



spot the difference

IF YOU THOUGHT EATING CHOCOLATE HAD NO EFFECT ON YOUR SKIN, THINK AGAIN, SAYS **PETA BEE**

Plagued by acne? Then you've probably wondered whether eating junk food gives you spots. Until now, the accepted thinking was that this was a myth, the sort of wishy-washy warning that a mother might resort to in an attempt to encourage her teenage children to eat more healthily. Before you grab a bag of crisps, however, it is worth noting the results of a study published recently in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. Scientists now believe it is not a particular type of food – such as pizza, chips or chocolate – that is to blame for triggering acne, but rather the typical western diet as a whole.

This thinking is based on a study conducted by nutritionists at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Australia, who followed two groups of young males (aged 15-25) with acne. Half of the subjects followed their regular diet, which included plenty of processed foods with a high glycaemic index (GI) – the type of diet that is typical among westerners – while the rest were given a low-GI diet of whole grains, lean meat, fish and plenty of fruit and vegetables.

After 12 weeks, the low-GI group showed a measurable decrease in their acne, with 51% fewer pimples than when they embarked on the programme. "That is a better result than you would see from using a topical acne solution," says Professor Neil Mann, who led the study. A high-GI diet raises levels of insulin and an insulin-like growth factor, IGF-1, which increases production of the male hormone, testosterone. This, in turn, triggers the overproduction of sebum, the greasy substance that blocks pores and causes spots. "A diet rich in processed foods pushes glucose and insulin levels higher, exacerbating this problem," Mann says. The trial was small and more thorough investigation is necessary; however, it is the latest to provide evidence that diet is influential in causing acne.

It has always been a contentious issue. As long ago as 1969, studies seemed to prove that eating chocolate had no effect on the incidence of acne. Then followed research showing that peanuts, milk and cola did not have much influence on the condition, either, and the case for acne being triggered by food virtually fell apart. In fact, dark 70%-cocoa chocolate, a relatively low-GI food because of its low fat and protein content, is far from the worst food for acne-sufferers. Some researchers have even hinted that, because of the anti-inflammatory properties of the flavonoids in cocoa, a bar of the dark stuff might even alleviate acne.

It is too early for the official advice to change yey, but dermatologists are coming round to the idea that a poor diet may contribute to acne. Here is the latest thinking on what to eat and what to avoid:

FOODS TO EAT Whole grains, 70% dark chocolate, lentils, brown rice, porridge, apples, dried apricots.

FOODS TO AVOID White bread, processed and refined foods, burgers and fries, sports and fizzy drinks, sweets. □

[WHAT'S THE ALTERNATIVE?]

JENNIFER HARPER-DEACON



I AM GOING THROUGH THE MENOPAUSE AND AM GETTING MORE AGITATED AS I EXPERIENCE HOT FLUSHES, SWEATS, WEIGHT GAIN AND VAGINAL DRYNESS (MAKING LOVE IS UNCOMFORTABLE). I HAVE READ EVERY BOOK ON THE SUBJECT AND AM CAREFUL WITH MY DIET. I TAKE OMEGA-3, -6, -7 AND -9 TO HELP WITH THE DRYNESS AND HORMONE BALANCE. I HAVE TRIED HRT, BUT NO LONGER TAKE IT. I AM A SENSITIVE CHARACTER AND REACT STRONGLY TO MEDICINES, SO AM A LITTLE NERVOUS ABOUT WHAT TO TAKE. PLEASE HELP.

BARBARA, SCOTLAND



To gently regulate the hormonal system, I suggest you try a new spagyric remedy called *Hormonal Balance* (£22 for 100ml, from Archturus; 01592 620865). This formula includes the plant essences *Dioscorea villosa* (wild yam), which possesses oestrogen- and progesterone-like properties and acts as a hormonal regulator; *Agnus castus*, a progesterone-like essence considered to be a master hormone regulator that helps with night sweats, hot flushes, reduced libido, oedema (swelling) and vaginal dryness; and *salvia*, an essence that helps the body to adjust to hormonal changes, inhibits perspiration and calms the mind, body and spirit. It also contains *pulsatilla*, known as the remedy of choice for sensitive women, as it impacts on both the psyche and ever-changing hormonal symptoms. Take three drops three times daily for the first month, gradually increasing the dosage up to seven drops, three times daily. Ideally, you should take this remedy for six months.

LadyCare (£19.95, from Magnopulse; 0800 977 5080) is a safe, noninvasive approach for those suffering from menopausal symptoms. It is a small, discreet static magnet that you attach inside your underwear, which can help alleviate a number of symptoms, including mood swings, painful intercourse and hot flushes. Do not use if you or your partner has a heart pacemaker, defibrillator or insulin syringe driver.

To help combat dryness, try *Yes* water- and oil-based lubricants (£5.50 for 25ml; www.yesyesyes.org). They will re-moisturise and lubricate vaginal tissue and can be used daily to help cool, heal and soothe, as well as for intercourse. Oestrogen depletion is understood to affect sensation, so you could also try *Zestra*, a botanical massage oil that increases local warmth and sensation when applied (£16.49 for six sachets; www.zestra.co.uk). Avoid using on broken skin or if suffering from a vaginal infection (and don't use during pregnancy or lactation).

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If you have any questions, write to: What's the Alternative? Style, The Sunday Times, 1 Pennington Street, London E98 1ST. We can only provide replies to published letters

Before following any recommendation, consult your GP