Menopause and Acne

by AFRA WILLMORE

The Return of the Spots

Peering into the mirror she frowns, reaches for a tube, squeezes and dabs gel onto the rapidly growing spot which – typically – has appeared right in the middle of her chin on the night she wanted to look her best.

No, I am not writing about a teenager here but me, aged 45 and disgusted to realize that acne is another one of those unexpected delights which often accompanies the hormonal roller coaster that is menopause.

I didn't actually suffer too badly with acne when I was a teen many, many moons ago, and I thought the days of perusing the spot prevention/removal/concealer aisle were long past – unless it was to buy products for my teenage children, of course.

But I've found that even with a careful cleansing routine I still end up with what we used to call "zits" which are more down to plummeting progesterone and estrogen than the fast food and a laissez-faire approach to late night make-up removal that left me spotty in my youth!

Why Older Women Develop Acne

Levels of female hormones, i.e. estrogen and progesterone, start to drop at the start of menopause. But levels of male sex hormones like testosterone (which women have as well) remain constant. This effectively causes the body to experience a relative increase in the effect the "male" hormones have, often triggering skin conditions that result in menopausal acne.

So, testosterone levels rise and the skin's sebaceous glands go a bit mad producing too much sebum, an oily substance which can block pores. Additionally, cells can take longer to regenerate in older skin. So excess skin cells build up, block pores already clogged with sebum, resulting in inflammation and infection. Voila! Spots!

Menopausal acne most usually affects the area around the mouth or the back and chest. Or all three, if you're really unlucky. And you might find that although you have spots, your skin is actually dry, so traditional acne remedies might not work.

Making Changes

I found that my hot flushes made my skin feel greasy, and so I took to carrying a small deodorant for my 'pits and gentle face wipes with an antibacterial component for my face and the back of my neck in my handbag, to help me freshen up if I am out and about.

I also now carry a small tube of my new "over 40s" moisturizer because I found using the wipes left my skin feeling dry. I know - what a palaver!

If you too are suffering with spots or being plagued by pimples it might be time to go through your make-up bag and make some changes. Try new products and revise your skincare routine to find what works for you.

Next page: making changes, continued.

Making Changes

You might want to start by choosing a new moisturizer targeted for your age bracket and skin type. Ask the expert at the beauty counter for some samples to try before you buy.

I found night creams designed for women in their 40s were actually far too heavy for my skin, and my spots got worse. And I have to be sparing with serum, as that seems to bring out the blemishes on my skin too. I also find if I don't moisturize regularly my skin feels really dry. I now use an SPF 25 moisturizer with a built-in UV filter, which keeps my skin-tone even as well as appearing to help keep my worst wrinkles at bay (just).

You can even buy moisturizers designed to correct redness in your skin if that's an issue for you along with the acne, as well as ones with optical correctors to give you the appearance of a more even complexion.

Don't feel you have to spend lots of money – a generic supermarket brand costing the same as a bag of apples could be just as effective for you.

I have also switched from "proper" foundation to a moisturizer with a touch of colour for evening wear (or really bad skin days) as I found my poor embattled skin could not cope with my old brand any more. Save the full war-paint routine for big events - your face will thank you.

Look for water and mineral-based products avoiding those which are oil-based, for obvious reasons! And remember what your mum used to say – don't pick at your spots! You will make them worse.

Make sure you don't skimp on your cleansing routine and never go to bed in your make-up! Luckily nowadays you don't have to fiddle with cleanser, toner and moisturizer and cotton balls or tissues. You can buy quick and easy specially-designed facial wipes which do all three jobs in one.

There are medical products which can help - ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice about topical, oral or hormone treatments.

Back to Basics

I'm sorry, but the rest of my advice is stuff you almost certainly know already. These things will help you holistically, as well as helping reduce your spots

- **Eat well –** more high fibre and calcium-rich foods, less fat and carbs. Try supplements too if you wish- Vitamins B and C are good for skin.
- **Drink well –** Water is good for your skin - keeps you hydrated and actually helps prevent water-retention and bloating.
- **Sleep well –** Just like back in your teenage days when exam nerves always made your skin break out, stress and tiredness is linked to menopausal acne too.

If all else fails, treat yourself to a good concealer and hold your head up high. After all, you are not a nervous teenager any longer. You are an experienced, mature woman – be proud of that fact!