

This LED Light Therapy Mask May Help Clear Up Acne—And It's Only \$35

Lena Dunham is "obsessed," and doctors are fans, too.



A drugstore light therapy mask is getting some serious buzz online. It's no secret that many celebrities spend a ton of money on treatments and services to look and feel their best, but Lena Dunham says her new obsession is way more accessible than that. The *Girls* creator and star recently posted a photo of herself on Instagram, wearing

a futuristic-looking face mask that glowed pink while she lounged on a couch. "Saw the ad for the light therapy acne mask and became obsessed so when we got home from our journey it was waiting on my side of the bed," she captioned the photo. "Thank you @jackantonoff, even if you just did it to amuse yourself. #notanad #justapsycho UPDATE: for those thinking this is a fancy awards season prep tool to the stars, it's Neutrogena and it's \$35."

The mask is Neutrogena's new Light Therapy Acne Mask, which costs \$35 (the "mask activator," which is good for 30 uses, costs an additional \$15). Dunham isn't a spokesperson for the brand or mask, but apparently she just thinks it's that cool.

According to Neutrogena's website, the LED light mask relies on "clinically proven light therapy used by dermatologists for over a decade" to treat mild to moderate acne. The brand recommends using it for 10 minutes every day for "healthier, clearer skin." In a Neutrogena video on the brand's site, spokesperson Olivia Holt explains that the pinkish light is a combination of blue and red lights working on your skin.

"There need to be more clinical trials to make final conclusions, but the method for this mask does have merit," Jill Waibel, M.D., owner of the Miami Dermatology and Laser Institute in Miami, tells SELF.



Yes, it looks like something out of a sci-fi movie, but Gary Goldenberg, M.D., medical director of the Dermatology Faculty Practice at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, tells SELF that the concept is for real. “Light (red or blue) has been used by doctors to treat acne patients for a while,” he says. The light works by killing *p. acnes*, bacteria that causes acne, he explains.

Joshua Zeichner, M.D., a New York City-based board-certified dermatologist, tells SELF that red light is anti-inflammatory, while blue light actually kills *p. acnes*. “The combination of both lights helps get to the root of what causes acne,” he says. The over-the-counter light therapy mask can be used by itself for milder acne cases, or it can be used in combination with traditional acne treatments like benzoyl peroxide (which kills acne-causing bacteria and helps open up blocked pores) and salicylic acid (which removes excess oil from skin and exfoliates dead cells from the skin’s surface), Zeichner says.

“Light therapies may be extremely helpful even in patients who have very sensitive skin and cannot tolerate traditional topical medications,” he says. They can also be a useful maintenance tool for people whose skin has improved but needs continuous treatment to keep it clear, he says.

Waibel says they may even be more effective than traditional OTC topical creams. “They are only on the surface of your skin, they are not penetrating deep enough to fix inflammation of acne,” she says.

However, Goldenberg points out that you’re probably not getting the same light therapy from an over-the-counter mask as you’d get at your dermatologist’s office. “You need a certain strength of the light rays to get down into the follicle and kill the bacteria,” he says. “This can be enhanced by applying aminolevulinic acid, which is only available by seeing your dermatologist.” Waibel agrees that the strength isn’t the same: “Dermatology in-office LED and other lasers penetrate deeper through the skin, making them more effective,” she says.

While the OTC mask may work for you if you have acne, it also may not, since every person’s skin is different. “There are many types of acne and many different treatments for each type,” Goldenberg says. “Not every treatment works for every patient.”

However, the OTC mask might not be a bad place to start if you’re looking for a new acne treatment, Zeichner says. “The availability of light therapy to treat acne adds to the armamentarium of tools that we have to treat acne,” he says. If you want some guidance before diving in, feel free to check in with your dermatologist. And if you *do* go for it and your acne hasn’t improved within two to four weeks, make an appointment with your dermatologist for an evaluation.