THE 4-WEEK CHALLENGE TO CLEARER SKIN

Win the battle against acne, in 30 days or less.

BY CRISTINA MONTEMAYOR
If you’ve ever struggled with acne—and let’s face it, most of us have at one point or another—you know how frustrating it feels to deal with stubborn breakouts and scarring. By now, you know that there is no overnight miracle treatment. Clearing acne-prone skin takes time and patience, but when you’re consistent with a good skin care routine, those efforts can and will pay off.

With so many different products made up of hard-to-pronounce ingredients, it can be confusing trying to cut out all the noise and narrow it down to the products that actually do what they say they’re going to do. Once you’re armed with the right products and the knowledge of how to use it, it takes consistency to see results. If you struggle with regular breakouts, incorporating lifestyle changes into your daily routine can also make a real difference in the amount and severity of breakouts you experience.

No more guessing or gambling—this guide includes everything you will need to prepare your body for long-term clear skin, including dietary and lifestyle changes.

So here is the challenge:

4 weeks of step-by-step instructions to help rid and keep your skin clear of blemishes.
Over the course of the next 4 weeks, you’ll learn:

1. How the skin cycle works, why it matters, and how to navigate the different phases for clearer skin
2. How to build a skincare routine that works for you and your lifestyle
3. When and how to use treatments like exfoliants, spot creams, acne patches, etc.
4. If you’re dealing with breakouts now, you may think that four weeks is a long time to wait, but a lot can change in that timeframe.

“There aren’t that many quick fixes out there to make the skin look young and glowing overnight, so patience is a virtue,” said Dr. Jaimie DeRosa, Double Board Certified Facial Plastic Surgeon and Founder and Lead Facial Plastic Surgeon of DeRosa Center Plastic Surgery & Med Spa in Boston and Palm Beach. “The good news it is that it takes about 28 days for the skin’s cells to turnover, which makes it possible for a near complete skin revitalization within this timeframe.”
Tip #1  **Understand the skin cycle**
If you want to know why it takes four weeks to clear breakouts, it all relates back to the skin cycle, which is the process of formation of new skin cells at the deepest level of the epidermis. Once these new, healthy skin cells are formed, they start their journey moving up to the surface of the skin.

“At the end of the cycle, the cells mature and ultimately get replaced by newer ones,” explained Dr. De Rosa.

Acne starts when oil and dead skin cells clog the skin’s pores “Dead skin cells tend to accumulate on the skin surface which can result in a dull and dry complexion and can accentuate fine lines and wrinkles,” said Dr. De Rosa. “Bacteria tend to get trapped within pores underneath the dead skin layer, causing breakouts and blemishes.”

When treating acne, it takes time to see results because your skin has to go through the entire skin cycle to allow those new skin cells to make it to the surface of the skin.

Once you understand the framework of how and why acne occurs within the skin cycle, it’s time to move on to the first step in your journey to clearer skin.

Tip 2  **Build a basic skincare routine.**
If you want to banish breakouts for good, you need a solid skincare routine to attack acne at the source. A proper skin care routine always starts with a great cleanser. “Old epidermal cells tend to build on top of the outer layer, so cleansing at least twice a day is the foundation of a healthy skin care regimen,” said Dr. De Rosa. “Cleansing in the morning will help remove sweat and oil left overnight and evening cleansing will help remove skin care products and also sweat, dead skin cells, and other pollutants that get affixed to your skin during the day.”

**HOW TO DO IT:** Good skin starts with a good cleanser. Look for one that’s gentle on the skin and clears away grime and impurities without stripping skin of its natural oils. Next, follow up with a moisturizer that’s
oil and fragrance-free, which Dr. De Rosa says will be tolerated well by a wide range of skin types, from acne-prone skin to sensitive skin. In the daytime, follow it up with a broad-spectrum sunscreen that’s an SPF 30 or higher. Don’t skip this step! “Sunscreen is the most important skin protectant one can use since it helps prevent skin cancer due to sun exposure,” warns Dr. De Rosa.

**Tip 3  Avoid picking**
Whatever you do, don’t pop your pimples. When popping a zit, you’re actually creating a wound on the skin, which can cause bleeding and inflammation. You’re also opening it up, exposing the wound to dirt, bacteria and other irritants and can cause the area to be even more inflamed or even infected. Once healed, popped pimples may even leave a scar, whereas if you just leave your pimples alone, they dissipate within a few days.

**HOW TO DO IT:** Avoid touching your face too much, which can cause the spreading of oils, dirt and bacteria and can cause pimples to form. Don’t pop your pimples. Allowing your pimples to heal – no matter how unsightly they look – can help prevent scarring.

### WEEK 2

**Tip 1  Add exfoliation into your skincare routine.**
Once you’ve got a good routine going, you can incorporate gentle exfoliation to help unblock pores and prevent any new spots from popping up. Dr. De Rosa recommends exfoliating twice weekly via chemical or manual exfoliants to help cell turnover, increase collagen formation and improve brightness (getting rid of dull, lackluster skin). Chemical exfoliants use acids or enzymes (like glycolic, lactic, salicylic) to dissolve and loosen cells, whereas physical exfoliants work by mechanically buffing away dead skin cells using granular substances like sugars or walnut shells.

**HOW TO DO IT:** Once per week, use a chemical or physical exfoliant on your skin after cleansing at night. If you have sensitive skins, avoid manual scrubbing with a physical exfoliant. Rinse with warm water and finish with your typical moisturizer.

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**Tip 2**  Apply a spot treatment on any active breakouts.

For targeted acne solutions, use a spot treatment to treat individual pimples. “These spot treatments work by delivering acne-fighting ingredients right to the problem area to help decrease swelling, redness and pain,” said Dr. De Rosa. “They also help unblock the pores that are responsible for blemish formation in the first place.”

**HOW TO DO IT:** Start by using a spot treatment on blemishes at night once per week to evaluate how your skin (and your blemishes) respond to the treatment. Increase to every other day or everyday depending on your skin and the severity of your zits.

**Tip 3**  Clean your towels and sheets

Dirty sheets and towels can be covered in bacteria that can clog your pores and worsen acne. The oils and residue from your hair and skin can build up on these items over time, and if you’re not washing your sheets regularly, you may be unknowingly undoing all the progress you’ve made by sticking to a consistent skincare routine.

**HOW TO DO IT:** Wash or change your sheets and towels at least once per week, or more if you have persistent acne. Try flipping over the pillowcase and changing your pillowcase every other day to ensure you’re sleeping on a clean surface.

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**WEEK 3**

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**Tip 1**  Be consistent.

By this point in the challenge, your skin is about halfway through the skin cycle and you should be seeing some subtle but promising results. Consistency is the key to keeping you on track, so stay diligent with your morning and evening skincare routine. “Taking care of one’s skin diligently during a 4-week period will allow for the complete turnover of the skin cells, with new skin cells appearing at the outer surface of the skin and resulting in a softer and more vibrant complexion,” says Dr. De Rosa.

**HOW TO DO IT:** Set an alarm on your phone to remind you to do your skincare routine every morning and evening. Get into the habit of waiting to have your morning coffee until after your skincare routine to help encourage you stick to it.

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**Tip 2**  **Target overall skin concerns with a face mask.**  
“Week three is the time when one can start addressing specific skin concerns such as hydrating, clarifying, calming or brightening through use of face masks,” says Dr. De Rosa. A face mask is a great counterpart to spot treatments: while spot treatments treat individual pimples, face masks treat the rest of your skin.

**HOW TO USE:** Apply your desired face masks to clean and dry skin. Use once or twice per week.

**Tip 3**  **Eliminate acne-causing foods**  
Acne is caused by a combination of factors, including food. Certain foods can promote inflammation throughout the body, and some studies show that this is what triggers certain acne outbreaks. Your diet can also affect your hormones, which could make acne worse. Milk and foods with a high sugar content can increase insulin levels in the body, altering other hormones that might affect the skin. Some studies have linked milk and whey protein with acne.

**HOW TO DO IT:** While some studies suggest that a person’s diet might contribute to acne, researchers can’t say for sure one way or another. Eliminate foods linked to an increase in acne and see how your body reacts to the change. If you find that some of them make your skin worse, enjoy these foods in moderation.

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**WEEK 4**

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**Tip 1**  **Treat dark spots left behind from pimples.**  
So you’ve kicked your zits to the curb. Now what? Well, you most likely have dark spots where your pimples once were. These dark spots are produced as a result of hyperpigmentation, which is a collection of excessive amounts of melanin. “There is a number of modalities to treat hyperpigmentation, but my favorite is a mixture of vitamin C and soy extract and can be applied to dark spots in the morning and at night before using the usual moisturizer,” said Dr. De Rosa.

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**HOW TO DO IT:** Use a dark spot corrector after cleansing and before moisturizing every night and morning. In a few skin cycles, you should see a difference in the amount of pigment left behind, and they may even disappear altogether.

**Tip 2**  **Increase hydration, decrease alcohol intake.**
Your skin is 64 percent water. Increasing your water intake will have a positive impact on your overall skin health and help your skin function at maximum efficiency and function. Avoid alcohol whenever possible, as alcohol dehydrates the skin.

**HOW TO DO IT:** Aim to drink a little less than a gallon of water per day. If you are drinking alcohol, consume at least one glass of water per alcoholic beverage to offset the dehydrating effects of alcohol.

**Tip 3**  **Be patient.**
Clear skin takes time and consistency. Four weeks is the shortest amount of time it takes to see any results, but it’s only the beginning.

“There is no magic overnight remedy for clear skin,” said Dr. De Rosa. “Developing a sound, consistent, logical (and simple) skin care routine and, most importantly, sticking to it will bring the desired results in as little as 4 weeks.”

**HOW TO DO IT:** Keep a consistent skin care routine and incorporate lifestyle changes into your daily life to keep acne-prone skin at bay. Even with a diligent routine, you may still experience the occasional pimple pop up. Don’t let it get you down—keep doing what you’re doing, let your skin cycle through whatever it’s going through, and your skin will be clear and smooth before you know it.

Clear skin is possible—it just takes a little time, effort, and dedication. We hope this guide has been helpful for you on your journey to clear, blemish-free skin. You’ve got this.