

TREATING ACNE: Modern Modalities VERSUS Eastern Medicine

by Dasha Saian, L.E.

Treating acne requires a proper homecare regimen, an understanding of client allergies and intolerances, and regular visits to a skin care professional. A knowledgeable aesthetician will use a variety of professional products and modalities to deeply cleanse, exfoliate, decongest, and disinfect the skin, as well as soothe and heal any inflammation associated with acne. Combining traditional Chinese medicine with modern aesthetic treatments is a unique way to treat clients' concerns.





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MODERN DAY MODALITIES

Many clients may be interested in services utilizing spa equipment to treat their acne. Certain devices can be beneficial in treating this condition, especially when paired with appropriate professional skin care products.

Skin care professionals should check with the state's Board of Cosmetology to see if a device is allowed to be used by licensed aestheticians or just by medical personnel.

Galvanic

One of the first modalities skin care professionals are exposed to in school is galvanic. Galvanic current is a constant and direct current that uses a positive and negative pole to



produce the chemical reactions when it passes through tissues and fluids in the body. For acne clients, desincrustation is used. Desincrustation is a deep cleansing treatment that softens and emulsifies sebum, and is the ideal treatment for oily or congested skins preparing the skin for extractions. It should be done after cleansing the skin, using desincrustation fluid – a type of alkaline solution made from sodium chloride (table salt). Although this is a very commonly used machine in a professional's scope of practice, ensure the client fills out the consultation form and is not contraindicated to receive a galvanic treatment. Contraindications for using a galvanic device are pregnancy, metal implants or pins in the face or body, epilepsy, pacemaker, and high blood pressure.

Ultrasonic Skin Spatula

Another effective way to cleanse the skin is by mode of ultrasonic exfoliation. An ultrasonic skin spatula or ultrasonic skin scrubber is a small, handheld device that features a thin plate that vibrates 28,000 to 30,000 hertz per second and removes dead skin cells, dirt, and debris. The spatula works by creating high speed oscillations that painlessly extract pores. For clients with sensitive skin, ultrasonic exfoliation is a wonderful alternative to skin-cleansing brushes and microdermabrasion (both of which can spread bacteria and aggravate redness and discomfort). The skin care professional controls the pressure, angle, and direction of the spatula to delicately work debris from the client's pores, focusing on problem areas and exfoliating the skin gently without aggressively brushing or peeling it. As the spatula uses water or a hydrating toner, and not a gritty scrub, client's skin will feel clean and smooth after the treatment.

High Frequency

Another basic tool is the high frequency machine. This machine is used after extractions, on either clean skin or over gauze, to close the pores and kill germs and bacteria. High frequency treatment uses low current, high frequency alternating currents, delivered via a glass electrode.

Because the high frequency current converts some of the oxygen in the air into ozone, the treatment has a germicidal action, and is also drying and warming. Consequently, the treatment is used to aid healing, help desquamation, and stimulate sweat and sebaceous glands. At up to 250,000 hertz frequency, the hollow glass electrode behaves like a glow discharge tube. When applied to the surface of the skin or scalp, a mild high frequency current passes through the neon or argon gas-filled glass electrode, causing it to light up with a neon orange or argon purple glow.

Cleanse the skin first, exfoliate, and perform extractions. Next, treat the blemished area by lightly whisking the glass bulb tip of the high frequency wand across the surface of the client's skin using circular motions. Concentrate on larger blemishes and the areas most affected for at least 30 seconds. The total treatment time with a high frequency machine is three to five minutes and treatments can be repeated every other day. Similarly to the galvanic machine, the contraindications for this device are pregnancy, metal implants or pins in the face or body, epilepsy, pacemaker, and high blood pressure.

LED

To kill acne-causing bacteria and reduce inflammation, one of the best modalities is light emitting diode (LED) – a tiny computer chip encased in glass. Blue LED therapy for acne is non-invasive, painless, and requires no



recovery time. It is safe for all skin types and tones and requires only five to 15 minutes. The best combination of lights for acne is blue and red together – blue LED kills germs and bacteria that cause acne, while red LED renews the skin and encourages new collagen production. Such lights are available for home use in a handheld device, as well as panels for faster and more convenient treatment room services.

Far Infrared Sauna

Far infrared is another light that is beneficial for acne. This modality can be combined with heat for the best

results, such as the case with infrared sauna therapy. Whole body hyperthermia treatment causes the excretion of sweat from the sebaceous glands of the body, where these harmful materials are stored. Sweat is not excreted from the sebaceous glands using a normal sauna. Far infrared waves refer to the part of the spectrum of light that can heat objects directly, without having to heat the air or create steam. This is what differentiates far infrared saunas from “regular” saunas that must heat the air between the heating device and a person. Regular saunas primarily heat up the surface of the



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skin, whereas infrared rays can penetrate up to 1.5 inches, reaching the subcutaneous fat layer of the body.

Carbon heaters emit far infrared rays that match the body's own wavelength, which is essential to improving blood circulation and the health of internal organs in the body. In the lying position, the hyperthermic chamber treatment does not lower oxygen levels in the blood or increase lactic acid.

Sweating therapy with carbon heat allows the body to produce much more perspiration through the pores. It is excellent for overall purification and balancing. The skin is the largest eliminative organ in the body and the elimination through sweating is more passive and requires less expenditure of energy than elimination via the kidneys and bowels, which is vital for destruction of acne-causing viruses and bacteria.

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

Of course, different systems work for different people, and no one's acne is exactly the same. Traditional Chinese medicine, or Zhōngyī, is a healing system of Eastern medicine developed in China more than 2,000 years ago, incorporating therapies that are, in some cases, millennia older. What are the key differences between Western and Eastern medicine? Allopathic or Western medicine relies on the belief that disease is a defect within the human body or a destructive process caused by a specific outside pathogen. There are three main components of treatment available within Western medicine: pharmaceuticals, surgery, and therapy.

Chinese medicine views the body and the person as a unified whole. Spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical aspects are all seen as interconnected and interdependent. This, perhaps, explains why some people see Chinese medicine as a holistic therapy. Traditional Chinese medicine looks at multiple symptoms and their pattern of illness specific to the individual, then delineates their cause from a combination of negative imbalances within the lifestyle, psyche, and effects of environmental stress, trauma, or invasion by external pathogens. It utilizes a holistic approach to medicine and does not try to find one exact reason for illness; instead, it acknowledges that there may be several factors that contribute to problems arising in the body. There are five main components of treatment





available within traditional Chinese medicine: acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine, tui na bodywork, Tai Qi/ Qi Gong (movement and stretching exercises), and nutrition.

In Chinese medicine, dampness and heat are the main causes of comedonal acne and heat is a significant cause of inflammatory acne. Heat imbalances are reflected in red skin tone, as well as red inflamed papules and pustules.

The tongue and pulse reflect the nature of the imbalance causing the acne – a red tongue with thick yellow coating is reflective of heat, but a pale tongue with a thick white coat is damp.

Acupuncture

According to traditional Chinese medicine, one person's acne is different from another's, and therefore, each client needs to be treated by tending to those unique symptoms. To achieve this, the acupuncturist must try to determine the acne's root cause to bring balance to the body. The acupuncturist will determine the type of acne present – heat, damp, toxicity, stagnation, or a combination of them – by examining the location of the outbreak, the degree of inflammation, the overall appearance of the skin, and the health of the entire body.

Acupuncture points on the arms will often be combined with facial acupuncture for inflammatory acne. Acupuncture close to the acne, traditionally called “ouch points,” is used for inflammatory type acne, combined with Chinese herbal medicine.

Cystic acne can be related to toxins and stagnation. Acupuncture close to the acne is often used for cystic acne. In addition, acupuncture points on the arms are used to clear heat and on the spleen meridian to remove dampness.

Cupping

Cupping is also effective for cystic acne as it reduces heat and moves stagnation. Cupping is performed by depressurizing the inside of the cup with a flame or a vacuum, so, as the air inside cools, it contracts and draws the skin slightly inside. More recently, a vacuum is created with a mechanical suction pump acting through a valve located at the top of the cup. Traditionally, cupping works to increase circulation and remove heat from the body, while it is used for a wide range of conditions including stress, muscle pain, arthritis, chest colds and fevers, and even some skin conditions.

Plastic and glass are the most common materials used today. Cupping therapy types can be classified into

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four main categories: technical types, such as dry, wet, massage, or flash cupping; power of suction, such as light, medium, or strong; method of suction, such as fire, manual suction, or electric suction; and materials inside cups, such as herbal, water, ozone, needle, or magnetic. Cups may range in size from one to three inches in diameter.

Fire cupping involves soaking a cotton ball in alcohol, then clamping it by a pair of forceps, setting it on fire, and, in one motion, placing it into the cup and quickly removing. The cup is then placed on the skin. Similar to dry cupping, fire heats the inside of the cup and a small amount of suction is created by the air cooling down and contracting. Massage oil may be applied to create a better seal, as well as to allow the cups to glide over muscle groups in an act called “moving cupping.” Immediately after, dark circles will appear where the cups were placed because of rupture of the capillaries just under the skin.

Wet cupping, or Hijama, is performed by letting the area under the cup fill with “bad” dark blood. The cups are applied to the skin using the fire or suction method and left to cling to the skin for a few minutes. Then it is lifted off and several very small incisions are made in the skin. The cup is then put back as it was before until the flow of blood subsides. Hijama is considered a form of energy medicine because it has been claimed to “unclog” purported meridians in the body.

When treating inflammatory conditions, such as acne, the goal is to remove heat and toxins. This is generally done through cupping on the back, even if the acne is on the face or chest.

There are a number of small studies and reports for cupping alone or in combination with other therapies that have been successful for treating acne, particularly for inflammatory and cystic acne. In traditional Chinese medicine, it is very common to combine cupping with other






modalities, such as acupuncture or herbal medicine. A meta-analysis of cupping concluded that cupping alone or in combination with herbal interventions is more effective than herbal interventions alone, and cupping combined with acupuncture was found to have a trend toward being more effective than acupuncture alone. A study that examined cupping found that 10 out of 11 people with acne had improvement in their symptoms. In these patients, cupping also reduced inflammatory chemicals circulating in the blood.

Electroacupuncture

Hormonal acne is also treated by traditional Chinese medicine, since many women find that their acne flares up during the premenstrual cycle. This type of acne is often a combination of whiteheads and blackheads with some inflammation involved, and tends to occur more commonly along the jawline. In Chinese medicine, hormonal acne is often related to stagnation, a lack of circulation in the body, and accumulation of dampness. In traditional Chinese medicine, stress leads to stagnation of qi and blood, which is a common cause of hormonal acne.

Electroacupuncture, a technique that uses a small amount of electric stimulation at specific

acupuncture points, has been shown to regulate hormones and reduce acne in women with polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS). Electroacupuncture for hormonal regulation is often done on acupuncture points such as the abdomen.

As with any condition, no two people are the same, and a method that may work well for one client may not work for another. These are merely devices that assist skin care professionals in the treatment process – it is the professional's responsibility to select the best products, as well as a homecare routine, for the acne client. Working in synergy – products, modalities, professional treatments, homecare, diet, and a positive attitude – will get the client on the way to a clear complexion! 



Dasha Saian is the co-founder and current CEO of SALAN® and has over 17 years of experience in the spa industry. In addition to her Business/Marketing degree, she is a licensed aesthetician, certified Nutrition and Wellness Consultant, official Ambassador of the Aesthetics International Association (AIA), and certified Family Herbalist. Saian gives lectures and classes internationally and regularly contributes to global trade publications. She is an expert adviser on natural living, alkaline diet, alternative oncology protocols, and positive body image.

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