

BENZOYL PEROXIDE VS. SALICYLIC ACID:

Which Acne-Fighting Ingredient Is Best for You?

Find out which works best for your skin type.

By Julie Ricevuto | March 4th, 2015

Clogged pores, blackheads, and painful pimples have all been a dreaded part of our lives at some point or another. Battling the beast of acne is usually a long, drawn-out process for anyone experiencing its unpleasant effects. To make matters worse, the terms and phrases surrounding acne products seem to be only easily understood by a certified dermatologist and not your everyday consumer (AKA, the rest of us).

Without a medical degree, it's tough to keep up with every acne term in the book, making it hard to know what's best for our skin type and specific problems. So to clear things up (literally and figuratively) we asked **NYC Dermatologist and AOB Med Spa National Medical Director, Jody Levine, M.D.**, the differences between the top two acne treatments on the market: salicylic acid and benzoyl peroxide. After getting all the facts, it'll be much easier to decide which is the right one for you. Clear complexion, here you come!

YouBeauty: What are the most common causes of acne?

Dr. Levine: Dead skin and oil in the pores form a breeding ground for bacteria in the skin, causing the formation of a pimple.

YB: What is Salicylic Acid? What are its benefits?

DL: Salicylic acid is considered a beta hydroxy acid (BHA) that works to exfoliate the skin and decrease inflammation — it contains the same anti-inflammatory ingredients as aspirin. Salicylic acid accelerates the removal of dead skin cells and fats that clog pores and interfere with proper oil drainage of the skin. It also helps to reduce the number of acne blemishes and blackheads while allowing the skin to heal.



YB: What are the downsides of Salicylic Acid?

DL: Even though salicylic acid is generally considered safe for the majority of people, there can be some people who experience side effects. Salicylic Acid may not be as effective in severe acne cases, if the bacteria is present in large quantities. Some may also experience dryness due to the exfoliation properties; however, the skin tends to build up a tolerance with consistent use. Also, in order for salicylic acid products to be effective, they need to contain a pH from 3-5 — some over-the-counter products do not contain this quantity.

YB: What are the differences in percentages of Salicylic Acid?

DL: Percentages can range from .05 to 2 percent in over-the-counter products. For more stubborn acne, 2 percent is recommended.

YB: What is Benzoyl Peroxide? What are the benefits of Benzoyl Peroxide?

DL: Benzoyl Peroxide is an antibacterial ingredient that gets inside the pores and kills bacteria that cause acne and inflammation.

YB: Downsides?

DL: Some downsides include dry, irritated skin or redness. Also, it can bleach fabric or clothing so be careful when applying!

YB: Who is it best for?

DL: Because it works to kill acne-causing bacteria, it can be good for larger pimples or cysts as it works to dry them out. Also, it works as a good spot treatment to reduce pimple size. It is also very good for body acne. A benzoyl peroxide wash on the back and chest is very useful for acne in those areas.