

7 Experts Reveal How to Ditch Blackheads for Good


 by AMY LAWRENSON



PHOTO: Zara

Blackheads are annoying, that's one of life's facts. While not everyone has them or at least not often (more on that later), if they do plague your complexion, there are quite a few things you can do to rid your skin of them. We called on various skin experts to reveal what blackheads really are, how to prevent them and how to tackle them head on when they do appear. **So keep scrolling because blackheads don't need to ruin your complexion. Here's how to tackle them once and for all.**

WHAT ARE BLACKHEADS AND WHAT CAUSES THEM?

"Blackheads, also known as open comedones, are caused when the opening of a hair follicle becomes clogged," explains Alexis Granite, MD, of [Mallucci London](#). "Attached to each hair follicle is an oil gland that produces sebum. Dead skin cells, oils and bacteria can build up at the skin's surface, leading to a plug. The black colour of an open comedone is not due to dirt but rather oxidation of keratin (the protein found in our skin) within the dilated follicle."

But it's not just excess sebum that can cause blackheads. Skin expert and brand founder [Nicholas Perricone, MD](#), reveals, "One of the main culprits for blackheads is rising insulin levels. When our blood sugar and insulin levels rise, whether from a poor diet or from stress, we experience a serious increase in inflammatory chemicals at the cellular level. This causes inflammatory diseases, such as blackheads, to worsen dramatically."

"Stress and hormones can also play a role, triggering a spike in sebum production," adds Anjali Mahto, MBBS, MRCP, CCST, [consultant dermatologist at the Cadogan Clinic](#).

WHY DO SOME PEOPLE GET THEM AND OTHERS DON'T?

Since sebum is a main culprit in the cause of blackheads, anyone with an oily complexion will be more prone. People with dry skin, don't tend to get blackheads, [David Jack](#), an aesthetic doctor, tells Byrdie UK.

"The lack of regular skin cleansing and the application of some makeup and oily creams might trigger blackheads," says Pedro Catalá, founder of [Twelve Beauty](#). "Therefore, it is very important to remove these products, always, and never go to sleep without cleansing your skin properly."

CAN YOU PREVENT BLACKHEADS?

It's important to remember that blackheads are not pores clogged with dirt, but cleansing the skin does help reduce the sebum that can cause the blockage.

"Reducing the surface debris on the skin by exfoliation and regular extractions can help," says Jack.

Granite recommends the "regular use of exfoliating washes and face brushes like Clarisonic [Mia 2](#) (£130), which can help keep pores clear."

You could also try double cleansing, something Rabbia Aslam, clinical director at [HC MedSpa](#) endorses: "A double cleanse regimen will firstly ensure any surfaced makeup and grime is removed, whilst the second cleanse will work to purify deeper into the pores."

In-clinic skin peels or microdermabrasion may help, and it's worth seeking help from a dermatologist if your blackheads are out of control. Don't be tempted to over exfoliate, warns Mahto. "This can push the inflammation deeper and worsen the spots, whilst also causing dryness and irritation. If you are exfoliating oily-prone skin, once a week is fine. If you find blackheads are a regular problem for you, try to decongest your skin by using non-comedogenic products and avoid oils and oil-based cleansers," she adds.

Even if your skin is oily, don't skip serum or moisturiser; just ensure you choose a lightweight, hydrating, oil-free or non-comedogenic product.

IS IT OKAY TO EXTRACT BLACKHEADS AT HOME?

"Absolutely," says Jack. "The main thing is that this is done in a clean way. Cleanse the face, and steam the skin first, then using gentle pressure with your hands in gloves to extract the contents of the pore."

Rabbia recommends using an "AHA- or BHA-based exfoliator to rid any dead skin after cleansing."

You can even use a comedone extractor tool, says Granite. "Pore strips also can temporarily improve the appearance of blackheads. But if you're having trouble removing blackheads at home, leave it to the professionals to avoid inflammation and scarring."

ARE THERE ANY SPECIFIC INGREDIENTS I SHOULD INCLUDE IN MY REGIMEN?

There are a few ingredients you can incorporate that help to effectively tackle and prevent blackheads. "Use products to reduce sebum production," says Jack. "Serums and cleansers containing glycolic, lactic and salicylic acid are good."

"Topical [retinoids](#) help make pores less sticky and aid in skin turnover," explains Granite.

Want to take a more natural approach? Catalá recommends blackcurrant and raspberry extracts. "These are packed with antioxidants which help to prevent and treat blackheads by avoiding oxidation of the skin's natural oils. Facial masks with clay can be a valuable help. [Clay](#), in fact, has antiseptic and purifying properties while exfoliating too."

Mahto recommends Origins [Clear Improvement Active Charcoal Mask](#) (£25).

DOCTOR-APPROVED DIY REMEDIES

"In a pinch, baking soda mixed with water to form a paste can be used as an exfoliant scrub," says Granite. Jack suggests mixing in antioxidant green tea powder too.

Lorraine Dallmeier, director of Formula Botanica, says, "It is possible to make DIY scrubs just make sure they are not too abrasive on the skin. Some exfoliants that are used on the body can have strongly jagged edges so can create small rips in the skin. We don't recommend the use of salt or large crystals of sugar on the face, for instance.

"It is fun to make a DIY scrub with [jojoba beads](#). Jojoba beads are very round, which means they don't damage the skin by creating micro-tears, and originate from natural sources, so they function as a great alternative to plastic micro-beads."
