



## Holistic Herbal Acne Treatments

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**Question:** My teenage son is starting to develop acne and has been using harsh cleansers and treatments that I don't think are very good for his skin. I'd like to turn him onto natural products for acne. I know about witch hazel, but what other herbal or botanical ingredients should I look for in an acne cleanser, toner or other skincare product?

**Answer:** Skin challenges can occur at any age for teenagers and adults. Acne can be painful, embarrassing and difficult to treat with many of the overly harsh acne treatments available today including many that are more “natural.” Many acne products strip the skin of oil leaving it “squeaky” clean and more prone to break-outs. This has often been my experience with witch hazel extracts. I would try it first and notice if your son’s skin becomes more red, heated or dry from it.

From my perspective, it is ideal to incorporate a holistic approach to address **the person and the underlying causes for acne**. For a holistic and long term strategy, I would encourage diet and lifestyle changes to help heal this skin condition **from the inside out**. Stress for many young adults is also a key factor to consider when addressing skin issues. I would suggest consuming nervous system balancing teas such as Chamomile or Tulsi/ Holy basil if your son tolerates teas. Both of these herbs are ideal for supporting the nervous system healthy digestion, reducing inflammation and supporting greater balance in the body. Some individuals (teens and adults), might also benefit from taking herbal dietary supplements to help balance their hormonal swings and to support their liver functions. Herbs such as Neem leaf *Azadirachta indica*, Turmeric *Curcuma longa*, Ashwagandha *Withania somnifera* and Shatavri *Asparagus racemosus*, might be very beneficial for those prone to skin challenges.

One of my favourite herbs for topical application to reduce acne and help heal the skin is Neem (*Azadirachta indica*).

Neem is a tree native to Southeast Asia that is renowned for its therapeutic benefits for the skin. The Neem tree is often called the “village pharmacy,” as Neem has been used for 1,000’s of years to support the health and wellness of the human body for a broad array of uses.

Neem leaf, bark and oil have traditional and modern uses to help heal the skin for issues such as: acne, eczema, psoriasis, fungal and bacterial infections. Neem is renowned for its **cooling, soothing & astringent** actions to support healthy skin.

**Cooling-** Neem is known for its refrigerant actions, meaning that it helps to lower body temperature and cool the skin. This cooling action is very appropriate with acne which is often described as a red, hot and inflamed condition.



**Soothing-** Both Neem leaf and Neem oil help to reduce inflammation when topically applied. Neem is rich in quercetin (a polyphenolic flavonoid). Quercetin is recognized for its anti-inflammatory, bactericidal and antifungal actions which help to soothe the skin. Neem oil is rich in essential fatty acids that help to protect, moisturize and balance out the skin tone and texture. Neem oil will also help to lower any unfriendly bacterial levels on the skin that may be caused by blemishes. These soothing qualities are ideal for acne prone skin which tends to be overly oily or extremely dry, red and irritated.


**Astringent-** The gently astringent action of Neem helps to tighten and heal the skin and lessen secretions. This action helps heal pimples more quickly, close pores, normalize, balance and promote healthy skin.

The idea of using oil on acne prone skin seems a bit scary at first. I encourage you to give Neem oil or Neem oil based products an opportunity. Often times, people with acne find that when they feed the skin healthy oils on the outside, that this in turn helps to balance oil production of the skin and leads to less blemishes. It is important to use high quality, organic and or wild crafted Neem oil, leaf and or bark. Choose products with a high percent of other organic ingredients that are gentle on the skin.

#### **A Neem based skin care protocol:**

- Wash with gentle botanical based soap. There are Neem soaps available that contain up to 20% Neem oil. Or use a mild creamy based cleanser with a neutral pH that will not strip the skin and destroy the acid mantle.
- Cool the skin with a Neem and clay mask 2-4 x's per week with acne prone skin. Be certain to not allow the clay treatment to dry all the way - wash off right before it is completely dry or apply more moisture to the skin so that the mask can stay on for more cooling and drawing benefits. Clay treatments can be used on the face, back or chest, or wherever a blemish has occurred; it is even helpful with bug bites and stings!
- Use a gentle toner such as apple cider vinegar that is infused with Neem, or try organic lavender hydrosol. Try pure witch hazel to see if it is well tolerated. For some acne prone skin, it is too drying and leaves the skin more irritated and red.
- Apply a Neem based moisturizer or add a few drops of pure Neem oil per application to a gentle and natural moisturizer. Moisturizing this skin even with acne prone skin is very important to re-balance the proper oil and moisture level to the skin after cleansing. Overly dry skin is prone to more redness, irritation and breakouts!
- For back or chest acne, try a Neem Leaf extract combined with Aloe Gel to soothe and reduce inflammation.

#### **Clay mask congested/acne prone skin:**



Use clay (French green or your favourite). You may include ½ tsp of turmeric powder\* for added skin nourishment and healing properties. \*Turmeric will stain the skin slightly yellow, so take care to use a small amount and be prepared to have your skin tone be a bit altered!

Per 4 oz glass jar (an old jelly jar works well)

4 TBS French Green Clay

1 TBSP Honey

3 TBSP lavender hydrosol (available through Mountain Rose herbs), spring water, aloe vera juice or Neem and aloe gel

10 drops of organic lavender *Lavandula officinalis* essential oil

10 drops of pure Neem oil

Combine the clay, liquids, lavender and Neem oil and mix well. It should be about the consistency of tooth paste. Not too wet that it is dripping and not too dry or it will not spread evenly on the face, back or wherever the blemish has occurred.

Apply to clean damp skin; **Do Not Allow** the clay to fully dry; continue to spritz hydrosol onto skin or pat the skin with damp hands to retain dampness or remove as soon as cracks begin to appear. Allowing the clay to dry too much for some skin is irritating. Take care!

For the extra big pimple, bump, bite, or sting: Apply a thick poultice of the clay and allow it to dry or you can leave it on overnight. This is not advisable for the whole face, but for “spot” treatment to get rid of the undesirable blemish.

Reminder: Patience is a virtue with skin issues too! For many individuals with acne prone skin, it can take a month to 6 months to see the best results when addressing the skin holistically with herbs, diet, lifestyle and topical products.