

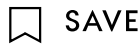
SKIN

I Gave Up Dairy—And My Adult Acne Vanished in Under a Month

BY CHRISTIAN ALLAIRE AND AUDREY NOBLE

October 22, 2023





My quest for clear skin has been an arduous journey, which has led me to search for any and all causes to these breakouts. Stress? Hormones? Does dairy cause acne? I've asked all the questions and tried just about everything for clearer skin.

As a longtime sufferer of acne since my teens—not to mention adult acne now, which is basically Satan's work—I've tried just about every serum, moisturizer, toner, and mask for acne in existence. I've tried changing my pillow and sheets every other night. I've tried aggressive exfoliating, or only washing my face with gentle rosewater, like the faux Parisian I am. I've tried chugging copious amounts of water throughout the day (12 trips to the restroom: a real time suck, but not bad for getting your steps in). Nothing ever seemed to rid the under-the-skin cystic bumps—think acne, but bigger and more painful—that were permanently positioned on my forehead and chin area.

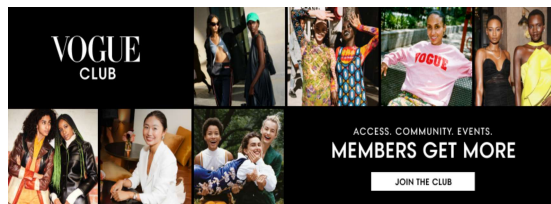
Upon turning 26, the year I officially gave up hope my skin problems would eventually just go away, I paid a visit to my family doctor. After hearing out my symptoms, he suggested I look into Isotretinoin, previously known as Accutane, a prescription drug with some seriously harsh side effects such as dry lips and eyes, nosebleeds, joint pain, and even depression in some cases; or, perhaps, try tweaking my diet. And while I've always thought of myself as healthy—I exercise regularly and eat mainly whole foods—I decided to opt for the latter. After all, there was one aspect to my regimen I knew didn't paint the perfect picture of “clean living”: my love of dairy. See, I grew up in Northern Ontario, Canada, where dairy farms are as common as corner stores, so my indulgence in creamy lattes, cheesy salads, and nightly ice creams never felt out of the ordinary. Unfortunately, my doctor didn't agree.

Following the appointment, I embarked on a strict two-week diet, during which I only ate vegetables the first week and steadily reintroduced other foods, such as fruit, animal proteins, and gluten. By the end of it, my skin, which was suffering a particularly horrific outbreak that spring month, slowly began to clear. Those large cystic bumps on the

highest points of my face? They had shrunk in size, from mountainous hills that no concealer in the world could cover up to more manageable, regular-size breakouts—but still! I decided to extend the dairy-free diet to three weeks and by day 22, the monstrous bumps were virtually deflated. My skin had completely cleared up—completely.

Does Dairy Cause Acne?

For me, the solution to my lifelong skin struggles turned out to be surprisingly simple: cutting out dairy. That combined with my still-regimented skin-care routine of cleansing, exfoliating, moisturizing, and rosewater spritzing, of course. Yet, despite my dramatic skin transformation, I was shocked no doctor or dermatologist had ever laid it out as an obvious, primary cause of acne. After some digging on the Internet, it became easy to understand why: Today, there are still very few studies that link dairy and acne together, and of them, very few are of high quality and include extensive research, and typically only extend to the teenage years, when acne is more common.



“Limited evidence shows that some dairy, more specifically skim milk, may be associated with acne,” says Marisa Garshick, MD, board-certified dermatologist at MDCS Dermatology. “It is though that certain types of dairy, specifically, may be associated with acne breakouts when consumed in the form of whole, low-fat, or skim milk, but not in the form of yogurt or cheese.” Garshick goes on to explain that while studies show that milk may increase your skin’s sebum production, there are still a lot of unknowns. “Many of these studies highlight an association but not causality and do not suggest that eliminating the food or drink will necessarily treat acne,” she says.

Still, the results out there are hard to ignore. According to a 2015 study from the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*, for instance, the “consumption of low-fat and skim milk, but not full-fat milk, was positively associated with acne.” An article published in the journal in 2013 also concluded that dairy shows a weak but possible association