



Style

Why Do I Always Get Acne In The Summer?

Here's why you might breakout more when the seasons change.

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Despite writing about beauty for over a decade, I have yet to permanently cure my own acne. Acne is in many ways the impetus of my interest in beauty in the first place, which probably doesn't surprise you; I don't think it's a unique experience to have often considered my body as a collection of problems to solve. Sometimes the endless pursuit of new solutions makes me feel like a failure, but on good days I try to frame my lifelong argument with my body as a way to be curious about things out of my control. I can learn all about how ingredients and diets work for other people but also know they don't work for me. I can find products that work for me for a while and also come to terms with the fact eventually they may not. I'm at that point right now - my tried and true skincare products are failing spectacularly, and I'm back at square one.

As it gets warmer and sunnier out, my acne seems to be thriving in the sun in ways I wish I could do myself. Small colonies of zits are forming around my nose like beachgoers at Riis Beach, a queer beach hangout I miss very much. Rather than (simply) sulk at my new circumstances, I decided to talk to some both dermatologists and estheticians to figure out what exactly makes acne worse when the weather gets nice out. Is it in my head, actually? Or is there something more to the problem?

Is acne more common in the summer or any season in particular?

According to Dr. Vishal Saggar from the New York Dermatology Group, acne can definitely be affected by the time of year. "I always tell my acne patients to be vigilant in the summer because of the increased warmth and humidity. These environmental factors often lead to increased sweating and sebum production, blocking your pores and causing worsening of acne."

There are also several studies that show seasonal variations for acne. This [one](#) studied over 450 patients and noted that more than 56% of them noted that they had worse acne in the summer and the study proposed the same causes that Dr. Saggar identified: increased temperature, marked humidity, and sweating might explain the results commonly noted.

For some people, their skin actually gets better in the summer. (Jealous.) New York Dermatologist Dr. Julie Rusak [explained](#) to *Teen Vogue* a few years ago that for some people whose skin actually gets *better* in the summer, it may not actually be an improvement but a masking effect of the sun on skin redness. "You'll notice that the sun decreases redness. Since the sun suppresses the immune system, it, therefore, suppresses the immune cells in acne, which are the cells that create redness. The redness goes down because you're decreasing an inflammatory response, but when you decrease that immune reaction, you're creating a longer-term problem. Tanning also produces a pigment, so the skin turns dark. The chances are, you're basically masking the redness and not treating it," she says.

To that end, how do you even identify the causes of acne? Are those [charts](#) that separate your face into possible causes based on scientific evidence? Dr. Saggar points out that that acne along the jawline is often linked to a hormonal imbalance and acne along the forehead might be linked to specific hair care products, while acne, overall, has been associated with "high sugar and carbohydrate diets."

"When it comes to acne, there are often many different variables that need to be considered," adds Dr. Saggar. "I once had a patient that only had acne on a specific area of her back. We were able to determine together that she wore a backpack over one shoulder which led to increased sweating on the subway during the summer in that one particular area. As soon as she stopped doing so, she became acne-free! Similarly, tight-fitting clothing or certain sports gear during the summer can lead to occlusion of your pores and increased oil production. It is very important to change your clothes as soon as possible after a tough work out or hike."

Danuta Mieloch, head esthetician and owner of Rescue Spa, shares similar some similar sentiments. "Some people tend to break out more noticeably during the change of the seasons, although it may depend on habits that you have like wearing extra sunscreen or makeup."

Is it uncommon to have a breakout be caused by ingredients in sunscreen or overexposure to the sun?

Dr. Saggar was emphatic in his response: "I cannot stress how important it is to protect yourself from the sun. You can get burned even on a cloudy day. Overexposure to the sun can also cause increased inflammation of the skin and increased sebum production, leading to worsening of acne."

Mieloch also has some advice regarding summer skincare journeys. "Any thick oils that can become easily rancid should be avoided. Also, sunscreen can contribute to breakouts if you don't cleanse the skin properly. Chemical sunscreens can sometimes cause reactions, as does over-layering products and using very thick makeup. Silicone-based makeup or products, too."

Dr. Saggar agrees, and notes that "chemical sunscreens containing oxybenzone can sometimes cause contact dermatitis, specifically."

What skincare ingredients should we look out for?

"One of the double-edged swords of acne treatments is that some of the most effective acne treatments, such as oral antibiotics like doxycycline, can make you very sensitive to the sun and lead to rashes with too much sun exposure, eventually causing hyperpigmentation," advises Dr. Saggar.

Acids can be helpful. Dermatologist Patricia Wexler told *Allure*, "AHAs are generally preferred for normal to dry skin and are used due to their affinity to enhance natural moisturizing factors and exfoliate dead cells. BHAs, which are great for oilier skin types, work their way into blocked pores, dissolving sebum and dead skin cells, and help exfoliate acne that can lead to post-inflammatory pigmentation." While looking for a sunscreen that protects from [both UVB and UVA can be helpful as well](#).

Dr. Saggar does note that since everyone's skin is different, not everyone should be using the same skincare routines. "While UVA contributes more to photoaging and UVB more to sunburns, it's actually UVA that causes immediate redness during a sunburn. It's definitely important to use sunscreens that offer both UVA and UVB protection, which is why I recommend physical blockers."

But really: summer skincare is never just about products.

Rather than consider my current situation as a binary problem of my skincare failing to work, I've got to approach it as a multi-dimensional issue. "External factors will always have something to do with how your skin looks. Climate, lifestyle, personal hygiene," explained Mieloch. Our lives are drastically different than they were a few months ago and that is in one way or another going to be reflected in our skin. It's simply more stressful to enjoy the warmth of the sun. I'm eating differently than I did at the turn of the season, and the stress level I deal with daily fluctuates like a rollercoaster dependent on what's going on around me.

Speaking to professionals reminded me that beauty is not just a two-body problem: me and a miraculous product, against the world. It's always going to be a combination of things, working together, for better or for worse. Negotiating with humidity, diet, exercise – beauty is made up of our whole lives. My skin isn't worse right now simply because the seasons are changing but all these other factors in my environment. The best advice they gave me was unspoken, honestly: we've got to assess the situation on a bigger scale and keep checking in with ourselves as to where we are. And right now, that means taking it a step at a time. It's ok to feel frustrated by skincare roadblocks because you might be in a wildly different place than you were before your breakouts. It won't be forever – as long as you're using sunscreen, washing your face regularly, and using good acids you're doing a good job. We're doing the best we can, with what we know, and where we all are.