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Acne dietary advice

Acne is a very common dermatological condition that affects a large percentage of the population. Whilst in many cases the disease may not be severe, it can nevertheless cause significant psychological impact on the individual. It is therefore essential that advice is given on all aspects and factors that could interfere with acne and diet is an important factor which many acne patients relate to.

Acne is a condition that arises from a specialised unit in the skin called the pilosebaceous unit which is essentially the grease gland and the associated hair follicle and duct opening. The grease gland is referred to as the sebaceous gland in medical terms. Acne is the result of 4 main mechanisms that ultimately lead to the clinical presentation of acne. These mechanisms are: increased activity of the grease glands (hence the associated oily skin), increased presence of one type of a bacteria present in the glands called cutibacterium acnes, inflammation which is largely the result of excessive sebum and the presence of large numbers of bacteria, and finally blockage of the duct openings as a result of excessive keratin build up in the ducts which lead to the pore openings visible on the surface of the skin. In some cases one or two of these mechanisms may prevail but in most cases all 4 mechanisms are present. This is important to understand as the treatment of acne should address as many of these factors involved to ensure clearance of acne.

Diet can affect acne through stimulation of certain hormones that activate the sebaceous gland or the receptors that are responsible for the hyperkeratinization (the process that leads to clogging). Common culprits are milk (particularly skimmed), dairy products, whey protein containing shakes, processed food, sugary and fatty food. Most act on stimulation of Insulin-like Growth factor (IGF) which leads to worsening of acne

.Diet can also play a role through low level gut inflammation with a build of toxins which in turn can worsen the skin and in particular acne. Having a healthy gut free of inflammation and toxins is therefore beneficial in the management of acne. Food rich in fibres, Omega-3 and wholefoods reduce the toxins and are beneficial for the gut. It is important that the dietary intake and advice is assessed and discussed with a dermatologist and a nutrition expert.

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