wildwood

Essential Oils in Colour by Rosemary Caddy

Aromatherapy Workbook by Marcel Lavabre

Research Trials:

[http://www.ijdv.com/article.asp?issn=0378-](http://www.ijdv.com/article.asp?issn=0378-6323;year=2007;volume=73;issue=1;spage=22;epage=25;aulast=Enshaieh)

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<https://insights.ovid.com/clinical-drug-investigation/cdrin/2002/22/050/preliminary-clinical-tests-topical-preparations/5/00044011>

To find a practitioner to discuss your needs [click here](#).