Acne below the belt [1]

Dear Alice,

For a number of years I have had acne from waist down. I can't find any information on it except for acne of the face and back. I'm embarrassed to wear shorts in the summer. Any suggestions?

Answer

Dear Reader,

If pimples on the back are backne, might we dub this? legne?

Acne on the body is actually triggered by the same factors that cause acne on the face, which, contrary to popular belief, are not chocolate or greasy foods. Acne is largely the result of an interaction between hormones, oil glands, hair follicles, and pores. For a detailed explanation of what causes acne, you can check out Go Ask Alice! questions Antibiotics and acne [2] and How can I have acne at thirty?!? [3].

Outbreaks occur most commonly on the face and neck, but can also appear on the back, chest, shoulders, or below the waist. People can develop acne for a variety of reasons. Fluctuation in hormone levels is a common culprit, especially during puberty for both boys and girls, or before a woman's menstrual period. Acne can also develop due to genetics, cosmetic products, allergies or sensitivities, environmental pollutants, harsh scrubbing of the skin, tight clothing, and stress.

Acne is not usually dangerous, but can be a real source of discomfort, both physically and emotionally. Some things you can do to reduce body-acne outbreaks are:

- **Cleanse gently.** Body cleansers, creams, lotions, and laundry detergents with strong soaps, dyes, "anti-acne" agents like alcohol or acids, and/or perfumes may irritate skin and make acne worse. Use mild soap and warm water (not too hot). Scrubbing rigorously with a washcloth or loofah can also irritate skin and make acne worse.
- **Use mild skin-care products and/or make-up.** Look for the word hypoallergenic (won't cause allergies) and non-comedogenic (won't clog pores) in the products you buy.
- **Determine if shaving is causing irritation.** Shaving itself, or shaving cream, could be causing irritation.
- **Consider acne medication.** Anti-acne medications, both over-the-counter and prescription, may work wonders for your skin. However, some people find acne relief
simply from treating their sensitive skin gently (mild cleansers, mild lotions, natural clothing).

- **Loose, natural fabrics** may be less irritating to your skin.
- **Epsom salt baths** may help slough off dead skin and soothe acne sores.
- **Check in with your stress level.** Are you coping effectively with both day-to-day and out-of-the-ordinary stressors? Is your acne worse during certain times?

In cases of extreme acne, a health care provider may prescribe medications like antibiotics to impede growth of bacteria and reduce inflammation, Vitamin A derivatives or retinoids to clear out follicles, or prescription-strength Benzoyl peroxide.

Even though the skin on your legs may not be picture-perfectly blemish-free, it might help to remember that almost no one has a body they are completely unself-conscious about. It might also be freeing to wear shorts even if you have some hang-ups about the state for your skin. Airing out those legs in summer may improve the condition, and you may find that some sunshine and the feel of warm breezes on your legs make whatever blemishes you have fade into the background.

Alice!

Category:
General Health [4]
Skin Conditions [5]

**Related questions**

- Microdermabrasion for stubborn acne [6]
- Getting rid of acne scars? [7]
- Dry skin? [8]
- Skin lightening [9]
- Antibiotics and acne [10]
- What to use on clogged pores? Salicylic acid or benzoyl peroxide? [11]

**Resources**

Medical Services (Morningside) [12]
Medical Services (CUMC) [13]

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