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SKIN CARE

## 5 Acne Treatments That Make Pimples Worse

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In the clear.



Photo: Courtesy of Instagram/@mileycyrus

Like it or not (okay — who *likes* it?), breakouts are part of life. It's natural to want a solution that will zap that sucker ASAP, but if you're not careful, the very steps you take to nix your pimple can make it last longer, get infected, or leave a scar. Here, what *not* to do when you start seeing spots.

**Lots of Product** We totally get why you'd want to smother your blemish with a magical potion, but globbing on tons of salicylic acid or benzoyl peroxide treatment can lead to dryness, cracking, or contact dermatitis (AKA inflamed, angry skin). About a pea-sized dab is all you need! And if you do notice dryness or cracking, "take a break from the zit-clearing product for a day or two," suggests Dr. Neil Saddick, a derm in NYC. Same goes for products with very high concentrations of actives like benzoyl peroxide, explains Dr. Howard Sobel, founder of DDF Skincare. "If you choose a formula that's too strong it may cause irritation, inflammation, and not reduce any blemishes," he says. Instead, look for options with 2.5% or less. Tip: If product overload leaves your skin very red or irritated, Saddick suggests soothing it with cold soy milk, a natural anti-inflammatory.

**Popping and Squeezing** Some people think that gently pressing on a zit with clean hands just to get the head out will help it disappear sooner. They. Are. Wrong! “Squeezing acne can make it worse by increasing inflammation or leading to a secondary infection which means more zits,” Saddick explains. Plus, some skin tones may experience post-inflammatory pigmentation, which is what causes acne scars. And those can take years to go away. Hands off that zit, k?!

**DIY Extractions** You can find blackhead extractors at any drugstore, but this is something best left to dermatologists and estheticians. If you press too hard you can irritate or tear the area. Plus, like popping with your fingers, it can lead to inflammation, infection, and more zits. If you’re dying to nix a pesky blackhead, book yourself an appointment instead of digging around with sharp objects!

**Oil-Nixing Cleansers** It may seem like a no-brainer to use a harsh cleanser when dealing with zitty situations, but unless you have *extremely* oily skin, this can strip away too much moisture. “Your skin will then create more oil to counteract the dehydrated skin condition,” explains Sloane Mathieu, spa director and medical aesthetician at Dream Spa Medical in Massachusetts. It’s basically sending your face mixed messages and freaking it out. Use a gentle cleanser instead (like [SkinCeuticals](#)) and spare your skin the dramz.

**DIY Fixes** Pinterest is full of home remedies and recipes that promise to make pimples peace out. But according to Saddick, you should not be treating those bad boys with toothpaste, baking soda, or Visine. “Toothpaste may dry the pimple out, but it’s more likely to irritate it than to heal it,” Saddick explains. All those whitening, breath-freshening ingredients were not intended to be applied to your face! Baking soda becomes alkaline when mixed with water, so applying it to a zit would mess up the pH level of your skin — which can actually have some scary long-term effects. And while Visine will get the red out of your sleepy eyes after an all-nighter or sad movie, it will not get the red out of your breakout unfortunately. It’ll either do nothing or irritate it and make it stick around for even longer.