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Acne Extraction: Don't Try This at Home

When done by a skilled professional, acne extraction can clear up an acne breakout. But extraction is much more than just popping a pimple — and it can be dangerous to do at home.

By Diana Rodriguez

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You're carefully inspecting your skin in the mirror and see a glowing red pimple, just begging to be squeezed or popped. While popping that pimple may seem like a satisfying solution, it could make your acne problem worse. When you do attempt to extract a pimple yourself, you may push the contents deeper into your skin, introduce more bacteria into it through unclean nails, and risk scarring. Your best bet is to visit a dermatologist or aesthetician who will have sterile hands and use the appropriate tools.

What Is Acne Extraction?

Acne extraction is a type of acne treatment procedure that is done in a doctor's or dermatologist's office or at a spa, using special, sterile tools to get rid of problem pimples.

"Acne extraction is when blackheads or milia [tiny bumps] are extracted using a blade and an instrument, such as a comedone extractor," says Amy J. Derick, MD, a board-certified dermatologist at Derick Dermatology in Barrington, Ill.

The extractor is used to pull out the fluids or solids that are inside the pimple. "The extractor puts pressure on the contents of the blackhead to expel its contents," says Dr. Derick.

To extract a pimple, the dermatologist or aesthetician uses the fingers to pull the skin tight, then uses a sterile tool that looks like a pen that squeezes out the hard little pellet or fluids deep inside the pimple.

When Acne Extraction Is Effective

Acne extraction is most effective on a type of pimple called comedones — blackheads or whiteheads. These hard little bumps can be open (blackheads) which have a dark surface, or closed (whiteheads), which look white on the surface because the underlying hair follicle is completely clogged. Comedones make the skin appear rough or bumpy in texture.

One advantage of having acne extraction performed "is that you can clean the pores of extra

debris," says Derick. But it's not a foolproof or permanent acne treatment. "One disadvantage is that the pore contents could re-accumulate," she says, and the comedone could form again.

Acne extraction is typically tried when other acne treatment methods — like oral or topical medications — are unsuccessful at treating very severe acne.

Acne extraction is not generally used to treat an inflamed pimple, like a pustule or papule, or comedones that are close to an inflamed pimple. A dermatologist may also avoid acne extraction for people who are elderly or those who have used a lot of topical steroids to treat their acne.

The Pros and Cons of Acne Extraction

When this acne treatment is done correctly — by a professional in a sterile environment — it's a safe procedure. Acne extraction can quickly clear up unsightly acne, and over time, even help prevent future acne breakouts when other preventive measures, like proper skin cleaning, are also used.

But, time and cost can be a factor when visiting a dermatologist or spa to have the procedure done.

Also, if acne extraction is not professionally handled, there are some serious risks involved, such as:

- Acne that gets worse

- A bacterial infection of the skin

- Scarring

The best way to prevent these serious risks is to have the procedure performed by a medical professional — a dermatologist or aesthetician. Picking, popping, squeezing, or otherwise trying to extract a pimple on your own is asking for trouble. Visit with a dermatologist if you have problem skin to see if your particular acne will respond well to acne extraction. It could spare you a lifetime of scars and recurring pimples.



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