



**REFINERY29**

# Are You Making Your Skin Freak Out?

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We're not here to be the bearers of bad news — and we're just as sick as you are of hearing about all those things we thought were good for us that suddenly aren't. How is non-fat yogurt now bad? How? Anyway, we digress. We are here to get to the bottom of those persistent and pesky skin issues, and uncover the little things we may be doing to cause them — without even realizing it.

So, you're making a serious effort to take good care of your skin (cleansing, moisturizing, exfoliating, all that), but whether it's dryness, breakouts, redness, or even an unbalanced pH, you can't seem to keep things consistently in check. What's the deal? After chatting with a handful of derms and aestheticians, we discovered that some simple — and seemingly harmless — things in your day-to-day routine could be causing your skin to freak. Some of them seem strange, most of them are easy to let go of, and a few have absolutely nothing to do with your skin-care routine.



## *Ahead, **12** surprising habits that you may want to break for your skin's sake.*

We know, we know. We've all heard "Leave your face alone!" time and time again when our pick-happy hands can't stay away from an irksome zit. Yes, it's true: When the little guy first arrives, you should let it be to prevent any excess redness, inflammation, or even scarring. But if, and only if, it becomes a whitehead, it's time to get in there — especially if you're planning to apply a topical acne medication. Amanda Sanzone, an aesthetician at Dr. Matthew Schulman Plastic Surgery, explains that a pimple will need to be extracted before applying acne medication in order for the meds to work their magic.

"If you apply a spot treatment on top of an unpopped pimple, it will simply dry the surface of your skin and never penetrate into the pore to kill the bacteria causing that pimple," she explains. (If you're unsure about the best plan of attack, check out how to pop a pimple in three easy steps.) The one exception is if the pimple is a cyst — as in the breakout remains under the skin. These types of breakouts will never turn into juicy whiteheads, and should be considered no man's land (or, "no hands' land").

Putting Acne  
Medication On An  
Unpopped Pimple



Washing Your Face  
In The Shower



Who doesn't love a piping-hot shower? We certainly do, and would never try to take that away from you. We're just suggesting that you leave your face wash at the sink, where you will most likely turn the water to a cooler temp and your touch will be softer. We tend to crank up the heat and really scrub when we're enjoying all that H2O flow over our bodies, but our faces need to be treated more delicately.

Aesthetician Caroline Hirons puts it simply: "It's too hot! And, people are much more vigorous than they would be at the basin. Using hot water that is pounding your face will lead to broken capillaries." It is especially irritating, and will cause extra redness, for people prone to dry skin, eczema, or rosacea — so, let's keep our skin-care routines at the sink.

This sensitive area has a completely different pH than the rest of our skin — 3.8 as opposed to 5.5, according to dermatologist Marnie Nussbaum, MD. She informs us that regular soaps (also, clothing, diet, and sex, but that's for another story) can affect our balance, and trigger infections or cause odor. Dr. Nussbaum suggests cleansing your intimate areas with a more delicate, soap-free wash, like Sebamed Feminine Intimate Wash, which is specifically formulated at pH 3.8.

Using Body Wash  
On Intimate Areas



## Taking Too Long Showers



We stand by our word and your right to a relaxing, hot shower, but staying in there too long may also be contributing to your skin's misbehaving. And, it's not just the heat that can cause irritation, explains **Jody Levine, MD, a New York-based dermatologist and the national medical director at AOB Med Spa**: The chemicals in the water can cause skin issues, too. **"With all the purifying agents used to filter public water, chemical build-up on skin over time is very common."**

She suggests investing in a shower-head filter to fight off dry skin caused by chlorine and other elements. After washing your face, a spritz of thermal-water spray is great, too.

Now that you're out of the shower in record time, your first move should be to lotion (or oil) up — this goes for after you cleanse your face (at the sink), too. "After a hot shower, you have three minutes before your body loses its essential moisture," Dr. Nussbaum explains. Looks like you've got to be speedy if you want to capitalize on the ideal moisturizing moment.

Dermatologist Rebecca Baxt, MD, agrees. "Even if you are using mild soap, it strips the natural oils off the surface of the skin," she says. "So many people do not moisturize when they get out and the skin starts to get dry and crack, especially the lower legs and feet."

Try storing your product of choice in your shower and applying it all over while your skin is still damp to really lock in the moisture. It can take your face wash's place on your shower caddy!

Not Moisturizing  
Right After You  
Cleanse

## Applying A Mask After You Wash Your Face



You're someone who puts in the effort and actually uses masks to help clear up your face and get that extra glow — so, how is your skin still acting up? Strangely, it may be because you are doing too much. This may sound completely counterintuitive, but there are times washing your face is not doing you any good — namely, before you use a mask.

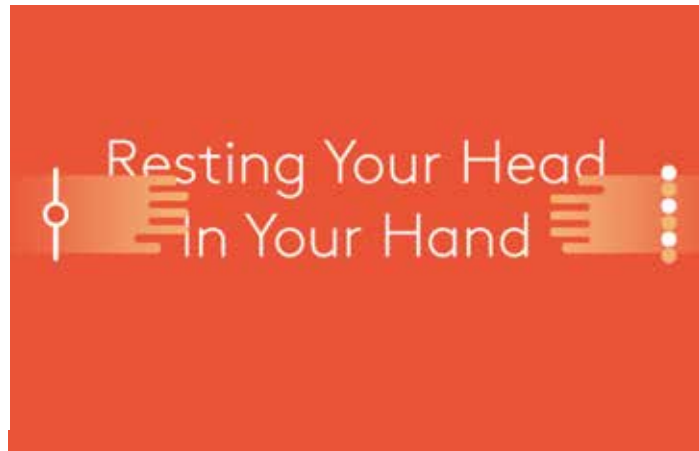
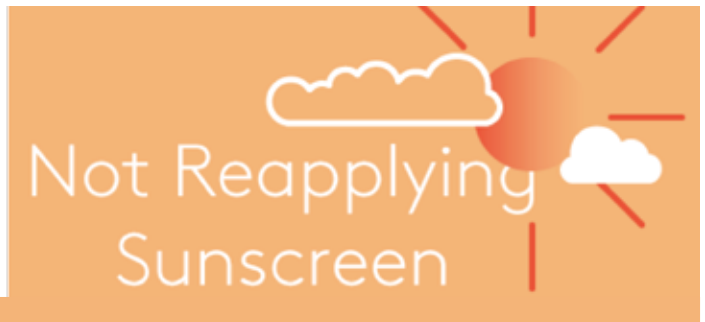
**"Many people choose to shower and fully cleanse their faces, then apply a face mask afterwards,"** explains Dr. Levine. **"However, the truth is that masks should be applied before washing the face, or it may be too drying for many skin types. Anything you apply after a shower will be more rapidly absorbed, so you may get more irritation."**

## Too Tight Bra Straps

Moving away from the shower, your clothes — or perhaps the way you're wearing them — can also lead to mysterious breakouts and irritation. You might feel comfortable in your bra, but for your skin's sake, those straps may need a little loosening. This can also go for hats, your bike helmet (glad you're wearing one!), and even your tights.

**"Acne mechanica is a type of acne triggered by excess heat, pressure, friction, or the rubbing of skin,"** says Dr. Levine. **"It can occur anywhere on your body, and anything that traps heat for a long period of time, rubs, or puts pressure on your skin can set it off."** If you're noticing breakouts in these random places, try loosening things up and swapping your fabrics for something more breathable.

The importance of wearing sunscreen has been drilled into our heads time and time again. But, just slathering up once a day or before you hit the beach won't cut it. Dr. Baxt informs us that sunscreen really only lasts one to two hours, so we should be reapplying every hour if in the water and every two if not — even when not in the direct sun. What if you're by a window? "If you see the light of day when you are at work, then this daylight is also seeing your skin and causing unnecessary exposure that contributes to aging," says Dr. Baxt.



We all know how important good posture is — especially those of us who have ache-y necks and shoulders from sitting hunched over a computer all day. Sitting up straight is not only better for your back (not to mention exudes confidence), but bad posture may also be leading to some of those mysterious breakouts.

Sounds crazy, we know, but once you read this, you may start to notice just how often you rest your head in your hand when you slouch. **When doing so, Dr. Levine says, all the bacteria from your hand is immediately transferred to your face. And, then: zits.** A little more motivation to try one of those exercise balls, ergonomic chairs, or standing desks — for real this time.

Sure, we've heard that not cleaning your cell phone can cause break-outs because you're pressing the dirty screen against your face. But, we still had a bit of an "aha" moment when **Dr. Levine mentioned that sunglasses (or any glasses) can stir up the same trouble.** We never thought about it before, but it makes perfect sense. She suggests wiping down your shades before you put them on your face, every time.



For some, the most natural way to apply eye cream (and other undereye makeup) is with their forefinger. But, according to Sanzone, this could lead to "crepe-y" skin and wrinkles. It's better to use the tip of your ring finger and apply the product in a light tapping or circular motion, working from the outside in. This will create the least amount of pressure and decrease any potential pulling on the delicate skin in this area.

This habit is a little harder to break, but if unwanted wrinkles are your concern, then it might be worth it. If you like to curl up on your side while you sleep, over time, the friction from rubbing against your pillow, and gravity, could work against you. "If possible, sleep on your back," says Sanzone. "Consistently sleeping on your sides or stomach will contribute to wrinkles on your face, neck, and chest."

