

Acne more than skin deep issue to students and parents

BY ERIN ANDERSON
Special to the Record-Eagle

As if the transition from child to teen isn't traumatic enough, for many adolescents, their skin often acts as a visible reminder of the changes happening inside their bodies. Their faces can end up bearing the scars of this turbulent time.

Although acne and other skin conditions are common among teens, unfortunately, tolerance and understanding of these conditions is not, especially when it comes to their peers.

During these formative years, the last thing anyone wants is to be different. And while nearly 85 percent of the population has dealt with acne between the ages of 12 and 24, for the smaller, but significant, percentage whose teen acne is severe, the effects can be devastating.

"The teen years are punctuated by seeking acceptance from one's peers, and a large part of that has to do with image and physical appearance," said Traverse City psychologist Greg Holmes. "There's nothing worse for teenagers than being singled out, especially for something negative that has to do with their appearance and is beyond their control. Ultimately, they can

develop anxiety over social interactions and their self-esteem can plummet."

Many parents feel helpless, thinking there is nothing they can do except "wait it out" and let the acne run its course. However, as much as unpredictable skin is thought to be an unavoidable hallmark of high school years — it doesn't have to be, especially if the condition is worsening to the point where the child is experiencing loss of social confidence and self-esteem.

Despite the proliferation of myths that claim acne is caused by eating greasy foods, chocolate or not washing your face frequently enough, the condition is actually caused by the unavoidable over-production of oil that comes with being a teen.

According to Joan Griner, M.D., of Traverse City's Associates in Dermatology, acne is often "the pre-cursor to the onset of puberty."

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She explained that pimples occur when oil glands begin producing an increased amount of oil due to the hormonal changes of

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puberty. This over-abundance of oil can cause dead skin cells to stick together and remain inside the gland/hair follicle, plugging the pore. These clogged pores cause the skin's natural bacteria to begin backing up. The excessive amount of oil continues to feed this bacteria and the blocked pores develop the inflamed, red pustules known as pimples.

The best regime for teens to follow is a mild one that includes washing their face twice a day — more than will most likely irritate the already inflamed skin and make the problem worse — with a mild cleanser or one containing 1 percent salicylic acid. Rather than using a washcloth, exfoliating sponge or other abrasive cleansing items, they should use only their finger tips and massage the cleanser into their skin for 15 to 20 seconds before rinsing.

There are also a number of things parents can do to initiate positive change and remain supportive throughout the process.

The field of dermatology has made incredible strides in recent years, and acne is no longer a condition that must simply be endured throughout someone's teenage years.

"If your child has been diligently following a mild skin care regimen (as described above) for a month to six weeks, and is still not seeing improvement, or the problem is getting worse, then they should see a dermatologist," said Griner.

They may be resistant to the idea at first, depending on how embarrassed they are about their skin. If they are feeling extremely self-conscious, remind them that they aren't abnormal, and that these doctors have spent years studying condi-

tions like theirs. Let your child talk, and try not to monopolize the conversation. Making the patient an active part of the healing process promotes a feeling of empowerment and will help your child regain some of the confidence they may have lost as a result of their skin's condition.

"Eric," 17 and soon to be a senior at Traverse City Central High School, understands these feelings all too well. He felt similarly until his parents convinced him to see a dermatologist and take an active role in his own treatment.

"When my face first started breaking out it was no big deal, since all my friends were having the same problem," he said. "But after awhile mine just kept getting worse and worse until people started to really notice and make jokes about my skin. Pretty soon I wouldn't look people in the eye any more and I'd always be looking down because I thought they were staring at my face. I stopped wanting to go out anywhere; and I really didn't want to go to school."

Both dermatologists and psychologists agree that good communication is key not only to the effectiveness of their medical treatment,

but also to the success of their psychological healing. Not only do teens need to feel comfortable communicating with their dermatologists, they need to feel welcomed to do the same at home.

Commenting on your child's failure to follow your own prescription for clear skin — "Well, no wonder your face is broken out so badly, I told you to stop eating all that junk food" — will not help.

Talk with your children, listen to how they are feeling, and remind them that you understand that some of the issues they're dealing with can be tough, but that you want to work together toward finding a solution. Be conscious of the fact that your child already feels conspicuous enough about his/her skin, and try to keep discussions of its condition to a minimum. A few brief remarks to check in and get their take on how the treatment is progressing should be sufficient. You don't want them to feel you are treating them any differently because of their skin, or that you even take much notice of it all.

Erin Anderson is a local freelance writer.

Fall school clothes colors bright and preppy

BY SHARON MOSLEY
Copley News Service

You don't have to study too hard this fall to be in touch with the latest trends that will be hitting the hallowed halls when schools open their doors. In fact, it's a look that is not studied at all. Anyone can master the newest fashion lingo with a little practice and a lot of style savvy — just mix and match to make the best grades.

Here are a few fashion thinking points:

- Think preppy with a twist. "We were inspired by an all-American story: 'The college quarterback goes to the Air Force to fly a fighter jet,'" said Kenneth Loo, of the Avirex fall collection for young men. This preppy-chic look embodies a host of layers with varsity jackets, argyle sweaters with letters stitched across the front, denim pinstriped blazers, wool bomber jackets and button-down shirts with funky neck ties.

- Think unique. Girls layer fitted denim or cord jackets over preppy vests and trendy pants or skirts for a classic style that's never too studied. Take a denim jacket and layer it over a button-down striped shirt and pair it with a satin skirt and striped tights or leg warmers. Finish it off with a funky knit hat and you've got a style that says "I'm unique" — the mantra of the back-to-school crowd.

- Think contrasts. It's not

only your individual look, but it's the way you mix the skirts worn on top of pants, roll leg warmers over tights and pair floral-printed T-shirts with a leather motorcycle jacket. It's the plaid kiltie skirt with the rhinestone T-shirt, the fur-trimmed cardigan sweater with the toile bubble skirt or a velour hoodie emblazoned with Gothic letters. It's modern-day skater-style mixed with vintage varsity classics. It's pale blue or dark indigo jeans.

- Think color and texture. It's one of the season's biggest trends. So don't be afraid to mix colorful sneakers with colorful characters on your backpack and colorful tights and leg warmers. Whether it's leather or suede, velour or fur, tweed or denim, texture rates an A-plus in the subject of back-to-school fashion. It's all in the mix and anything goes.

- Think effortless. Dressing for school should look easy, like you tossed the outfit together from the clothes off your bedroom floor (not really, but you get the picture!) and — voila — you're too cool for school. But don't get overconfident. The look is not big and baggy, just relaxed. Think you can get a good grade now?

Top trends

- Flashback to the '80s with lots of layering, off-the-shoulder tops, fleece, stirrup pants and neon brights.

- Get punked with rips and tears, graffiti prints, zippers and chains, leather mixed with denim and plaid, lots of black and red.

- Go bright with color in primary hues, Crayola brights, neons and color-blocking.

- Prep up with classic blazers and hoodies worn with jeans or cheerleader skirts; look for classic patterns like houndstooth and herringbone lit up with color.

- Be mod with retro style in sleek cat-suits, miniskirts and dresses, A-line jumpers, black-and-white and op art graphics.



CNS Photo courtesy of Avirex.

Look for lots of preppy style this fall with fashions that combine textured layers with an accent of bold color.

- Watch for details that make the difference: charm bracelet details on skirts, tops and jeans, big sweaters with fur collars, sequins, shiny metallics and lots and lots of buttons.

The annual college migration

With college registration fast approaching, teenagers eagerly await their new independence. Parents, on the other hand, are often unprepared for their empty-nest feelings.

The book "Letting Go: A Parent's Guide to Understanding the College Years" (Quill, \$13.95) has been updated since it was first published in 1997 to help parents ease into the transition.

According to the book, the newest technological advance to lessen separation anxiety between parents and children is e-mail. Written by Karen Levin Coburn and Madge Lawrence Treeger, the book says e-mail often works better than letter writing or phone conversations. For one thing, the messages are written on "kid time" — often 3 a.m. And students have the opportunity to present their entire communication without interruption from parents.

Some parents print out e-mails to save as a chronicle of their child's college years.

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