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Here's What Noncomedogenic Really Means

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Dealing with breakouts? It may be time to consider refreshing your [skin-care routine](#), especially if you have oily or acne-prone skin. There's a chance some of the products in your current regimen may be comedogenic, making them more likely to clog pores and cause pesky pimples to pop up. These hidden culprits include certain oils like coconut, sesame, olive, carrot seed, flaxseed, and wheat germ, as well as ingredients like silicone and lanolin.

The solution for many is to seek out the best noncomedogenic products. In simple terms, a noncomedogenic product is one that has been specifically formulated so it won't block or clog pores. Oftentimes, noncomedogenic makeup and skin care will be clearly and proudly indicated as so on the label.

Still, navigating this task can be confusing, especially if you're unsure exactly what's best for your skin. Fortunately, we consulted with two board-certified dermatologists to clarify what noncomedogenic means, who should use noncomedogenic products, and what [ingredients to look for](#). Plus, we'll go into the difference between noncomedogenic, oil-free, and nongreasy products. Keep reading to learn more.

What Does Noncomedogenic Mean?

When a product is "noncomedogenic," that indicates it's been specifically formulated for acneic skin so it won't clog pores, reducing your chances of experiencing breakouts from it. "It also implies that the ingredients were chosen specifically for their small molecular size and composition," board-certified dermatologist [Ava Shamban](#), MD, tells POPSUGAR.

To provide clarity regarding the likelihood of pore clogging, Dr. Shamban suggests using this scale, which is widely employed on numerous brand websites:

- 0: Noncomedogenic
- 1: Slightly comedogenic
- 2-3: Moderately comedogenic
- 4-5: Highly comedogenic

Who Should Use Noncomedogenic Products?

All [skin types](#) can benefit from using noncomedogenic products. However, people with oily, combination, and acne-prone skin will benefit the most from using noncomedogenic products, Dr. Shamban explains. This makes the products great for many teenagers, as well.

It's also worth noting that "clogged pores may not necessarily lead to major acne," Dr. Shamban says. Instead, they can have other drawbacks such as reducing the effectiveness of serums and active ingredients, as they struggle to penetrate when the pores are not clear.

Comedogenic Ingredients to Avoid

There are a handful of comedogenic ingredients to look out for when shopping for beauty products. Certain oils (but not all) can put you at risk of breakouts. This includes coconut, sesame, olive, carrot seed, flaxseed, and wheat germ oils. It's important to avoid products containing silicone, which is frequently found in primers (and, to some extent, foundations) to provide a smoothing, water-resistant finish and is a common culprit for comedogenic reactions. Instead, [Rachel Westbay, MD, FAAD](#), a board-certified dermatologist at Marmur Medical, suggests looking for plumping and hydrating ingredients like [hyaluronic acid](#).

It's advisable to also refrain from using products with artificial fragrances, if possible, as they all have the potential to clog pores. Benzaldehyde is the most notorious offender in this case. "Another ingredient to avoid is lanolin, known for its high comedogenicity," Dr. Westbay says. "Lanolin may appear under alternative names such as acetylated lanolin alcohol, ethoxylated lanolin, solulan 16, and PEG 16 lanolin."

Lastly, Dr. Westbay advises being cautious of sodium chloride, which is sometimes included in foundations and skin-care products as a thickening agent and can worsen or trigger breakouts. Other comedogenic ingredients to watch out for include squalene, isocetyl stearate, isopropyl isostearate, isopropyl myristate, isopropyl palmitate, octyl stearate, and octyl palmitate.

Good, Noncomedogenic Ingredients to Look For

According to Dr. Westbay, beneficial ingredients for those with acne include [benzoyl peroxide](#), resorcinol, [salicylic acid](#), sulfur, and [niacinamide](#). These ingredients are commonly added to skin care and even some makeup to help combat breakouts. If you're seeking hydration in your routine, certain oils like grapeseed, sunflower, rosehip, argan, jojoba, and hempseed are noncomedogenic.

She explains that hyaluronic acid is also great for hydrating the skin without clogging pores, making it beneficial for all skin types, including those with combination and oily skin. Niacinamide has anti-inflammatory properties that can reduce redness and inflammation caused by acne, and it also directly regulates sebum production, helping prevent breakouts. Ceramides are another common ingredient

found in moisturizers that is noncomedogenic, as it's made of natural lipids that strengthen the skin's protective barrier. If you are wary of silicone but like the look it gives your makeup, dimethicone can smooth the skin's surface without clogging pores like pure silicone does.

When choosing a sunscreen, Dr. Westbay recommends opting for physical sunscreens containing ingredients like titanium dioxide or zinc oxide. "These sunscreens sit on top of the skin and reflect UV rays, reducing the likelihood of pore clogging and breakout development compared to chemical sunscreens."

The Difference Between Oil-Free, Nongreasy, and Noncomedogenic

A noncomedogenic product is one that has been intentionally formulated to prevent the blocking of pores. "If it doesn't say noncomedogenic, it is not, and there is a high likelihood that the product and its ingredients may cause clogged pores after frequent or regular use," Dr. Shamban says. When shopping, it's helpful to know what to look for on the label and have an understanding of key ingredients to avoid.

"An oil-free product means that the product itself does not contain oils or mineral oils," Dr. Westbay says. "It's important to note that not all noncomedogenic products are oil-free, and conversely, not all oil-free products are noncomedogenic." Another word frequently used is nongreasy, but that simply indicates that the formulation doesn't leave behind a greasy feeling on the skin. It doesn't provide any information about the product's comedogenicity or whether it contains oils, Dr. Westbay explains.

Unfortunately, you can't entirely trust any product that claims to be noncomedogenic. Similar to hypoallergenic, there are no regulatory standards in the US or EU for these claims. That's why it's always good to know your stuff.