

# RING IN THE NEW YEAR

with Radiant Skin

HOLIDAY  
EDITION  
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# All I want for Christmas IS ACNE-FREE SKIN

As we ready our best holiday frock for that big year-end gathering, let's not forget that the best way of sprucing up is through healthy skin. In this special issue, **our acne expert** shares her expert tips on how to keep acne at bay amid the season's festivities

## Adj A/Prof Hazel Oon,

Senior Consultant and Consultant in-Charge of the Acne Clinic, NSC

**Q:** Why do I tend to break out right before a big party or event?

**A** There could be several factors at play here. **The stress or anxiety** in anticipation of a major event can lead to a rise in the hormone cortisol, which in turn stimulates the sebaceous glands to produce more sebum. **Greasy makeup** can clog pores. Lastly, **dietary indiscretion in the form of foods** with high glycaemic load (carbohydrates, refined sugars that cause a rapid spike in blood glucose) are correlated with acne severity.



**Q:** What are other known triggers of acne vulgaris?

**A** **Picking or squeezing acne** may trigger more inflammation leading to acne excoriée. **Wearing masks for long periods of time** ('maskne').



**Drug-induced acne** can arise from steroids (topical and oral), chlorine, progesterone, lithium and JAK inhibitors.



**Q:** Oh no! I have broken out with a week to go to a major Christmas party. What can I do to make it go away?

**A** Treatment of acne depends on the grade of severity and removal of triggers. **Mild acne** may be controlled with **over-the-counter preparations** such as benzoyl peroxide, salicylic acid, sulphur resorcinol and alpha-hydroxy acid.



If acne is difficult to control, consult **your doctor** who may prescribe a Vitamin A cream (such as tretinoin, adapalene) or antibiotic application. For **moderate to severe acne**, your doctor may prescribe **oral medication** such as a course of antibiotic tablets, oral contraceptive pill or isotretinoin.

**Q:** I am pregnant. Are there alternatives to Vitamin A to treat acne?

**A** Acne can worsen during pregnancy. There are safe and effective acne treatments in pregnancy. **Topical treatment is first line** (benzoyl peroxide, certain topical antibiotics and azelaic acid). For moderate to severe cases, consult your dermatologist as oral antibiotics may be prescribed.



**Q:** Help! It is the day of the party and my face is covered in pimples. Is there no hope for me other than slapping on layers upon layers of high coverage foundation and concealer?

**A** It is important to recognise that acne is a chronic condition and requires long-term treatment rather than a quick fix. Multimodal therapy, where one acne topical is combined with another topical or oral medication with a different mechanism of action, may lead to improved outcomes. However, it may require a month or longer of regular treatment to start seeing improvement in acne.

If your acne is moderate or severe, do consult a dermatologist early on to discuss an individual treatment plan.



**Q:** When do I need to see a dermatologist?

**A** Those having the following should consult a dermatologist: **cystic acne**, **severe acne variants** (acne conglobata/fuminans), moderate to severe acne or truncal acne, not responding to conventional treatment, scarring acne, depression, anxiety or psychological distress from acne, **acne in unusual sites** such as the armpits, scalp, buttocks, groin, **persistent acne above the age of 25 or below age 8** which may be accompanied by signs of excess male hormones (this may warrant a referral to a gynaecologist or endocrinologist), drug-induced acne.



**Q:** What can I do to prevent untimely acne breakouts?

**A** Avoid squeezing or picking the acne. Replace cosmetics with noncomedogenic products.

Cleanse the face twice daily with a gentle cleanser. Stick with proven topical acne preparations and avoid fads and unproven therapy.

**Q:** My teen has been asking to be treated for acne despite my husband telling her she would “grow out of it”. She has been crying and refusing to attend socials with red cysts covering her face.

How do I convince my husband to take acne seriously, and tell him it is not simply about a 17-year-old daughter “wanting to look good for her friends” and being overly “self-conscious”?

**A** Self-image and peer acceptance are important during the teen years and throughout adulthood. Untreated acne can result in dyspigmentation and permanent scarring. Depression and anxiety can ensue. Treating and controlling the acne early will help to prevent scarring in the long run and help to improve her outlook and mood.



**Q:** Amid the year-end feasting and celebrations, what should I look out for or avoid, to keep my acne under control?

**A** Use non-comedogenic make up and products. There are inexpensive and effective over-the-counter acne topicals.

Eat in moderation, avoid high glycaemic load foods and reduce your stress level. Recognise signs of more severe acne and acne scarring and consult a dermatologist early if this is the case.







Liu Ting Ting

# ACNE AFTER 40



At a time of widespread ‘masking weariness’ in 2022, Liu Ting Ting found unlikely solace behind the pandemic staple. The now 43-year-old recalls her experience living with adult acne, where it seemed like her only way to cope was to hide her face behind a mask.

The mother of two was 41 years old when she started noticing one or two spots emerging near her chin, days shy of her menstrual period. Before long, her adult acne went from being a monthly menstrual symptom, to a persistent and painful affliction that covered her entire chin.

“While acne is predominantly thought of as a disease of adolescence, the prevalence of post-adolescent acne has been increasing,” said Adj A/Prof Hazel Oon, Senior Consultant and Head of the Acne Clinic at National Skin Centre (NSC).

Adult acne accounts for approximately 30% of acne cases seen at NSC. Among the risk factors and triggers are genetics, Western diet with high glycaemic load, excessive dairy intake, Adj A/Prof Oon added. It does not help that some patients pick at the acne (acne excoriée) or wear masks for long periods (‘maskne’). Moreover, drug-induced acne can arise from steroids (topical and oral), chlorine, progesterone, lithium and JAK inhibitors.

There are some differences between adult and pubescent acne, Adj A/Prof Oon shared.

“**In adult acne, deeper inflammatory papules and fewer comedones may be seen. It may affect the jawline and area around the mouth rather than the T zone. Adult acne can also be more difficult to treat and prone to relapse.**”



Where most of these methods failed, Ting Ting did find some relief from a pandemic staple – her mask. “With my whole chin covered in acne that would not go away, my self-esteem was affected. Whenever I looked in the mirror, I felt stressed about my appearance and grew quite self-conscious. I would wear a mask wherever I went, even to social functions,” Ting Ting told Derma Digest.

It was not until the relaxation of mandatory masking rules in August 2022 that it fully sank in that this shield she had grown so reliant on, was only a temporary solution. “When the masks started coming off, I realised I had to look more seriously at treating my adult acne.”

Ting Ting came to NSC as a walk-in case, determined and eager to reclaim the carefree part of herself she once knew before adult acne kicked in.

She was seen in NSC’s Acne subspecialty clinic, and prescribed spironolactone. Adj A/Prof Oon explained: “Spironolactone is an off-label treatment for adult female acne, and works by lowering levels of androgens (male hormones). It is useful for adult acne and in patients who are unable to tolerate or prefer not to take isotretinoin.”

One month into her treatment plan, the stay-at-home mom was almost entirely acne free.

“I feel more carefree and finally do not have to hide behind a mask. I am dolling myself up, doing my hair and putting on makeup without worry,” - A beaming and radiant Ting Ting said.

Ting Ting is looking forward to her acne totally resolving, before seeking treatment for acne scarring. As she anticipates her next stage of parenting as the mother of 11-year-old twins, she is confident that any pubescent acne would be surmountable, given the right medical advice and treatment.



# SKINCARE ESSENTIALS

## Dermatologists would not travel without

Just because you're on vacation doesn't mean your skin care routine should take a break too. Our derm experts share their top tips to keep skin in the pink of health during travel, plus a sneak peek into their skincare pouches!

I look forward to summer vacations whether for an adventure outdoors, or a relaxing time at the beach (with a glass of pina colada, of course!). As the sun shines brighter and temperatures soar, we must adjust our skincare routine. With limited luggage allowance, I find myself having to be strategic about what skin care products to bring on my perfect summer trip.

Here's what I pack to achieve glowing skin, while avoiding sunburn, dryness and breakouts!

**Dr Jayden Wong Yisheng,**  
Associate Consultant dermatologist

## SUMMER HOLIDAY

### Keep it light

I would pack a **lightweight moisturiser**, and like to go for oil-free and gel-based ones for greater comfort in hot, humid weather.

Remember skincare is just one part of it: **Drink plenty of water to keep your body hydrated!**



### SPF, always!

I pack with me a broad-spectrum sunscreen with at least **SPF 30**, and apply it generously to all exposed skin. Tinted sunscreen will provide extra protection against visible light.

However, it is important that sunscreen needs to be **reapplied every two hours**, or immediately after swimming or sweating, to ensure optimal protection.



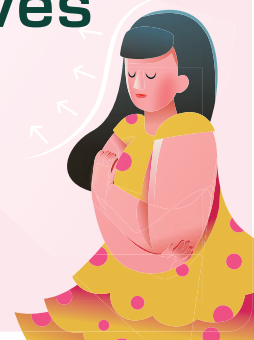
### Bug guard

If I am going hiking or camping, I will be sure to pack a **bug repellent cream**. It is important to prevent those nasty bug bites that can leave unsightly marks even after they heal up. I would also bring along a tube of topical steroids of moderate potency as part of my travel medication kit, because the unbearable itch of bug bites can put a damper on the holiday fun.



### Go easy on certain actives

**Exfoliating ingredients** or retinol/retinoid containing products **may make skin sensitive** to sun exposure. If you are continuing on such products, it is imperative that sunscreen is applied in the day.



It's always lovely to cap off the year with a cold wintry holiday to escape the heat of Singapore. Some of my destinations in recent years were London, Poland, and the Tohoku prefecture in Japan just last year for a babymoon.

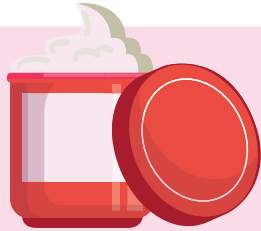
This year, I'm opting for a milder winter in Asia as I'm bringing baby to join my husband in Taiwan after his course ends. While it's cute to see babies all bundled up in cold weather, I can't imagine the long flights or diaper changes under all those layers! So, a mild winter is just right for my family this year.



**Dr Vanessa Lim Ziying,**  
Consultant dermatologist

## WINTER HOLIDAY

### Lay it on thick



For cold and dry climates, I would opt for a **thicker and richer cream-type moisturiser** that I slather on my arms and legs at the start and end of each day. I choose one that is suitable for use by my whole family to minimise packing extra tubes of creams – this means something suitable for babies and my husband who is prone to eczema flares. I also pack a small tube of moisturiser for use on the flights, as cabin air can be drying as well.

### Yes, sunscreen for winter



Sunscreen, and in fact, the **regular reapplication of sunscreen is essential on holidays**. We are often out and about exploring new locales, and may be exposed to UV the entire day, even when it appears cloudy. As I have combination skin, I prefer to continue my usual oil-control gel-cream type of sunscreen in winter, to reduce the risk of acne breakouts while on holiday.

I do make it a point to **re-apply every 4-6 hours**, and a sunscreen with a lighter texture allows for easy layering in the middle of the day.

“ For my baby, I use a **mineral sunscreen** that is recommended for ages above 6 months. ”



### Gentle does it

I prefer to pack my own gentle **soap-free cleansers** whenever I travel, instead of using the hotel provided soaps that usually contain added fragrances and essential oils. Ironically, these are actually non-essential for good skin care!

A gentle soap-free cleanser helps to **reduce dryness of the skin** in winter climates, and I use it for both the face and body.



### Pucker up

I also always pack a **moisturising lip balm**, as I have had painful cracked lips when I neglect them on winter holidays.



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