

# dermascope

THE AUTHORITY ON PROFESSIONAL SKIN CARE  
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Addressing Acne:  
Treating Teenage  
Acne Conditions

CELEBRATING 45 YEARS





# treating teenage acne

**Acne cosmetica &  
best makeup practices**

by **Rachelle Dupree**, herbalist and naturopath



Increased androgens, sebum production, lifestyle, genes, and hygiene practices can all contribute to teenage acne. Yet another possibility could be due to excessive or poor makeup usage. This type of acne is known as acne cosmetica.

## ACNE COSMEDICA

In the world of aesthetics, treating a teenage client with acne can sometimes be a challenging mystery to solve. Over 85% of teenagers will develop some form of acne during adolescence.

Acne cosmetica generally appears in the form of papules — tiny red or pink bumps on the face, neck, and hairline. The bumps may or may not become infected and have the potential to itch or create a rough appearance. The cheeks and forehead are especially susceptible to irritation by heavy makeup and increased oil.

Ask the teenage client a series of questions to help narrow down the cause of their acne. “Is this an acute (short term) or chronic (long term) condition?” “Have you been using any new products or heavy foundation?” “Has your environment or lifestyle recently changed?” “Does it itch?” “Do you breakout when you exercise or sweat?” If it is a truly chronic situation, it may need to be addressed by a certified

dermatologist, along with follow-ups by a licensed aesthetician.

## TEENAGE ACNE

Acne is essentially a clogged hair follicle. Normal skin types produce a certain amount of regulating sebum (or natural oil) each day and shed one layer of skin. In teenagers, increased sebum production combined with hormonal shifts can push the skin to shed five times the normal amount of cells (corneocytes) leading to accelerated blockages or comedones (pimples). The increase in oil also results in an overgrowth of bacteria called propionibacterium acnes, further promoting debris and dead cells that result in pimples and sometimes pustules. Once the hair follicles become plugged, blackheads or whiteheads may form. Any non-cleansing products, such as heavy face creams, cosmetics, sunscreen, hair ointments, and even poor hygiene, can all increase blockages of pores.

## IMPACT OF MAKEUP

The number of products available to treat any skin condition has skyrocketed in the last two decades. There are now hundreds of ways to hide skin imperfections. And if teenagers did not already have enough on their plate, social media has created a whole new level of pressure (for both sexes) to be picture perfect at any moment.

The ability to affect confidence and hide acne blemishes with makeup has never been stronger, but there are also concerns that standard ingredients may do more harm than good. In an increasing shift towards natural products and cleaner formulations, many are questioning if their makeup may be exacerbating or causing acne.

The truth lies somewhere in between. Yes, makeup may exacerbate or cause acne, but this does not apply to all products. It also depends on the formulation or ingredients — some can clog pores and worsen breakouts.

However, there are many factors which can contribute to breakouts and using makeup is just one of them.

According to one published acne cosmetica study in the Wiley online library, “The true adverse reaction to cosmetics was not very common. In this study, dermatitis was associated with cosmetics in only 31% of patients with specific complaint of dermatitis caused by cosmetics. Therefore, 52% of patients misdiagnosed the condition and had other dermatoses and 14% made inappropriate use of cosmetics.”

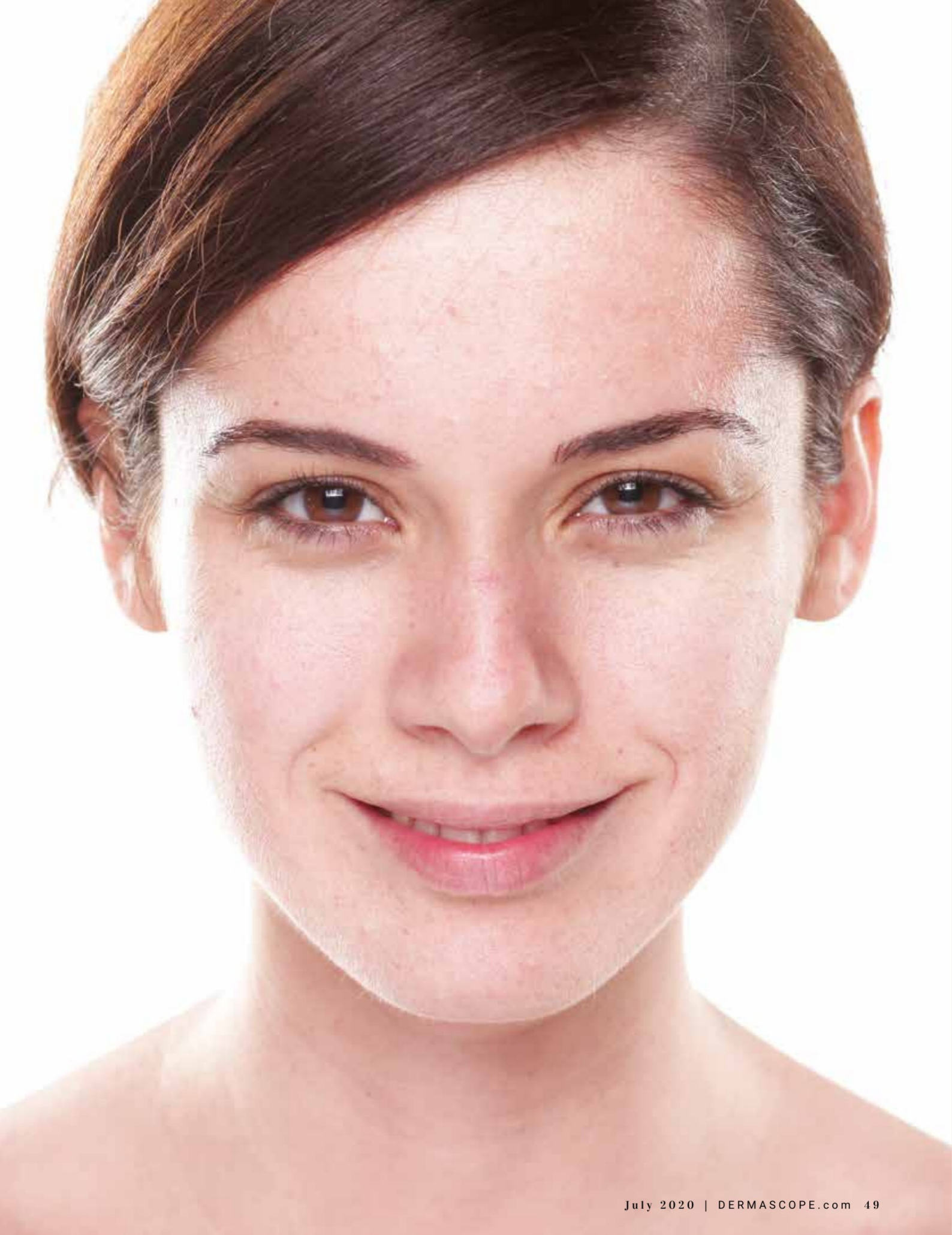
Improved makeup formulations over the past 30 years, have greatly reduced the diagnosis of acne cosmetica in dermatological practices. Yet, makeup brands can still vary widely in their ingredients and formulas. Singular makeup ingredients alone do not cause acne, but combinations of finished formulas, hormones, lifestyle, stress, diet, and poor hygiene can all be contributing factors to trigger or worsen breakouts.

Acne cosmetica typically resolves when clients stop using certain products or improve their application and usage practices. Many cosmetics are now formulated as oil-free or use reduced ingredients and can be used safely by most clients in combination with proper skin care techniques.

## COMEDOGENICITY

Non-comedogenic is a term that roughly translates to “will not clog the pores.” Unfortunately, there is no FDA regulation around the use of this word, meaning any product could potentially claim to be non-comedogenic. According to dermatologist Dr. Jennifer Linder, “Comedogenicity is an over-used, yet elusive, concept that was introduced in medicine and the cosmetic industry several decades ago. It was recently re-evaluated and is rarely used in science today. That said, it is still prevalent in marketing materials, causing confusion amongst consumers.” The term was first developed to link





the use of certain ingredients to comedone formation. The scientific tests done at the time proved to be inconclusive as the tests were done on rabbit ears and not actual human responses to allergic reactions.

### When to Cover Up & When to Avoid Makeup

Hiding pimples and redness with concealer, foundation, and other cosmetics is one of the primary ways teenagers can boost self-confidence and cope with acne breakouts when in public. While dermatologists tend to discourage makeup use during acne treatment, published research has shown that “treatment results and quality of life scores associated with makeup use in acne patients improve when patients receive instruction on

how to use skin care products and cosmetics effectively.”<sup>1</sup>

### Focus on Foundation

Makeup can be very good at hiding pimples, but it can also accentuate problem skin if using the wrong products or application techniques. Teenagers should never apply makeup to a breakout that has been picked or popped. At that point, it is basically an open wound and applying makeup could delay the healing process.

Heavier, active breakouts may require a concealer, as well as a foundation. The redness and peeling that many acne treatments leave behind can look even worse when smeared with thick makeup. Heavy foundation applications may also cause increased oiliness and makeup

slip. Consulting with a professional cosmetologist can help teenage clients and their aestheticians narrow down makeup choices by skin type, tone, and cost. While there are loads of informational videos and cosmetic reviews found on the internet, be aware that they might not be unbiased or are paid for by a product sponsor.

### SKIN FASTING & WORKOUTS

Of course, makeup is not essential in the privacy of one’s home or when sleeping. Teach teenage clients to take these opportunities to give skin a break from cosmetics and unnecessary skin care treatments. Teenage skin needs time to heal and to heal it needs a break. Advise going at least two days a week without makeup or limiting products. This can also help eliminate noticeable offenders from a makeup routine that may still be causing breakouts.

One of the primary areas of concern has been wearing makeup when working out or at the gym. It is easy to understand, especially for teenagers who may apply makeup in the morning, then go from one class to another straight into athletics or training. But dermatologists advise strongly against this when struggling with acne breakouts or reactions from makeup.

Sweating is the body’s natural method of cooling the skin and wearing makeup can trap sweat and bacteria, thereby blocking the pores. This can result in skin congestion, which can cause blackheads, skin irritation, and increased breakouts. By taking just two minutes to remove makeup before a workout, the skin will have a much easier time breathing and perspiring. Dermatologists warn that overtime, repeatedly wearing heavy makeup in the gym can worsen acne and produce uneven skin tone.

However, if a teenage client’s self-esteem is at issue, advise using only waterproof mascara or light makeup





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like a powder or BB cream. Avoid formulations containing oils and waxes which can run around the eye area during perspiration and potentially block pores. Finally, always cleanse the face or shower as soon as the workout is over.

## MAKEUP TO AVOID

When speaking of makeup for acne coverage, most are referencing foundations, BB and CC creams, tinted moisturizers, primers, concealers, powders, blushes, and setting sprays.

As aestheticians, finding the cause of an acne cosmetica will take a little testing and research into a client's skin care routine, skin type, and lifestyle habits. All breakouts are not equal; one teenager may respond well to certain makeup products while other popular products will not work at all. When sensitive skin or acne breakouts are a concern, advise teenagers to try to avoid products whose formulas contain the following ingredients. When in doubt, do small patch tests on the wrist or jawline to determine individual skin reactions.

**Silicones:** This ingredient is usually marketed as a smoother or moisturizer. Unfortunately, silicones are basically a cheap form of liquid plastic and moisture sealant. Silicones trap dirt, sweat, bacteria, sebum, dead skin cells, and other debris in the skin to further contribute to dryness, congestion, clogged pores, and more breakouts. Silicone (or anything ending in cone) and other

formulated variants of polymers and acrylics can be found in most beauty and hair products today including pricier primers, foundations, and concealers.

**Parabens:** Help to extend a product's shelf life and inhibit the growth of mold. Although they may not aggravate acne directly, there is a concern that they can mimic estrogen in the body, which could influence the endocrine hormone system and trigger an acne flare up.

**Isopropyl Myristate and Isopropyl Palmitate:** Can lead to clogged pores and non-inflamed closed comedones. Also watch out for myristyl myristate and laureth-4.

**Alcohols:** Usually found in setting sprays, makeup remover, and toners — alcohol is designed to maximize the product's penetration into the skin and increase all-day wear. However, it is an extremely drying compound and can lead to dehydration and irritation. Look for products that contain hydrating ingredients like glycerin or hyaluronic acid instead.

**Sulfates:** Like alcohol-based products, those with sulfates are harsh enough to aggravate eczema, psoriasis, dryness, and allergies. Look for products labeled sulfate-free.

**Fragrances and dyes:** Makeup does not need to smell like flowers. Scented products contain strong chemicals that can irritate sensitive skin, leading to redness, allergic reactions, and inflammation.

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## BETTER INGREDIENTS FOR ACNE-PRONE SKIN

As beauty consumers and skin care professionals, try to recommend higher-quality botanical ingredients that support skin health. Aloe vera, chamomile, and calendula are natural skin healers. Rosemary, tea tree oil, and lavender are antimicrobial and anti-bacterial acne-busters. Depending on skin type and acne severity, coconut, avocado, and jojoba oils are good alternatives to silicones and closest to natural facial sebum. Botanicals can go a long way to avoiding a breakout or flare-up from formulated ingredients.

Standard ingredients found in most acne products are benzoyl peroxide and salicylic acid, also known as beta hydroxy acids. Just be warned, foundations that contain salicylic and benzoyl peroxide acid could prove to be too drying to some skin types.

## Oil-Free, Hypoallergenic, Non-Irritating, & Mineral-Based

When choosing makeup that will not cause or exacerbate acne breakouts, clients should look for packaging that indicates the product will not clog pores and is oil-free. These types of makeup formulations carry less risk of irritation.

Mineral-based cosmetics are an excellent option to heavy creams and foundations. There are generally no preservatives, fragrances, parabens, oils, or dyes in mineral-based cosmetics. They contain natural anti-inflammatory properties and antioxidants using powdered formulas of silica (a trace mineral found in a variety of fruits and vegetables), titanium dioxide, or zinc oxide. They can be helpful to absorb oil, camouflage redness, reduce skin irritation, and promote barrier repair. Zinc oxide and titanium oxide also work double-duty as natural sun blocks, preventing acne scarring and hyperpigmentation.

Other ingredients that sound sketchy but actually get the green light from skin care professionals are:

cocamidopropyl hydroxysultaine, disodium lauraminopropionate, cocamidopropyl betaine, decyl glucoside, disodium cocoamphodiacetate, disodium cocoyl glutamate, sodium cocoyl amino acids, sodium lauroyl lactylate, sodium C14 to 16 olefin sulfonate, sodium cocoamphoacetate, and sodium lauroyl oat amino acids.

## MAKEUP PRACTICES TO AVOID BREAKOUTS

The recent coronavirus outbreak has taught the world just how easy it is to spread infection and to stay clean by washing hands and avoiding unnecessary contact. Teenagers might not be the best at following good hygiene habits or understanding what can harm their skin and cause further breakouts. Educate clients on best practices while treating them.

## APPLICATION & SANITATION

Resist the temptation to pop pimples or pick at acne, this can raise the chance of scarring and increase the time it takes to heal by forcing bacteria deeper into the skin and cause bigger lesions.

Clients should avoid touching their face to limit spreading dirt, oils, and bacteria that can further clog pores and trigger new blemishes. Both face and hands should be washed before applying makeup to create a clean palette. Use hand sanitizer when soap and water are not readily available.

Also avoid using fingers to apply makeup. Use disposable applicators, cotton swabs, or cotton balls to apply products. If brushes or sponges are used for makeup application, clean them regularly and replace tools frequently. Reusable makeup applicators can harbor oil, dirt, dead skin cells, and bacteria that contribute to acne if they are not washed regularly. Use baby shampoo or find a product specifically designed to deep clean and sanitize

brushes. Similarly, makeup bags are grimy, contaminated places. Separate makeup tools and store them upright in jars or individual compartments if possible.

When testing samples, try to use individual sealed packets or tubes and avoid commonly accessed jars from skin care stores which could be infected.

Use products in pump bottles or use a spatula to retrieve product in jars and pots instead of using fingers or hands. This will reduce the amount of contamination from bacteria into the product.

Makeup should be applied gently to avoid irritating the skin. Do not use more makeup than needed and apply makeup after any acne medication.

## Sharing Makeup

Teenagers are notorious for sharing makeup and makeup brushes. Remind clients not to share products with others unless they can easily sanitize them, especially those that come in compacts with single reusable pads or brushes.

Pay attention to makeup's expiration dates and remind clients to not use a product that may be growing bacteria or mold. Shelf-life all depends on when a product is first opened, how it is stored, and the type of packaging used. Powders and blushes are good for two years. Foundations, creams, and toners are usually good for a year.

Avoid wearing any makeup when sick or suffering from an infection like conjunctivitis. Sanitize or toss those products immediately afterwards to avoid re-infection.

## Cleansing & Moisturizing

Always remove makeup before going to bed. Sleeping in makeup increases the chance of the product settling into the skin, worsening breakouts, and enlarging pores.

Options for cleansing should be based on skin type and can include micellar water, cleansing oils, cleansing





creams, and milks for dry skin or foaming cleansers for oily skin.

Most dermatologists recommend gentle skin care with a facial wash rather than soap and limit washing to twice a day. Acne can increase from frequent washing, touching the face often, or unclean headwear. Although clients may be compelled to scrub their skin to remove makeup, this can spread bacteria that contribute to acne. A mild cleanser should be gently applied using the fingertips or preferably a soft washcloth and rinsed off with lukewarm water to minimize skin irritation. Any makeup remaining on the skin after washing should be gently removed with an oil-free makeup remover or micellar water.

Face wipes are convenient but may often contain ingredients like alcohol that can irritate acne-prone skin. Recommend teenage clients gently

splash their face with water after using a face wipe.

Even acne-prone skin needs moisture. Moisturizers with anti-inflammatory properties like aloe vera and witch hazel are best if the client is using drying prescriptions creams. Apply moisturizer twice a day after washing and before any other acne treatments for best results.

### Hair Products & Shaving

Products like hairspray, oil, and gel can clog pores around the hairline and cause further flare ups. Wash hair frequently and shield the face when applying hair products. It also helps to keep hair off the face and forehead, as well as keeping hats and headgear clean. If a male client has started to shave, use care to avoid nicking pimples — an electric razor may work better than a razor blade.

With a little research, a little effort, and some extra education, teenage clients should easily be able to find the makeup that works best for them and put their best face forward. 45

#### References

1 "Figure 2f from: Irimia R, Gottschling M (2016) Taxonomic Revision of *Rocheffortia* Sw. (Ehretiaceae, Boraginales). Biodiversity Data Journal 4: e7720. <https://doi.org/10.3897/BDJ.4.e7720>," n.d. <https://doi.org/10.3897/BDJ.4.e7720.figure2f>.



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### Thank you to all of our healthcare workers!

Wearing a mask for 12 hour shifts caused skin sloughing for a nurse who works at a Minneapolis hospital. A friend gave her a bottle of BiON Pure Hydration to use. " I was amazed that the very next time I worked, and washed my face, my skin felt great without any sloughing! I appreciate that there is a product that can help."

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