

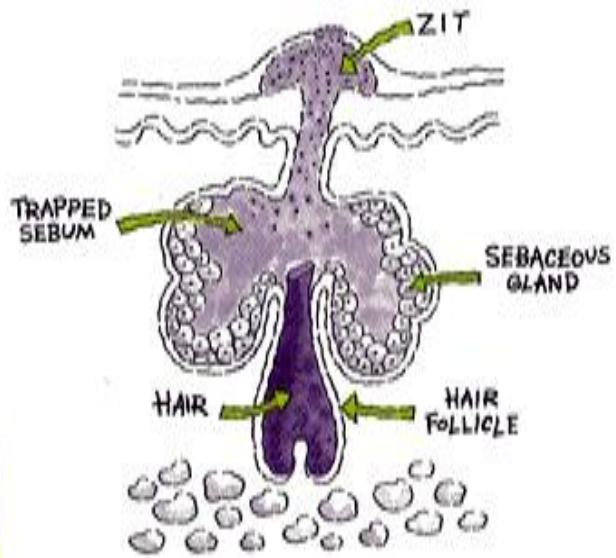
# A

## ACNE

Of all the cruel jokes that life plays on us—sweaty armpits, stinky breath, and gym class—pimples rank right up there on the “not fair” chart. Just when you realize that the opposite sex is actually an okay thing, you wake up one morning looking like something out of a Japanese horror movie.

### GLAND-LAND

The trouble starts when you hit puberty. At teen time, your body releases a whole mess of ANDROGENS



(*an-drow-ginz*), which is a fancy word for sex hormones. (They're the ones that turn your voice deep and help you grow a cool goatee if you're a guy, and that give you curves in all sorts of places if you're a girl!) But they also make the SEBACEOUS (*si-bay-sbuss*) glands in your skin go crazy. These glands make SEBUM (*sea-bum*), which is a clumpy-looking fat. (See DANDRUFF, page 35, for more on sebum.)

You need sebum to keep your skin stretchy and soft. (Without it, you'd look like a lizard.) But the recipe for making sebum can get all messed up.

Sometimes it becomes too thick and really sticky—kind of like substituting peanut butter for egg whites in a cake. The sebum, which is now gunky, gets stuck and blocks the sweat glands and the hair follicles around

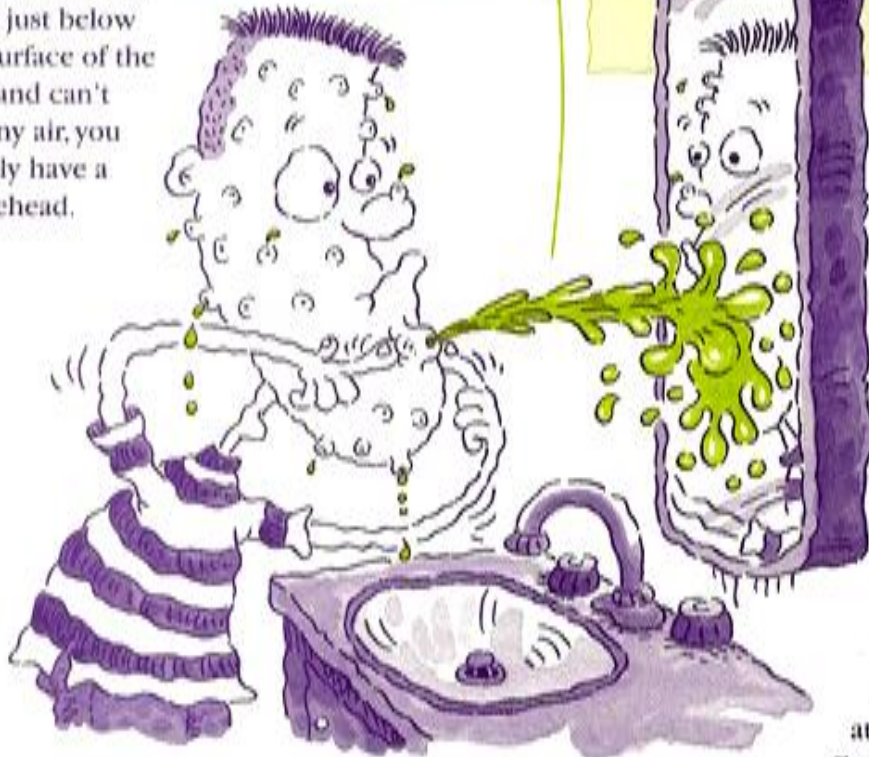
them. The follicles have no choice but to stretch outward to make room for all the dead skin cells that would normally



OH, YUCK!

have been shed. They're stuck—with no way out! Before you know it, you're staring at a lump the size of a volcano waiting to blow . . . right on the tip of your nose!

When an oil duct in your skin gets blocked off by a thick cap of oil mixed with dead skin cells and hunks of bacteria, you become the proud owner of a COMEDO (*kab-meh-doe*). If that oil plug makes it all the way to the surface of your skin and breaks through, you now have a blackhead—a hunk of sebum that turned dark when the air hit it. Fun, huh? If the sebum simmers just below the surface of the skin and can't get any air, you merely have a whitehead.



Blackheads and whiteheads are both pretty annoying. But on the pain-in-the-rump scale of annoying things, they're about the equivalent of your little brother whining about wanting to watch some stupid cartoon when you want to watch a really cool action flick. On the other hand, PIMPLES, also known as ZITS, are the equivalent of being forced to spend eternity with that geeky kid from home-room! A major, major bummer!

## To Squeeze or Not to Squeeze

**R**esist the temptation to press, push, pop, or in any way *touch* that poor little pimple. Messing with it damages the surrounding skin, spreads bacteria like crazy, and leaves a yucky mess on your bathroom mirror! Doctors all say No! No! No! And in case you didn't hear me just now . . . NO!

Let's go back to that blocked gland. Suppose it stretches and stretches and the sebum mutates into something called FREE FATTY ACIDS (let's call them FFAs for short). Now, FFAs and your body don't get along well. FFAs are, to put it mildly, irritating. Bacteria, though, love to feast on them. Word gets out that there are good eats at pimple number 23.

Crowds of hungry bacteria pile on. Mount Pimple is about to erupt. (To read more about the nasty antics of BACTERIA, turn to page 6.)

That's when you get those mammoth red lumps with the dainty frosting of white-yellow-green on top. That frosting is something called PUS, which is formed by white blood cells coming to the rescue to do what they do best—kill bacteria. (See PUS, page 124, for more on the daring adventures of white blood cells.)

## ZITCODES

What to do if you wake up one morning looking like last night's pepperoni pizza? First off, don't panic. Nerves make the hormones kinda . . . nervous. Then they start making even more trouble. So, stay *calm*. Then try the following remedies.

Wash a couple of times a day with an antibacterial soap, but don't wash too often. (If you wash too much, your skin gets faked out, thinks it's too dry, and starts making even more oil!)

Over-the-counter medications can help a little. (They're the ones you don't need a doctor's prescription for.) Some contain stuff that can cover the redness. But they can't make you any older, and in the end that's what needs to happen. You'll find that as you get older your hormones will finally settle down and stop making your skin so oily. And don't give up hope if things get really out of hand. Skin docs, called DERMATOLOGISTS (*der-ma-to-l-o-jists*), can prescribe super medications that can clear up your skin by calming those ruffled hormones.

Remember . . . zits happen to everyone to some degree. The rare few who escape will probably end up getting wrinkles a lot earlier, and will look like shriveled-up old prunes by the time they're forty. There. Does that make you feel any better?



## THE PUTRID PAST

**In** ancient times, (say, 20 years ago), skin doctors figured that if you ate fried food you'd be adding to your body's oil supply (remember . . . "fried" means cooked in oil).

Chocolate—another high-fat food—was also a no-no. So kids were told to stop eating the only things they actually like to eat!

Of course, that advice was nonsense. It's not like kids were taking

those french fries and chocolate bars and rubbing them all over their faces! So, unless you're rubbing fried chicken or melted chocolate bars all over your skin, food is rarely a player in this game. The bad guy here is hormones and there's not a lot you can do about them except *grow up!*

# ANTS

What's worse than ants in your pants? How about stepping on a nest of angry ones that chew on your ankles and bite their way up to your neck, leaving juicy blisters wherever they've gnawed?

## ATTACK OF THE KILLER ANTS!

Ants are everywhere. More than 8,800 different types swarm all over the globe. Some like sweets, some like meat, some can kill a person. You may think they're merely annoying. But what could be more disgusting than something like the PHAROAH ANT?

This nuisance loves hospitals, where it feasts on surgical wounds, IV solutions, sealed packs of sterile dressings or, better yet, used bloody bandages that have been tossed in the trash! And then there's the famous ODOROUS HOUSE ANT—it stinks of rotten coconuts when you squish it.

No doubt about it—a swarm of 300,000 ants can ruin a picnic and turn a stomach pretty quickly. Ants can live in burning-hot sand, in bricks, on dead plants, and—a particular favorite—under layers of greasy garbage. One famous ant colony even lived in the biology labs at Harvard University. They were discovered carrying radioactive particles from the petri dishes into the walls of the school. They were completely unharmed by radioactive dosages that could have killed Godzilla!